



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Thursday 20 March 2025 at 6.00pm

Present

Councillor Chika Akinwale
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith
Councillor Anna Bailey
Councillor Ian Bovingdon
Councillor David Brown (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Charlotte Cane
Councillor Christine Colbert
Councillor Lorna Dupré
Councillor Lavinia Edwards
Councillor Mark Goldsack (Chair)
Councillor Martin Goodearl
Councillor Keith Horgan
Councillor Julia Huffer

Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Mark Inskip
Councillor James Lay
Councillor David Miller
Councillor Kelli Pettitt
Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Mary Wade
Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Gareth Wilson

66. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

67. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann and Cllr Caroline Shepherd.

68. Declarations of Interest

The Monitoring Officer reported that as Cambridgeshire County Council had already voted on the Government's proposals for Local Government Reorganisation, those members who were also County Councillors needed to come to the debate on agenda item 6 with an open mind.

69. Chair's Announcements

The Chair made no announcements.

70. The Making of the Modified Witchford Neighbourhood Plan

The Director Operations presented the report, Z143 previously circulated, which invited Council to include the modified Witchford Neighbourhood Plan as part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect. It was noted that Witchford Parish Council had decided to amend its Neighbourhood Plan to include a new chapter on tackling climate change.

Cllr Bill Hunt praised Witchford Parish Council and all those involved in the amendment of the Neighbourhood Plan, which required hard work and teamwork.

Cllr Lorna Dupré, the County Councillor for Witchford, expressed her support for the recommendations in the report. She congratulated those involved on including a chapter on addressing climate change in the Plan. She hoped that this would set a precedent for others to either amend their existing Plans or incorporate climate change in their original Plans.

Cllr Anna Bailey, Leader of Council, and Cllr Mark Goldsack, Chair of Council, both congratulated those involved in amending the Plan.

Cllr Bill Hunt proposed and Cllr Lorna Dupré seconded the recommendations in the report.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed to:

- a) Congratulate Witchford Parish Council on their preparation of a successful modification of their Neighbourhood Plan; and
- b) Formally make the Witchford Neighbourhood Plan (as modified 2025) (attached at Appendix 1) part of the Development Plan for East Cambridgeshire with immediate effect

71. Local Government Reorganisation – Submission to Government

The Director Operations presented the report, Z154 previously circulated, which updated Council on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals and next steps.

Cllr Anna Bailey expressed her belief that East Cambridgeshire District Council was the best authority she had worked with during her career. While she understood the Government's goal of a single unitary authority, she believed that smaller authorities were better at supporting residents. She thanked staff for their achievements, including freezing council tax, while maintaining high service levels. She pointed out that other local authorities often had to use part of their council tax to pay interest on their debts and a larger authority could hinder local services and face-to-face interactions. A recent survey with 809 responses showed that 78% of residents opposed the Government's proposals. Cllr Bailey concluded by stating that current data was insufficient to consider different models and hoped that Council would agree to explore various solutions.

Cllr Mark Inskip emphasised that the current structure, established 50 years ago, needed reviewing. He supported unitary authorities, as they allowed councillors to address a wide range of residents' concerns, including roads, social services and planning. However, he criticised the Government's rushed proposals and the November deadline, which prevented addressing the county boundary anomalies. He agreed that the Council should support the recommendations in the report and work with others to ensure that the residents of the district were represented.

Cllr Keith Horgan noted that Peterborough and Cambridge City Councils both had significant debt, whilst this Council was debt free. He feared that the reorganisation could lead to higher Council Tax for residents to cover the interest on loans taken out by neighbouring authorities.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott agreed that insufficient research had been done for the Council to recommend solutions to the Government's reorganisation proposals. He expressed concern that Council Tax for local residents would have to increase. He suggested that the Government's reorganisation plans looked more like centralisation than devolution. He supported the recommendations in the report, as the best way to represent the district's residents.

Cllr Alan Sharp agreed with Cllr Inskip that unitary authorities were commendable as they simplified governance. However, the Government's proposals were being imposed on local government with little discussion and had not been included in their manifesto. He expressed concerns regarding the level of debt being held by neighbouring authorities and the effect the impending changes could have on staff morale. He regretted the lack of opportunity to discuss the alteration of council boundaries around Newmarket. He hoped and expected that there would be further discussion on the proposals before the Government's November deadline.

Cllr Bill Hunt stated that he had been a councillor for 18 years and expressed regret over the Government's decision to abolish the Council, describing it as a friendly authority that was supported by its residents.

Cllr Lorna Dupré criticised the Government's rushed reorganisation process, which she deemed inconsiderate and unlikely to resolve longstanding county boundary issues. She recognised an opportunity to create a beneficial governance structure and hoped that discussions on possible models would commence shortly with a cross party working group formed to explore options, as had happened at the County Council.

Cllr David Miller criticised the Government's reorganisation process, stating he preferred to have an option to maintain the current structure.

Cllr John Trapp stated that residents in his ward looked south towards Cambridge. He suggested that a future unitary authority should have multiple planning committees, to ensure local focus. He supported having one elected representative for residents' queries. He also supported Cllr Dupré's idea of forming a cross party group to collaborate with parish councils.

Cllr Alison Whelan asserted that any new governance arrangements must support local residents, particularly those without internet access or the ability to travel far. She suggested that parish councils should assume more responsibility for local representation and expected that local government reorganisation would be added to the Council's risk register.

Cllr Julia Huffer expressed her sorrow that residents might lose local representation due to local government reorganisation. She feared future councillors would mostly be full time politicians who were either retired or wealthy, rather than volunteers serving in their spare time.

Cllr Anna Bailey acknowledged the challenges of maintaining local representation and questioned whether a larger unitary authority would be more efficient than smaller councils. She was committed to ongoing engagement with parish councils and residents, suggesting that the Combined Authority could assume the responsibilities of the County Council instead of abolishing the lower-tier councils.

Cllr Mark Goldsack, Chair of Council, thanked officers and senior councillors for their efforts in drafting the letter to the Government and he encouraged all councillors to contribute to future proposals.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the recommendations in the report.

A vote was taken and it was unanimously agreed to:

- a) Note the progress of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- b) Delegate authority to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to finalise the proposed letter as set out in Appendix 1 along with other Council Leaders, as our interim submission to Government by 21 March 2025.

The meeting concluded at 6:58 pm

Chair.....

Date.....