



# East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council  
held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE  
on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2025 at 6.00 pm

## **Present**

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

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

### **1. Public Question Time**

#### **Question from Peter Bates, Chair of the East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network, read out by the Democratic Services and Elections Manager**

The East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network fully supports ECDC's initiative to increase the number of agricultural reservoirs across East Cambridgeshire in order to mitigate the impact of climate change. Equally so, the East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network is starting to develop a complementary project, working with Anglian Water to develop a network of Water Conservation Champions across the District – to actively encourage householders and small businesses to save water and their money.

The Water Conservation Champions initiative is one of three key high impact projects that the Network is currently focusing on. It is also developing a network of Community Energy Champions that will offer initial domestic energy saving advice, including renewables – and at the other end of the spectrum - the development of community led and benefit projects like wind

turbines, solar PV installations, linked to battery storage and EV Charging points.

The third high impact initiative is the development of community-based local nature recovery projects aligned with the CPCA's Local Nature Recovery Strategy including the ECDC commissioned "Nature Recovery Network for East Cambridgeshire" - Final Report published in 2022.

Questions:

1. How would the Council take the opportunity when planning Agricultural Reservoirs to ensure that they also double the biodiversity of the surrounding reservoir areas and also take the opportunity to plan for increasing access to the general public by improving neighbouring byways and bridleways - public rights of way - particularly as there is a need to increase more access to the countryside for the general public as a result of all the housing developments?
2. Does the Council think the East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network could play a positive role in further developing this idea? And if so, how can the Network get involved in the project?
3. Will the Council financially support the East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network with its emerging proposal to establish community water conservation champions, whereby such champions actively work with discreet local communities on water saving actions and advice? An initial £5,000 to pump-prime this activity would be useful.
4. How will the Council actively support the development of innovative water management/community energy solutions that could also result in sustainable projects like water source heat pumps for heating community buildings, micro-water turbines for electricity production and micro water-cooling systems for Data Centres? Can the Council fund some initial economic growth activities that will increase awareness of such business opportunities?

#### **Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey**

"I want to thank East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network and Mr Bates for the question and all the work that they do. They are heavily invested in this type of work in East Cambridgeshire, so I thank them for everything that they do and their support for all our efforts at this Council.

"We have a recently published report that we commissioned from Eastern Powerhouse, which I am delighted to be talking about and it has already gained an awful lot of attention. We sent it off far and wide and I will be alluding to it later when we discuss our Corporate Plan.

"We are constrained by the laws of the land and agricultural reservoirs obviously require planning permission and so access and biodiversity matters are dealt with through the planning process. Whilst we can encourage

biodiversity improvements and we certainly do and will, we cannot insist on the doubling of biodiversity surrounding the reservoirs. Actually, in my experience, farmers are very keen to progress this agenda and we can certainly encourage them. Access will depend on the location of any future reservoirs, because for example, if they are on private farmland the Council cannot insist on public access.

“The Council has only recently published its reservoirs feasibility study, so the project is obviously at an early stage of work. We will absolutely keep East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network fully informed of progress and any opportunities to be involved. The Council is of course committed to water efficiency, as far as we are allowed to be by the constraints that we work under and we promote sustainable water management, not only by the Agricultural Reservoirs project but we have of course included the actions to achieve this in our own Climate and Nature Strategy. Four of the top twenty actions for the 2024/25 strategy were water related, which shows you how important it is rapidly becoming. Our Climate Change and Natural Environment Team are available to help you with your proposal and our economic development team would also be happy to support local businesses with water management and community energy solutions.”

**Question from Marianne Pickles, read out by the Democratic Services and Elections Manager**

Originally, with funding from the CPCA, the Net Zero Villages Project in East Cambridgeshire has been highly successful and oversubscribed resulting in some projects being unable to get funding.

For those not familiar, the Net Zero Villages project took place earlier this year, managed by ECDC and was actively supported by the East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network, including discussing potential options with individual community groups across East Cambridgeshire. Unfortunately, no funds are presently available to re-open the grant scheme, despite considerable demand from community groups looking to save money on their running costs and contribute to reducing their climate emissions.

It is noted that there are going to be some changes at the senior management officer level which if handled sensibly, could result to savings for the Council which could then be re-directed to community-based projects.

Question: How can the Council proactively find additional funding internally for such projects as well as seek to identify other funds from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and/or Cambridgeshire County Council, the Greater South East Net Zero Hub and/or Great British Energy – the British government-owned renewable energy investment body?

East Cambridgeshire Climate Action Network would be willing to take on the management role of such an initiative, if the Council can find funding. This could also include extending it to the urban areas of Ely and Soham which were not included in the original project.

**Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey**

“Before I answer the question, I want to pay tribute to our small officer team for the way in which they have brought together the Net Zero Villages project and also the other projects that have come forward. It was really excellent and inspiring.

“Thank you very much for the question and of course for the offer of support. For those of you who are not aware, the successful Net Zero Villages programme has awarded a total of £150,000 to ten village halls across the district for solar panels, batteries and insulation, which has helped our vital community facilities reduce their running costs and their carbon emissions at the same time.

“Identifying and applying for relevant grants is an ongoing part of our work and our officers are continuously seeking new funding opportunities from both internal and external sources, including the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority and the Greater South East Net Zero Hub. We will continue exploring all suitable funding streams to enable the development and delivery of impactful community led climate action initiatives across the district.”

**2. Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Charlotte Cane.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

The Director Legal explained that as local taxpayers, councillors had a non-disclosable pecuniary interest in the motion on Council Tax and so they could fully participate in the discussion on that item and vote on it, without having to disclose an interest or have a dispensation.

**4. Minutes – 22 May 2025**

It was resolved unanimously:

That the Minutes of the Council meeting held on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2025 be agreed as a correct record.

**5. Chair’s Announcements**

The Chair made no announcements.

**6. Petitions**

No petitions had been received.

## 7. Notice of Motions Under Procedure Rule 10

### (i) Local Government Reorganisation

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the following motion.

The Council notes that:

1. Since the Government's White Paper on English Devolution was published in December 2024, Leaders and Officers of the six principal Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been working together to produce an agreed proposal, or an agreed set of proposals, in time for the final submission deadline in November 2025.
2. The initial work undertaken to support the business case includes a detailed analysis of the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on Adults, Children and SEND services; a financial analysis of the relative funding allocation from Government; analysis of demand across other services such as homelessness and environmental services; and analysis of the viability of the tax base (business rates, Council Tax, and other income) to support each Unitary configuration.
3. This work has led to the development of three different options all of which are for a two Unitary solution across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. See below the three options.

#### **Proposal A** North-West/South-East

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions

#### **Proposal B** North/South

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District along with County Council functions

#### **Proposal C** East/West

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions
4. Each Council across the region has directly input into the development of a suite of baseline data to be used in each business case and is now directly inputting into a chosen business case. Based on the shared data and analysis undertaken to date, at this stage East Cambs District Council officers are inputting directly into the development of the Proposal B business case and indirectly (through sharing of data) into Proposals A and C.

5. The business case for Proposal A is being led by Cambridgeshire County Council. This proposal is currently the preferred option of the County Council's Administration. District Councils are not directly inputting into the development of this business case.
6. The business case for Proposal B is being led by Cambridge City Council and is the only business case that has direct input from all District Councils and an upper tier authority, namely Peterborough City Council.
7. South Cambs District Council and Cambridge City Council Leaders have given public support for the creation of a Greater Cambridge Unitary – The Greater Cambridge Unitary comprises of the geography covered by these two Councils only, which forms part of Proposal B.
8. The business case for Proposal C is being led by Huntingdonshire District Council but is not receiving direct input from either of the upper tier authorities or any other District Councils at this stage. For clarity, HDC offered to lead on this piece of work as collectively the Leaders felt it was too soon to narrow down the options to just two.
9. A fourth Unitary option, which proposes the creation of three Unitaries across the region, is being developed by Peterborough City Council, however this does not have the backing of any other Council within Cambridgeshire, as a three unitary option was shown to be unlikely to be a financially sustainable solution longer term.
10. The Council can only endorse one or none of the Unitary proposals at the point of submission to Government in November 2025.

**The Council believes that:**

1. Each proposal has benefits and disbenefits for our residents, businesses, visitors and communities in general; however the early analysis shows that some proposals will have a greater impact than others.
2. Proposal A
  - Appears to have a logical geographical alignment due to areas in the south of our district bordering Greater Cambridge.
  - However, this option could see East Cambridgeshire being folded into the Cambridge Growth Company which is required to build 150,000 new homes in the Cambridge area with the Government directing where those homes will be located, rather than local people.
  - Would see East Cambridgeshire residents grouped with the highest Council Tax charging areas and see the biggest increase in Council Tax of all Unitary options for our residents.
  - Would also mean East Cambridgeshire would be joining an area where the existing District Councils have decided to permanently adopt a 4 day working week for 5 days' pay funded by tax payers.
3. Proposal B
  - Protects our district from over development and handing over control of the planning of new homes to the Cambridge Growth Company.
  - Brings rural districts that share similar characteristics and challenges together, giving them a stronger voice, while still being economically underpinned by a vibrant city.

- By virtue of its geographic and population size will need to maintain a council footprint presence and service delivery model in the northern Unitary, rooted in the local communities it serves, like the successful North Yorkshire Unitary established in early 2023.
- Meets the Government's ambition to deliver growth by forming a Greater Cambridge region in a southern Unitary that has the scale required to be financially sustainable, given its high tax base and future growth.

4. Proposal C

- Would align similar geographies and Councils with similar housing growth ambitions and constraints.
- However, it may lead to a northern Unitary that has such a low funding base, it would struggle to support an aging population and increased demands in Social Care and SEND services.

**The Council resolves to:**

1. Continue to actively and directly participate in the development of the Proposal B business case.
2. Consider all three business cases (A, B and C) at a meeting of the Council on 20th November 2025 prior to submission to Government.

The proposer and seconder accepted that the word "six" should be amended to "seven" in the first sentence of the first paragraph of the motion.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that she was opposed to the Government's Local Government Reorganisation initiative. It was not devolving power to local people, and the Government had recently admitted that it had not carried out proper costings of its proposals. The Council had frozen its Council Tax for the last 12 years and unlike most other authorities it was debt free. It had also scored far higher than its neighbours in the recent satisfaction survey. It was clear that larger authorities were not necessarily more efficient and her preference was for the Council to form a unitary on its own.

Cllr Bailey expressed concerns about the Council forming a unitary with Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council. 150,000 new homes had to be built in the Greater Cambridge area in addition to the houses already pledged in their Local Plan. Both authorities increased their Council Tax by the maximum allowed and South Cambridgeshire District Council's staff and their shared service staff with the City Council worked a four-day week. It was clear that Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire already had a close working relationship, and it was likely that the Council would become a junior partner if it joined with the other two authorities. Cllr Bailey supported proposal B, as this would provide financial resilience, with a bigger tax base with other rural authorities.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Mark Inskip seconded the following amendment:

The Council notes that:

1. Since the Government's White Paper on English Devolution was published in December 2024, Leaders and Officers of the ~~six~~ **seven** principal Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been working together to produce an agreed proposal, or an agreed set of proposals, in time for the final submission deadline in November 2025.
2. The initial work undertaken to support the business case includes a detailed analysis of the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on Adults, Children and SEND services; a financial analysis of the relative funding allocation from Government; analysis of demand across other services such as homelessness and environmental services; and analysis of the viability of the tax base (business rates, Council Tax, and other income) to support each Unitary configuration.
3. This work has led to the development of three different options all of which are for a two Unitary solution across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. See below the three options.

**Proposal A North-West/South-East**

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions

**Proposal B North/South**

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District along with County Council functions

**Proposal C East/West**

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions
4. Each Council across the region has directly input into the development of a suite of baseline data to be used in each business case and is now directly inputting into a chosen business case. Based on the shared data and analysis undertaken to date, at this stage East Cambs District Council officers are inputting directly into the development of the Proposal B business case and indirectly (through sharing of data) into Proposals A and C.
5. The business case for Proposal A is being led by Cambridgeshire County Council. This proposal is currently the preferred option of the County Council's Administration. District Councils are not directly inputting into the development of this business case.
6. The business case for Proposal B is being led by Cambridge City Council and is the only business case that has direct input from all District Councils and an upper tier authority, namely Peterborough City Council.

7. South Cambs District Council and Cambridge City Council Leaders have given public support for the creation of a Greater Cambridge Unitary – The Greater Cambridge Unitary comprises of the geography covered by these two Councils only, which forms part of Proposal B.
8. The business case for Proposal C is being led by Huntingdonshire District Council but is not receiving direct input from either of the upper tier authorities or any other District Councils at this stage. For clarity, HDC offered to lead on this piece of work as collectively the Leaders felt it was too soon to narrow down the options to just two.
9. A fourth Unitary option, which proposes the creation of three Unitaries across the region, is being developed by Peterborough City Council, however this does not have the backing of any other Council within Cambridgeshire, as a three unitary option was shown to be unlikely to be a financially sustainable solution longer term.
10. The Council can only endorse one or none of the Unitary proposals at the point of submission to Government in November 2025.

**The Council believes that:**

1. ~~Each proposal has benefits and disbenefits for our residents, businesses, visitors and communities in general; however the early analysis shows that some proposals will have a greater impact than others.~~
2. **Proposal A**
  - ~~Appears to have a logical geographical alignment due to areas in the south of our district bordering Greater Cambridge.~~
  - ~~However, this option could see East Cambridgeshire being folded into the Cambridge Growth Company which is required to build 150,000 new homes in the Cambridge area with the Government directing where those homes will be located, rather than local people.~~
  - ~~Would see East Cambridgeshire residents grouped with the highest Council Tax charging areas and see the biggest increase in Council Tax of all Unitary options for our residents.~~
  - ~~Would also mean East Cambridgeshire would be joining an area where the existing District Councils have decided to permanently adopt a 4 day working week for 5 days' pay funded by tax payers.~~
3. **Proposal B**
  - ~~Protects our district from over development and handing over control of the planning of new homes to the Cambridge Growth Company.~~
  - ~~Brings rural districts that share similar characteristics and challenges together, giving them a stronger voice, while still being economically underpinned by a vibrant city.~~
  - ~~By virtue of its geographic and population size will need to maintain a council footprint presence and service delivery model in the northern Unitary, rooted in the local communities it serves, like the successful North Yorkshire Unitary established in early 2023.~~
  - ~~Meets the Government's ambition to deliver growth by forming a Greater Cambridge region in a southern Unitary that has the scale required to be financially sustainable, given its high tax base and future growth.~~

**4. Proposal C**

- ~~Would align similar geographies and Councils with similar housing growth ambitions and constraints.~~
- ~~However, it may lead to a northern Unitary that has such a low funding base, it would struggle to support an aging population and increased demands in Social Care and SEND services.~~

**The Council resolves to:**

1. Continue to actively and directly participate in the development of the Proposal B business case; **and to join with Cambridgeshire County Council in the development of the Proposal A business case.**
2. **Consult residents and parish councils in East Cambridgeshire with the specific purpose of establishing local residents' views of all options being worked on.**
3. Consider all three business cases (A, B and C) at a meeting of the Council on 20th November 2025 prior to submission to Government.

Cllr Lorna Dupré was pleased that the correction of six councils to seven had been accepted. She stated that the paragraphs under the heading "The Council believe that" should be removed as they were misleadingly selective in the evidence quoted and did not list the disadvantages of proposal B. She explained that whilst councils could only endorse one proposal, they could work on other proposals by preparing more than one business case. She suggested that if a proposal had the support of a Council's Leader, it did not necessarily indicate support of the whole Council. She concluded that the Council should engage with the business case for proposal A, as this was preferred by residents, parish councils and interest groups.

Cllr Mark Inskip stated that Local Government reviews were very infrequent as it was 50 years since the last reorganisation. This made it imperative that the right decision was taken on the new structure, which would last decades. This was why he supported the amendment as the original motion ruled out proposal A and only argued for proposal B. He concluded that residents identified with Cambridge and not with Peterborough and their views should not be ignored.

Cllr Anna Bailey explained that the authority had tried to engage with Cambridgeshire County Council on proposal A but had not received a response. The administration was working hard evaluating all proposals, but the County Council were only promoting proposal A and were communicating this to parish councils. The Council would be sending out a questionnaire to residents and the administration was still open to all proposals and would carefully examine the business cases. It was clear that the business case for proposal B had huge merits.

A vote was taken and with 13 votes in favour of the amendment and 14 against, with no abstentions the amendment was lost.

Cllr Mark Goldsack reminded Council that Local Government Reorganisation was being imposed by the Government against the interests of the local

people that all the Members in the Chamber represented. He hoped that Members would not be divided by the Government's proposals. He expressed his disappointment in the fact that the Government would not consider any change in the county boundary near Newmarket. He was concerned that the Cambridgeshire County Council Chief Executive was being a spokesperson on this matter but had been assured that it was legal.

Cllr Lorna Dupré agreed with Cllr Mark Inskip that the proposals were for the long-term and she doubted that anybody would still be concerned about matters such as the four-day week in 50 years' time. She stated that the district's residents were drawn towards Cambridge for jobs, health, education and leisure and not towards Peterborough, who were less likely to understand the rural issues of the district. The district's parish councils and residents also preferred Cambridge, with connections to the Greater Cambridge Partnership, and the Greenways project.

Cllr Keith Horgan expressed concern about the loss of a rural voice due to Local Government Reorganisation and the increase in Council Tax, which would be greater under proposal A, that joined the district with Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire. He concluded that there was a risk of being dominated by the urban areas under all the proposals and East Cambridgeshire's representatives would have to speak up for its residents.

Cllr Bill Hunt expressed his opposition to the four-day week, council tax increases and parking charges. He opposed proposal A, that recommended that the Council combined with South Cambridgeshire and Cambridge City.

Cllr Alan Sharp agreed with Cllr Goldsack that it was disappointing that the Government were refusing to consider any amendments to the county boundary, and he too had concerns about all the options. He also expressed concern about the amount of debt that Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council had incurred, which would have to be shared with the new unitary. He feared that if the Council joined Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire it would be seen as the junior partner, as had been demonstrated with the lack of consultation over the Greater Cambridge Travel Plan and the Greenways project. He reminded Council that no final decision was being taken, and he wanted to see the business cases.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that residents wanted to preserve their community, and this would be under threat from the development coming from Greater Cambridgeshire in proposal A. Council Tax would be lower under proposals B and C, which would result in more rural areas coming together that could resist the influence of the urban areas more effectively than in proposal A. He supported the motion, which did not represent a final decision and he recognised that Council should wait for the results of the business cases before reaching a verdict.

Cllr John Trapp suggested that the motion was premature as Members did not have the details of the business cases. He suggested more research was

required on the amount of debt other authorities had incurred before making a decision. He believed that the four-day week issue was of little importance.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed his opposition to Local Government Reorganisation but accepted that it was happening. He stated that the debt of Peterborough City Council dwarfed that of the other authorities. He suggested that it would be up to the newly elected councillors of the new unitary authority to ensure that East Cambridgeshire residents were not excluded. He also suggested that such a long-term decision should not be based on current levels of Council Tax. He agreed with other members that the Council had little influence over the Greater Cambridge Partnership but this would be reduced further under proposal B. He concluded that residents identified far more with Cambridge than with Peterborough and so he would not be supporting the motion.

Cllr James Lay explained that he was involved with the development of Peterborough many years ago and he knew that the city had no relation to the established villages in the rural district of East Cambridgeshire. He suggested that considerable economic growth was expected along the Oxford to Cambridge corridor and the district's school children went to sixth form colleges in Cambridge. He would not be supporting the motion.

Cllr Gareth Wilson argued that most of a resident's Council Tax was paid to the County Council to pay for social care and education and without detailed figures it was impossible to know how this would be allocated to the new unitary authorities. Peterborough was harder for residents to get to than Cambridge and East Cambridgeshire was part of the Greater Cambridgeshire area and its growth. He would not be supporting the motion which focussed on many short-term issues on a long-term matter.

Cllr Martin Goodearl suggested that where people lived was often different from where they worked or shopped and this would not be affected by Local Government Reorganisation.

Cllr Christine Colbert stated that it was premature to prefer one proposal at this stage and so she could not support the motion.

Cllr Julia Huffer reminded Council that the final choice on the new unitary authority boundaries would be made by the Secretary of State. The Council should come up with an evidence based recommendation. She was concerned about the number of homes planned in the Greater Cambridge areas, the likely increase in Council Tax and the already close relationship between South Cambridgeshire and City Councils. She also expressed her opposition to the four-day week. She supported proposal B, as it would mean joining with other similar rural areas and so she would be voting for the motion.

Cllr Anna Bailey repeated her opposition to Local Government Reorganisation and she spoke of the need for local offices to remain in the district after the restructure was completed. She explained that residents valued their

communities and she supported Proposal B as it would allow the rural villages to run themselves and not be dominated by the nearby city of Cambridge. Residents were also concerned about development and the Greater Cambridge area had agreed to an additional 150,000 homes on top of those already agreed in the local plan. A proposed development in north eastern Cambridge of 5-6,000 homes was not now going ahead and this would put greater pressure for homes elsewhere. Cllr Bailey concluded that ultimately this was the Government's choice and she urged councillors to work together and support the motion.

A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour and 13 votes against, with no abstentions, the following motion was carried:

### **Local Government Reorganisation**

The Council notes that:

1. Since the Government's White Paper on English Devolution was published in December 2024, Leaders and Officers of the seven principal Councils in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough have been working together to produce an agreed proposal, or an agreed set of proposals, in time for the final submission deadline in November 2025.
2. The initial work undertaken to support the business case includes a detailed analysis of the impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) on Adults, Children and SEND services; a financial analysis of the relative funding allocation from Government; analysis of demand across other services such as homelessness and environmental services; and analysis of the viability of the tax base (business rates, Council Tax, and other income) to support each Unitary configuration.
3. This work has led to the development of three different options all of which are for a two Unitary solution across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. See below the three options.

#### **Proposal A North-West/South-East**

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, Huntingdonshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions

#### **Proposal B North/South**

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire, Fenland and Huntingdonshire District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District along with County Council functions

#### **Proposal C East/West**

- i. **Unitary 1** Peterborough City Council, East Cambridgeshire and Fenland District Councils along with County Council functions
- ii. **Unitary 2** Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire and South Cambridgeshire District Councils along with County Council functions

4. Each Council across the region has directly input into the development of a suite of baseline data to be used in each business case and is now directly inputting into a chosen business case. Based on the shared data and analysis undertaken to date, at this stage East Cambs District Council officers are inputting directly into the development of the Proposal B business case and indirectly (through sharing of data) into Proposals A and C.
5. The business case for Proposal A is being led by Cambridgeshire County Council. This proposal is currently the preferred option of the County Council's Administration. District Councils are not directly inputting into the development of this business case.
6. The business case for Proposal B is being led by Cambridge City Council and is the only business case that has direct input from all District Councils and an upper tier authority, namely Peterborough City Council.
7. South Cambs District Council and Cambridge City Council Leaders have given public support for the creation of a Greater Cambridge Unitary – The Greater Cambridge Unitary comprises of the geography covered by these two Councils only, which forms part of Proposal B.
8. The business case for Proposal C is being led by Huntingdonshire District Council but is not receiving direct input from either of the upper tier authorities or any other District Councils at this stage. For clarity, HDC offered to lead on this piece of work as collectively the Leaders felt it was too soon to narrow down the options to just two.
9. A fourth Unitary option, which proposes the creation of three Unitaries across the region, is being developed by Peterborough City Council, however this does not have the backing of any other Council within Cambridgeshire, as a three unitary option was shown to be unlikely to be a financially sustainable solution longer term.
10. The Council can only endorse one or none of the Unitary proposals at the point of submission to Government in November 2025.

**The Council resolves to:**

1. Continue to actively and directly participate in the development of the Proposal B business case; and to join with Cambridgeshire County Council in the development of the Proposal A business case.
2. Consult residents and parish councils in East Cambridgeshire with the specific purpose of establishing local residents' views of all options being worked on.
3. Consider all three business cases (A, B and C) at a meeting of the Council on 20th November 2025 prior to submission to Government.

Cllr Keith Horgan proposed and Cllr Christine Ambrose-Smith seconded the following motion:

**Motion to Oppose Proposed Changes to Council Tax Powers**

Council notes:

1. The Government is considering proposals to allow local authorities to set their own Council Tax bands, rates, and property valuations.
2. These changes would dismantle the nationally consistent framework that currently governs Council Tax, introducing significant regional variation.
3. Council Tax already exhibits stark disparities across the UK:
  - (a) The average Band D bill in England is £2,171 but varies from £829 in Westminster to £2,226 in Nottingham. (see note 1)
  - (b) Residents in poorer areas pay a higher percentage of their income on Council Tax — up to 10.3% in places like Blackpool and Teignbridge — compared to just 2% in wealthier boroughs like Westminster. (see note 2)
  - (c) The poorest 10% of households pay 7% of their income on Council Tax, while the richest 10% pay just 1.2%. (see note 1)
  - (d) Council Tax arrears have reached a record £8.3 billion, with 4.4 million people behind on payments — a third of whom live below the poverty line. (see note 1)
4. Nine out of ten councils in eastern England, including those in East Anglia, have already opted for the maximum allowable Council Tax increase of 4.99% for 2025–26. (see note 5)
5. If councils gain full control over rates and valuations, this could lead to even steeper increases, especially in areas facing financial pressure or service demand.
6. East Cambridgeshire District Council has frozen its share of Council Tax for the 12th consecutive year, maintaining Band D at £142.14. (see note 6)
7. This contrasts sharply with neighbouring districts, and under a decentralised system, such disparities could widen—leading to confusion and perceived unfairness among residents.

**Council believes:**

- A. Council Tax should remain a nationally regulated system to ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability.
- B. The valuation of properties is a complex and sensitive process that should remain under the purview of an impartial national body, not subject to local political pressures.
- C. Local autonomy over tax bands and valuations risks deepening regional inequalities, as wealthier areas with high property values can raise more revenue, while poorer areas face greater financial strain. (see note 3)
- D. The administrative burden of implementing localised valuations and banding would be substantial, requiring new systems, staff training, and oversight — diverting resources from essential services. (see note 4)
- E. A fragmented system would confuse taxpayers, reduce public trust, and make it harder to compare services and costs across regions.

**Council resolves to:**

- A. Oppose the proposed changes that would allow councils to set their own Council Tax bands, rates, and property valuations.
- B. Write to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities & Local Government to express our concerns and urge the Government to retain a nationally consistent Council Tax framework.

- C. Request that our local MPs raise this issue in Parliament and advocate for a fair and transparent taxation system.
- D. Collaborate with other councils, the Local Government Association, and relevant stakeholders to build a coalition against these proposals and promote alternative reforms that enhance fairness without fragmenting the system.

**Sources:**

1. <https://moneyweek.com/personal-finance/council-tax-burden-highest-lowest-uk>
2. [https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/mapping\\_britain\\_s\\_council\\_tax\\_burden](https://www.taxpayersalliance.com/mapping_britain_s_council_tax_burden)
3. <https://www.bing.com/search?q=impact+of+local+Council+Tax+autonomy+on+regional+inequalities&toWww=1&redig=791556156BA44C6B4BE461EA99D19A08>
4. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/modernising-and-improving-the-administration-of-council-tax/modernising-and-improving-the-administration-of-council-tax>
5. <https://www.eadt.co.uk/news/national/24946349.analysis-shows-nine-10-areas-facing-maximum-council-tax-rise-england/>
6. <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/finance-and-budget/council-tax/council-tax-bands>

Cllr Keith Horgan explained that it had come to his attention that a report published by the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2025, had called for the Government to give more control locally on deciding property valuations, Council Tax bands, rates and discounts. Under these proposals the levels of Council Tax would be decided locally instead of being set nationally. He suggested that if agreed, this could lead to Council Tax rises in excess of 4.99% and a growing disparity between the percentage of income being paid by rich and poor residents. He therefore requested that Council agree this motion and write to the Minister and Local MP to share the authority's concerns.

Cllr Lorna Dupré reported that the Government were not considering these proposals and had not yet given a response to the Select Committee's report. She accepted that since its inception, the Council Tax had unfair elements to it and whilst she welcomed debate on this issue, the motion seemed premature. She therefore invited the proposer and seconder of the motion to withdraw it.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott praised Cllr Horgan for his research and expressed his support for the motion, as taxation of local residents was a very important issue. He did not think the Council should have to wait for a Government press release before raising its concerns.

Cllr Anna Bailey suggested that the Council should be proactive in expressing its views whilst the Government was considering these radical proposals. Cllr

David Miller agreed and suggested that the evidence indicated that the Government were seriously contemplating these suggestions.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith found the Government's proposals worrying, as it would put control of Council Tax property bands and rates into the hands of political parties who could not be guaranteed to act in the best interests of their residents on this matter.

Cllr Keith Horgan disagreed with the suggestion that the motion should be withdrawn until the Government formally announced its plans, as by then it could be too late to influence the Government's policy. He opposed councils being allowed to increase Council Tax over the limit imposed by the Government and feared that if local authorities were allowed to set their own bands there would be a large increase for local taxpayers.

A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour and 13 against the above motion was carried.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Chika Akinwale seconded the following motion.

### **New Homes Ombudsman**

This council notes that

1. The New Homes Ombudsman Service exists to help customers resolve issues with their new homes, which the registered developer has been unable or unwilling to fix.
2. The remit of the New Homes Ombudsman Service covers the whole period from the reservation and legal completion of a property through to after-sales and complaints management for issues during the first two years of a new home purchase.
3. The primary purpose of the service is to provide a free and independent redress service to customers, which can impartially assess and adjudicate on issues that have arisen that fall within the Ombudsman's scope. This includes complaints around the reservation, legal completion and complaints management processes, or issues or defects that have arisen at or after occupation and which are not major defects.
4. The New Homes Ombudsman Service can resolve complaints through early resolution, negotiation, mediation, and adjudication.

This council further recognises that

- a) If a developer is not on the register of developers, or the customer reserved their property before their registration date, the Ombudsman will be unable to help.
- b) The New Homes Ombudsman is also unable to help with homes that are sold as affordable homes, or those under a shared ownership scheme or bought as part of a buy-to-let scheme.

This council expresses concern that

- i. Its own developer Palace Green Homes is not a registered developer for the purposes of this scheme, meaning that its customers will not be able to make use of the New Homes Ombudsman Service should they need to.
- ii. A number of other developers building homes locally are also not registered developers under the scheme.

This council therefore

- A. Calls upon its wholly-owned company East Cambridgeshire Trading Company to register its developer arm Palace Green Homes as a registered company with the New Homes Quality Board and agree to accept the New Homes Quality Code, thereby entitling their customers to use the services of New Homes Ombudsman.
- B. Resolves to encourage developers building in East Cambridgeshire to register under this scheme.

Cllr Lorna Dupré expressed concern that residents who bought their homes from Palace Green Homes would not be able to contact the New Homes Ombudsman Service with any problems. The purpose of the Motion was to ensure that new buyers had this right. She urged Council to agree this Motion unamended.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Julia Huffer seconded the following amended motion:

### **New Homes Ombudsman and Consumer Code for New Homes**

This council notes that

- 1. The New Homes Ombudsman Service exists to help customers resolve issues with their new homes, which the registered developer has been unable or unwilling to fix.
- 2. ~~The remit of the New Homes Ombudsman Service covers the whole period from the reservation and legal completion of a property through to after sales and complaints management for issues during the first two years of a new home purchase.~~
- 2. The primary purpose of the service is to provide a free and independent redress service to customers, which can impartially assess and adjudicate on issues that have arisen that fall within the Ombudsman's scope. This includes complaints around the reservation, legal completion and complaints management processes, or issues or defects that have arisen at or after occupation and which are not major defects.
- 3. The New Homes Ombudsman Service can resolve complaints through early resolution, negotiation, mediation, and adjudication.
- 4. ~~The Consumer Code for New Homes, approved by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, has been established to ensure that best practice is followed by registered developers in respect of the marketing and selling of new homes to consumers. The Code also sets expected standards for after sales customer care service.~~

5. The Council's own development company, East Cambs Trading Company trading as Palace Green Homes is a member of the Consumer Code for New Homes.
6. The Building Safety Act 2022 makes provision for the New Homes Ombudsman to be mandatory. However, the secondary legislation is not yet in place.

This council further recognises that

- (a) If a developer is not on the register of developers, or the customer reserved their property before their registration date, the Ombudsman will be unable to help.
- (b) The New Homes Ombudsman is also unable to help with homes that are sold as affordable homes, or those under a shared ownership scheme or bought as part of a buy-to-let scheme.

This council expresses concern that ~~a number of developers are not registered with an independent resolution service.~~

- i. ~~Its own developer Palace Green Homes is not a registered developer for the purposes of this scheme, meaning that its customers will not be able to make use of the New Homes Ombudsman Service should they need to.~~
- ii. ~~A number of other developers building homes locally are also not registered developers under the scheme.~~

This council therefore

~~Calls upon its wholly owned company East Cambridgeshire Trading Company to register its developer arm Palace Green Homes as registered company with the New Homes Quality Board and agree to accept the New Homes Quality Code, thereby entitling their customers to use the services of New Homes Ombudsman.~~

~~Resolves to encourage developers building in East Cambridgeshire to register under this scheme with an independent resolution service, for example, the New Homes Ombudsman or the Consumer Code for New Homes.~~

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that the New Homes Ombudsman was an independent dispute resolution service, for new home buyers who have exhausted a developers' internal complaints process. There was also the Consumer Code for New Homes, which provides an independent dispute resolution service and a set of established standards for developers to follow. The East Cambridgeshire Trading Company (ECTC) had signed up to the Consumer Code for New Homes, so purchasers had access to an independent resolution service. Registration to the New Homes Ombudsman was voluntary but will become compulsory at some point in the future and the cost of the registration fee was £1,500 per year. However, it could not apply

retrospectively to any already homes completed or sold and as there were no future homes that ECTC that could benefit from registering to this service, signing up now would be an unnecessary expense. The expectation was that ECTC would sign up to the service, although this was a matter for the company, which was independent of the Council.

Cllr Bailey was aware that some developers in the area had not signed up to an independent dispute resolution service and she encouraged them to do so. She acknowledged that the County Council's company This Land was registered, but it was delivering less affordable homes and at a greater cost than Palace Green Homes.

Cllr Mark Inskip stated that the Government was on the verge of making it compulsory to sign up to the New Homes Ombudsman and so it made more sense to ensure that ECTC signed up to the consumer code now, than to wait until instructed to do so by the Government. The New Homes Ombudsman service gave more rights home buyer than the Consumer Code for New Homes and the Council should set a good example by agreeing the Motion without amendments.

Cllr Chika Akinwale explained that purchasing a new property was stressful and signing up to the New Homes Ombudsman service would give home buyers a simple redress if there were any issues and allow disputes to be resolved early. The cost was minimal and it would build trust and ensure high quality. She was proud to support the motion.

Cllr Keith Horgan saw much to recommend the motion but there were currently no new developments pending and so it made sense to wait instead of paying for a service that could not be used. He therefore suggested that the motion should be withdrawn. Cllr Martin Goodearl agreed, as he saw no reason to pay for something that could not be used.

Cllr Julia Huffer opposed paying £1,500 for something that could be of no benefit to new homeowners. She concluded that the motion was premature and would commit the Council to spend taxpayers' money when it was not necessary.

Cllr Lorna Dupré suggested that the amendment essentially negated the original Motion and should not have been allowed. It was important to ensure that those who purchased a house from Palace Green Homes would have access to the Ombudsman and if the amendment was agreed it would mean waiting until the Government made it compulsory. Cllr Anna Bailed interjected that the purpose of the amendment was to sign up when residents could benefit from the Ombudsman service and not to wait until the Government required it by law.

Cllr Dupré explained that the current County Council administration had inherited This Land from the previous administration and were working hard to improve the organisation. She expressed her concern that the governance of East Cambs Trading Company was not separate from the Council. She

agreed with Cllr Inskip, that the New Homes Ombudsman service was superior to the Consumer Code for New Homes service and she concluded that the Council should be leading the way by agreeing the motion, unamended.

A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, 13 against and no abstentions the amendment to the Motion was carried.

Cllr Alison Whelan left the meeting.

The Chief Executive explained that the amended Motion now became the substantive Motion. Members now had the opportunity to propose any further amendments. The Chief Executive proposed that the Constitution needed to be clarified to advise on which councillor became the proposer in this situation and he agreed to bring a report to the next Council meeting.

Cllr Anna Bailey reported that Members were broadly in agreement, the only issue was when ECTC should sign up to the Ombudsman service. She maintained that this should be done only when there were future homeowners who could benefit from the service.

Cllr John Trapp stated that the cost of £1,500 was insignificant and signing up to the Ombudsman service would send a message to future customers that the company was committed to high standards.

Cllr Lorna Dupré expressed her disappointment that the amendment had been agreed. However, she supported the amended motion as it was important that the company signed up to the Ombudsman standards. She suggested that the Constitution needed to be reviewed by a standing committee and changed so that it was clear what the procedure was when motions were amended.

A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed the following amended Motion:

### **New Homes Ombudsman and Consumer Code for New Homes**

This council notes that

1. The New Homes Ombudsman Service exists to help customers resolve issues with their new homes, which the registered developer has been unable or unwilling to fix.
2. The primary purpose of the service is to provide a free and independent redress service to customers, which can impartially assess and adjudicate on issues that have arisen that fall within the Ombudsman's scope. This includes complaints around the reservation, legal completion and complaints management processes, or issues or defects that have arisen at or after occupation and which are not major defects.
3. The New Homes Ombudsman Service can resolve complaints through early resolution, negotiation, mediation, and adjudication.
4. The Consumer Code for New Homes, approved by the Chartered Trading Standards Institute, has been established to ensure that best practice is followed by registered developers in respect of the marketing

and selling of new homes to consumers. The Code also sets expected standards for after sales customer care services.

5. The Council's own development company, East Cambs Trading Company trading as Palace Green Homes is a member of the Consumer Code for New Homes.
6. The Building Safety Act 2022 makes provision for the New Homes Ombudsman to be mandatory. However, the secondary legislation is not yet in place.

This council further recognises that

- a) If a developer is not on the register of developers, or the customer reserved their property before their registration date, the Ombudsman will be unable to help.
- b) The New Homes Ombudsman is also unable to help with homes that are sold as affordable homes, or those under a shared ownership scheme or bought as part of a buy-to-let scheme.

This council expresses concern that a number of developers are not registered with an independent resolution service.

This council therefore resolves to encourage developers building in East Cambridgeshire to register with an independent resolution service, for example, the New Homes Ombudsman or the Consumer Code for New Homes.

Councillor Mark Inskip proposed and Cllr Christine Colbert seconded the following Motion, whilst accepting the amendments proposed by Cllr Mark Goldsack and Keith Horgan without debate:

#### **Ely Junction capacity improvements**

This council expresses its grave concern that the Government's announcement in June of progress on fifty rail and road schemes once again failed to include Ely Junction.

The congestion at this bottleneck means it is unable to handle the demand for both freight and passenger services. Solving this would return £4.89 for every £1 spent; remove 98,000 HGV journeys; enable an additional 2,900 freight services a year from Felixstowe; reduce carbon emissions by 1.7 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> over sixty years; and reduce traffic congestion by 5.6 million hours a year.

It is now twenty-three years since the first business case for upgrading the junction was made, and yet successive governments have failed to make the investment in this vital piece of infrastructure for our region and for the country.

This council calls on the Government to release funds for planning the project, conduct a rapid departmental review of the scheme and its benefits to present

to the Treasury, and listen to the concerns of the local MP, businesses, and stakeholders including this council at the effect of further delay.

Council agrees to:

1. Instruct the Leader to write to the Secretary of State requesting a rethink on the funding of Ely North junction, pointing out the data and statistics available to support the huge benefits available to all concerned for a positive outcome.
2. Provide a copy of the letter to local media to demonstrate that the Council is united in fighting for this important piece of infrastructure for East Cambs and the country.
3. Instruct the Leader to write to British Rail and Network Rail executive management teams asking for their full backing of the planned upgrade, including a request to both bodies for how they think we, the local authority, could further assist with progress on the project.

Cllr Mark Inskip explained that the Motion called on the Government to release the necessary funds to upgrade Ely North junction. This would allow for the increase in number of trains an hour from 6.5 to 10, benefiting both the passenger and freight service. This would reduce the number of Heavy Goods Vehicles and ordinary cars on the roads, which would reduce carbon emissions and promote economic growth, with an expected return of £4.9 for every £1 invested.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott supported the Motion and welcomed the political cooperation on this issue, led by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. It would benefit villages and towns in the district and was clearly in residents' interests.

Cllr Anna Bailey agreed with the Motion and she welcomed the support of the Mayor for the upgrading of Ely North junction. She hoped that the cost of the scheme would not result in its aims being downgraded.

Cllr Martin Goodearl supported the Motion and explained that not only did the junction have to be upgraded but also the track at Soham needed to be dualled.

Cllr Mark Goldsack thanked Cllr Inskip and Cllr Colbert for accepting the suggested amendment to the Motion. He explained that nearly ten years ago it had been suggested that to open Soham North, trains would have to be able to travel from Bury St Edmunds to Newmarket to Dullingham and then to Addenbrookes and back. The benefit to cost ratio was one of the largest he had seen but the Government had little support in the area and so it was not being seen as a priority. He hoped that the area's MPs could champion this. Cllr Lorna Dupré reported that Cllr Charlotte Cane MP was too unwell to attend the meeting but had promoted this initiative and was keen to see the junction upgraded.

Cllr Alan Sharp supported this Motion as the project would greatly reduce the number of Heavy Goods Vehicles from the district's roads. He added that putting freight onto the rail lines from Felixstowe that was bound for the midlands and the north would greatly benefit the entire country. Cllr James Lay agreed and mentioned that the A14 was blocked most mornings due to the amount of traffic and vehicles were then redirected onto the villages' roads.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed his disappointment in the fact that the Government were not focussing on this, as it would benefit the entire nation.

A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed the above amended Motion.

## **8. To Answer Questions From Members**

Two questions were received, and the responses were given as follows:

### **1) Question from Cllr James Lay to Cllr Julia Huffer:**

"I sit on the Planning Committee and on the whole we allow 30% of homes to be affordable or for rent, so I want some reassurance.

- How many affordable homes and homes for rent have we completed in ECDC in the last year?
- How many homes for rent have gone to the 1,000 on the housing register?
- How many of the new rented properties have been let to people from outside Cambridgeshire?"

### **Response from Cllr Julia Huffer**

"Thank you for the question, Cllr Lay. You will of course be aware that the Council is not a housing provider, but we also do not sit idly by. We do what we can through the policies that we have in place and then deliver what we can through East Cambs Trading Company and with our established CLT network who do remarkable work. We are passionate about delivering genuinely affordable housing that enables people to live and work locally. Officers are working on both our annual monitoring report and our returns to Government. Once this work is finished, we will have the answer to your first question and I will ask our officers to share this information with all members as soon as they are able. However, whilst the numbers are not available for us today for this year, there is good information in the 2023/24 annual monitoring report. That year there were 154 affordable completions and when you add that to the two previous years there were 489 affordable homes. The last three years have been the strongest years and long may this continue. In 2024/25, 479 properties were rented. 376 were allocated to people on the East Cambs waiting list but only 7 properties went to people outside Cambridgeshire. We do not know how many of these properties were built in the same year, and as I have already said we are working on this and I will make the information available. I do know that this year, CLT took a huge step forward and are now the proud owners of 10 affordable homes with 5 of those

for affordable rent, in fact they welcomed new tenants just this week. This may seem like a small number but that is 10 new affordable homes for people with a strong local connection to their area and there are 50 more homes to come, with 35 of those for affordable rent. In previous years in Swaffham Prior, Soham, Stretham, Wilburton and Haddenham, affordable housing has been delivered that enables people who have a strong local connection to have decent affordable housing. Delivery to date through our CLTs is 91 and 63 of those are affordable rent and there is more to come. Kennett, I have already mentioned and Haddenham CLT has ambitions to do more and is actively working with East Cambs Trading Company to make this ambition a reality. It will not count in this year's figures, but I would like to thank East Cambs Trading Company as they are on site right now building 27 affordable homes in Ely. A few years back, in this very chamber, we asked them to try and deliver more than our 30% policy on affordable housing and they have delivered for us. 100% of the 27 homes are affordable housing and they are all for social rent. We do all this because we put in place a framework to enable it. We have a company that shares our vision and we have a community led development policy with grants available for start-up and pre-development costs. The 100k homes policy is targeted at people who live and work locally and we influence where we can, to build affordable housing to those with a strong local connection. On this last point we worked with Accent at their site in Little Downham, where we delivered 39 affordable homes to ensure that our local connection criteria was secured and that extra efforts were made to market the properties in the local area so that people knew that there are affordable homes available that they can access. I am proud of what we have been able to achieve through the actions we have taken. I hope that answers your questions.”

**Question from Cllr Lucius Vellacott, to Cllr Anna Bailey, Leader of Council**

“Could the Leader of Council explain her understanding of the circumstances surrounding planning application 25/00437/LBC for Listed Building Consent (Retrospective change of use to secure office) at The Old Dispensary in Ely, initially converted without permission into an office for the Liberal Democrat MP?”

**Response from the Leader, Cllr Anna Bailey**

“Thank you for your question. In fact, there were two planning applications in relation to the Grade 2 listed building, the Old Dispensary building on St Marys Street in Ely. They were both submitted by Cllr Gareth Wilson in his capacity as a director of the registered company “The Old Dispensary Ely Ltd”. One application sought permission for listed building consent, the other was for change of use, away from community use, to secure it for office accommodation for our MP Charlotte Cane. Both applications were retrospective, as the works had already taken place, in breach of planning law and this was confirmed by the planning officer's report, which stated that the nineteenth century gothic style building lacked both consent for alterations and any approved state of use and that the conversion was unlawful. Cllr Wilson has served for many years on the Planning Committee and it is surprising; I do feel that he ought to have been aware of the need for planning

permission. Obviously planning laws exist to protect our communities and our heritage and it is very surprising that work was carried out in breach of planning law. The public have also rightly questioned why Cllr Wilson was removed by Cllr Dupré from his long-standing position on the Planning Committee in May this year. The applications were heard by the Planning Committee in July and indeed were granted retrospective permission. So, the position now has been regularised. Cllr Wilson's fellow company directors are in fact his wife, former East Cambridgeshire District Councillor Pauline Wilson and Mr David Wright who is the partner of Cllr Lorna Dupré, Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group and Deputy Leader of Cambridgeshire County Council and of course they do all stand to profit from rental income paid from Westminster by taxpayers, which does raise questions of ethics, transparency and accountability given the issues that occurred with change of use to the building without planning permission. So, it was not a great look or a great start for the new accommodation for our MP but we wish them the best."

**9. Schedule of Items Recommended from Committees and Other Member Bodies – to review the Council's treasury operations during the 2024/25 financial year**

Council considered a report (AA49, previously circulated) containing details of a recommendation to Council from the Finance and Assets Committee on 26 June 2025 to review the Council's treasury operations during the 2024/25 financial year.

Cllr Alan Sharp stated that the Finance and Assets Committee had unanimously recommended this report to Council. He thanked the report author, the previous Section 151 Officer, for his work and hoped that he was enjoying a happy retirement.

Cllr Sharp proposed and Cllr Ian Bovingdon seconded the proposal in the report.

A vote was taken and Council unanimously agreed

To resolve:

To approve the report detailing the Council's treasury operations during 2024/25, including the prudential indicators and treasury, as set out in the Annual Treasury Management Review (Appendix 1).

**10. Appointment of Finance Director / Section 151 Officer**

Council considered a report (AA50, previously circulated) which sought to appoint the Council's Section 151 Officer. The HR Manager explained that interviews had been held on 19 August 2025 and Council was being asked to endorse the appointment, as according to its procedures.

Cllr Anna Bailey paid tribute to Mr Ian Smith, the outgoing Section 151 Officer and was delighted to support the appointment of Mr Jude Antony. She had observed the interviews and was happy to report that Mr Antony had a wealth of relevant experience and she was looking forward to working with him.

Cllr Lorna Dupré expressed concerns about both the appointment process, which had no councillors on the appointment panel, and the lack of any supporting criteria in the report. She suggested that the Constitution should be amended to include rules for future appointments. With regret she declared that she would be abstaining on this matter. She wished Mr Antony every success in his new position.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott expressed his disappointment in the fact that the appointment of the Council's Section 151 Officer would not be unanimous. He stated that Council had appointed a Chief Executive who was responsible for appointing his staff and he trusted him to ensure that the right person was appointed. He looked forward to working with Mr Antony. Cllr Alan Sharp also supported the appointment of Mr Antony and was also disappointed that the vote was not going to be unanimous.

Cllr John Trapp stated that without knowing more information regarding the appointment process, he would be abstaining.

Cllr David Miller stated that due to data protection legislation, the CV of candidates could not be circulated. He did not consider that external advice was integral to the appointment of senior officers. He trusted the officers of the Council and the appointment process.

Cllr Anna Bailey proposed and Cllr Alan Sharp seconded the recommendation in the report.

A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, no votes against and 12 abstentions, Council agreed

To resolve:

To endorse the appointment of Mr Jude Antony as the Council's Section 151 Officer.

## **11. Appointment of Chief Executive Appointments Panel**

Council considered a report (AA51, previously circulated) which proposed the arrangements for the appointment of a new Chief Executive. The HR Manager stated that the Chief Executive had announced his retirement, and his last day of work would be 31 December.

Cllr Anna Bailey expressed her gratitude and thanks to John Hill, one of the longest ever serving Chief Executives who would be difficult to replace and left a huge legacy. She added that she supported the recommendation, which complied with the Constitution.

Councillor Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded the following amendment to the recommendation:

- 2.1. Members are requested to:
  - (i) approve the establishment of a 'task and finish' Constitutional Review Working Party to review Section 4 Part 7 of the council's Constitution and make recommendations to a Special Meeting of the Council;
  - (ii) this review to include, but not be limited to, establishing terms of reference for an Appointments Panel to make a recommendation to Council on the appointment of the Chief Executive; and
  - (iii) agree to the appointment of a politically balanced number of members including but not limited to the Leader of Council, Chair of Council and Leader of Liberal Democrats and Independent Group to the above panel; and
  - (iv) ~~(iii) advertise the post on an internal only basis in the first instance.~~ confirm that no further action in the appointment of a Chief Executive will take place until the Special Meeting of the Council has considered the Working Party's recommendations.
- 2.2 In the event that the changes required cannot be completed before the post of Chief Executive falls vacant, authorise officers to make arrangements for the appointment of an interim Chief Executive to fulfil the necessary functions until a proper appointment process can begin.
- 2.3 The Constitutional Review Working Party shall comprise six elected members, three from each group, and be chaired by the Chair of Council. Its terms of reference shall be to make recommendations to a Special Meeting of the Council to amend Section 4 Part 7 of the council's Constitution to ensure that it provides for a thorough, robust and informed process for the appointment, disciplinary action or dismissal of staff.
- 2.4 The Working Party will agree a programme of work and a timetable of meetings to enable it to make recommendations to a Special Meeting of the Council as swiftly as is conducive to a considered review. The lead officers for the Working Party will be the Director, Legal/Monitoring Officer and the Democratic Services Manager/Deputy Monitoring Officer. All meetings will be clerked and minuted.

Cllr Lorna Dupré stated that this was a significant appointment and the process needed to be checked, with the role of those on the appointments panel, to ensure that it was fit for purpose. To achieve this the Council's Constitution was in need of an urgent review and she proposed that a Task and Finish Working Party be set up to make recommendations to a special meeting of Council and the process for appointing a new Chief Executive should be delayed until this was done. An interim appointment could be made if necessary. She expressed concern about restricting the appointment to internal candidates.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott praised the current Chief Executive who had been in post for his entire life. He saw no reason to amend the recommendations that ensured that the leaders of the two political groups were on the appointments panel. The setting up of a Constitution Review Working Party would unnecessarily delay the whole process. He reminded Council that the Conservative party had won the election in 2023 and as the administration, had the right to decide the appointments process.

Cllr Mark Inskip expressed concern that members had not been directly involved in the appointment of the Section 151 Officer and he suggested the Council could learn from other authorities on how to appoint its next Chief Executive. He would expect to see the use of external consultants, who could shape the job specification and advise the appointment panel. To achieve this the Constitution needed to be amended.

Cllr John Trapp explained that he had been on the previous Constitution Review Working Group about a year and a half ago and it had made minor changes. However, the Chief Executive was a very important post and should follow a strict process. The current process was inadequate and needed to be improved.

Cllr Mark Goldsack reported that there was an urgent need to replace the Chief Executive but the longevity of the job was in question due to the Local Government Review. He believed that amending the Constitution should be considered but it should not delay the process for appointing a new Chief Executive.

Cllr Christine Whelan stated that it was vital that the process for appointing such an important role was transparent and accountable. The Council needed to ensure that it was appointing from the widest talent available and so the post should not be restricted to internal candidates. The Council could learn from other authorities and appoint expert advisers to assist in the process. She concluded that the Council owed it to residents to make the right appointment and not rely on a flawed process. She urged members to support the amendment.

Cllr Anna Bailey agreed that the appointment of a new Chief Executive needed to be done in the best way and this required a pragmatic approach. The proposed amendment would unnecessarily delay the process and add extra costs through the employment of consultants.

A vote was taken and with 12 votes in favour, 14 against and no abstentions the amendment was lost.

Cllr Lorna Dupré suggested that it was possible that the Government could still withdraw the Local Government Reorganisation process and the Council could regret its decision to rush the appointment of a new Chief Executive. She suggested the process could have equality implications by relying on a narrow selection process. She expressed concern regarding the absence of a clear remit for the appointment panel and the absence of any clear instructions for the process in the Constitution.

Cllr John Trapp disagreed with the proposal to restrict such an important position to internal applicants. He suggested that the successful candidate should have a vision for the Council for the next two years and he did not think that the proposals were pragmatic.

Cllr Christine Colbert stated that it was only fair to the future Chief Executive to have a fit and proper appointment process.

Cllr Mary Wade left the meeting.

Cllr Julia Huffer stated that it was very unlikely that the Government would reverse the implementation of the Local Government Reorganisation at this stage. The Leader of the Opposition would be given the opportunity to interview the candidates on their vision for the future and their leadership skills. The successful candidate would potentially be in post for 29 months but if the Council went through an external appointments process this could decrease to just a year and a half, which would reduce the calibre of the candidates wanting to do the job.

Cllr Anna Bailey assured Council that the appointment would be made on merit and if there were no appropriate internal candidates the Panel would not appoint.

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

A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, 11 against and no abstentions

It was resolved:

- a) To establish an Appointments Panel to make a recommendation to Council on the appointment of the Chief Executive.
- b) To appoint the Leader of Council, Chair of Council and Leader of Liberal Democrats and Independent Group to the above panel; and
- c) Advertise the post on an internal basis in the first instance.

## **12. Corporate Plan**

The Chief Executive presented this report (AA52, previously circulated) which invited Council to approve the updated Action Plan for 2025/26 and note the completed actions and progress made during the past 12 months.

Cllr Anna Bailey was pleased to list the achievements of the Council in the past year, including the freezing of Council Tax for a twelfth successive year, the agreeing of a new bereavement centre, funding of solar panels and the funding of Neighbourhood Plans. Cllr Bailey spoke of the need to tackle water shortage and drainage in the area to allow for more sustainable growth.

Cllr Lorna Dupré stated that she supported some elements of the Corporate Plan, including a crossing on the A10, the funding of Neighbourhood Plans and the initiative proposed by Cllr Chika Akinwale to build accessible play areas. However, she opposed the building of the crematorium and that discussions on this project had been held in private. She also expressed disappointment that proposed action on parking enforcement had been reduced to merely the part funding of a single Police Community Support Officer.

Cllr John Trapp suggested that the Corporate Plan should have included more evidence to support its aims, including more numbers and costings. He hoped that it would be updated to include the proposals for Soham railway and the Ely upgrade in the section on active travel and road and rail infrastructure. He did not think that he could support the Corporate Plan in its current form.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott was pleased to see that the Council was going to fund Neighbourhood Plans as the Government's decision to scrap its funding had left Wicken Parish Council with an unexpected funding gap. He welcomed the funding of the cycle route of Soham to Ely and noted that the Soham to Wicken route was almost completed. He also welcomed the plans for the new waste collection service, with a free extra bin if necessary and the plans to deliver £100,000 homes. He commended the Corporate Plan.

Cllr Julia Huffer was proud to support the Corporate Plan which showed that the Council was still supporting services, whilst freezing Council Tax for a twelfth year in a row. The recent survey showed that the district's residents trusted the administration to run the Council.

Cllr Anna Bailey stated that the Local Government Reorganisation survey had shown that residents supported the Council and the way in which it delivered its services. In reply to Cllr Dupré, she stated that it was normal for commercially sensitive projects such as the crematorium to be discussed in private and the Police were responsible for parking enforcement. The Council was aiming to fund the Police to do this work. However, Cambridgeshire County Council was the only authority that could deliver civil parking enforcement. Cllr Bailey was happy to receive any ideas and information from Cllr Trapp on the funding of projects. She reminded Council that the doubling of lines at Soham had been promised by Network Rail and the authority planned to lobby them to deliver this.

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

A vote was taken and with 14 votes in favour, 11 against and no abstentions

It was resolved to:

- (a) Approve the updated Action Plan for 2025-26 at Appendix 1.
- (b) Note the completed actions and progress made during the past 12 months.

### **13. Local Government Reorganisation – Public and Stakeholder Findings**

The Chief Executive presented the report (AA53, previously circulated), which provided the results of the Public and Stakeholder Survey undertaken as part of the Local Government Reorganisation business case development.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott stated that this report showed that the Council had a satisfaction rating of 63%, which was easily the highest in the county. This proved that residents supported the leadership of the Council that had frozen Council Tax, continued to deliver high quality services and had no debt. He declared the authority to be the best run Council in the country and would be handing this excellent position over to the new unitary authority.

Cllr Lorna Dupré stated that the survey findings indicated that residents had a strong connection with Cambridge and not with Peterborough and this should be taken into account when deciding the future governance arrangements. Cllr John Trapp agreed, explaining that the report indicated support for the work of the Council but foreboding over the possibility of joining Peterborough in a future unitary authority.

Cllr Anna Bailey recognised that many of the district's residents felt connected to Cambridge, but only 15% of those surveyed commented on geography and out of the 325 responses, 263 had been unclear about future boundaries. Instead, residents wanted their local authorities to be well run with low Council Tax and high value services.

Cllr Julia Huffer stated that the survey showed perceptions, which could change and not facts. It was likely that the centre of a future unitary authority would be in Peterborough and so satellite offices should remain in the districts. It would be unfair on the district's residents if they had to go to Cambridge for their services.

Cllr Alan Sharp hoped that accurate data on the debt of the other Cambridgeshire authorities could be provided along with details on how this would be allocated to the future unitary authorities.

Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann stated that rural communities had different challenges compared to those affecting urban areas but the Council would have to join with either the city of Cambridge or the city of Peterborough. The last census indicated that out of the 10,000 commuters in the district, 7,000 went to Cambridge and South Cambs and only 167 went to Peterborough.

Cllr Bill Hunt reported that there were many factors that were important to residents including free parking, no congestion charge and low council tax. He suggested that currently very few residents visited the County Council's offices

at Alconbury, which suggested that the location of an authority's main office was not important.

It was resolved:

To note the report.

**14. Local Government Reorganisation Update**

The Chief Executive presented this report (AA54, previously circulated), which updated the Council on Local Government Reorganisation in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

It was resolved:

To note the report.

**15. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority – Update reports**

Council received the reports (previously circulated) from the Combined Authority's meetings in June 2025 and July 2025.

It was resolved:

That the reports on the activities of the Combined Authority from the Council's representatives be noted.

The meeting concluded at 9:50 pm

Chair.....

Date.....

