



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of East Cambridgeshire District Council held at The Grange,
Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE
on Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 6.00pm

Present

Councillor Chika Akinwale	Councillor Julia Huffer
Councillor Christine Ambrose Smith	Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Anna Bailey	Councillor James Lay
Councillor Ian Bovingdon	Councillor David Miller
Councillor David Brown (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Kelli Pettitt
Councillor Charlotte Cane	Councillor Alan Sharp
Councillor Christine Colbert	Councillor Caroline Shepherd
Councillor Lorna Dupré	Councillor John Trapp
Councillor Lavinia Edwards	Councillor Ross Trent
Councillor Mark Goldsack (Chair)	Councillor Lucius Vellacott
Councillor Martin Goodearl	Councillor Alison Whelan
Councillor Kathrin Holtzmann	Councillor Christine Whelan
Councillor Keith Horgan	Councillor Gareth Wilson

46. Public Question Time

There were no public questions.

47. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mark Inskip and Mary Wade.

48. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

49. Chair's Announcements

The Chair did not make any announcements.

50. Political Proportionality

The Chief Executive presented his report (Z118, previously circulated) on the revised political balance of the Council and the implications for the allocation of seats on Committees, Sub Committees and other Member Bodies. He thanked

the leaders of both political groups for their cooperation and constructive challenge in a complex matter that appeared to be without precedent. He explained that counsel had advised that the recommendations in Appendix 3 could only be agreed if no councillors voted against it. The recommendations in Appendix 4 and 5 could be agreed by a simple majority.

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

- (i) Adopt the revised political proportionality as set out at Appendix 4.
- (ii) Amend the Council's Constitution such that Council shall, at its Annual Meeting, elect a Chair and Vice-Chair of each of its Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties for the ensuing Municipal Year. Should a Working Party be constituted during the Municipal year, Council (or a Committee if constituted by that Committee) may elect a Chair and Vice-Chair of that Working Party for the remainder of that Municipal Year.
- (iii) Instruct the Director Legal and Monitoring Officer to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution to effect the changes set out in (i) and (ii) above.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed and Cllr James Lay seconded the following amendment to the motion:

To adopt a revised political proportionality as follows:

- Finance and Assets Committee: 10 members
- Operational Services Committee: 10 members
- Audit Committee: 6 members
- Planning Committee: 10 members
- Finance and Assets Ethical Governance Sub-Committee: 6 members
- Personnel Appeals Sub-Committee: 4 members
- Licensing Non-Statutory Sub-Committee: 4 members

Cllr Anna Bailey reported that the district had voted for the Conservative manifesto and returned a Conservative majority in 2023. She suggested that the committee system was a more democratic form of governance than the Leader and Cabinet model and increasing total committee membership from 53 to 60 would ensure greater representation in the political process. She asserted that a change in the constitution was necessary and ensuring that full Council determined the chairs and vice chairs of the committees would be preferable to them being elected at individual committee meetings following annual Council, where a deadlock at each meeting would be likely. Many other authorities elected their chairs and vice chairs by full Council, including Cambridgeshire County Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Cllr Lorna Dupré agreed that the Committee system was the preferable form of governance. She stated that her concern that the Boundary Commission's recommendation for an even number of councillors could lead to two equally sized political groups, had now been realised. She explained that the 2023 election had been very close, with one seat being determined by only 25 votes. It was understood that whilst the Liberal Democrats had secured more votes in the 2023

election, the Conservatives had stood one fewer candidate. Cllr Dupré stated that a committee size of 12 meant that nearly half the Council would be sitting on each of the largest three committees. For this reason she supported the reduction of the size of these committees to 10. She also explained that with the sizes proposed in Appendix 4 neither political group would be able to put members and substitutes on both the Finance and Assets Committee and the Audit Committee, as the constitution prohibited members from being on both bodies.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott opposed the amendment, as it ensured fewer Conservative members on the Council's committees instead of more Liberal Democrat members, as proposed in the original motion. Cllr Julia Huffer stated that reducing the size of committees was less democratic, whilst increasing the size would ensure more voices were heard. Cllr Kathrin Holtzmann suggested that it would be more democratic for all decisions to be taken by full Council but this would be impractical. It was difficult for councillors with full time jobs and children to attend all meetings and so a smaller number of councillors on committees was more practical. Cllr David Miller suggested that having larger committees ensured more scrutiny over decisions and so he opposed the amendment.

Cllr John Trapp stated that when he first joined the Council there were 9 members on its main committees and so reducing the number to 10 members made more sense than increasing it to 12.

A vote was taken and cast as follows: (12 in favour, 14 against and 0 abstentions). The proposed amendment was rejected.

Cllr Lorna Dupré proposed that the number of substitutes on the Audit Committee be reduced from 3 to 2, to ensure that both political groups could appoint members and substitutes to both the Finance and Assets Committee and the Audit Committee. Cllr Anna Bailey, as the proposer of the original motion, accepted this amendment, which was agreed without debate.

Cllr Lucius Vellacott asserted that the motion was a fair and legal resolution to the political proportionality issue and the proposed amendments to the constitution would allow chairs to be elected without deadlock at individual committee meetings.

Cllr Lorna Dupré agreed that the motion as it stood met the requirements of the legislation. Her group supported it and did not disagree with the recommendation that the chairs and vice chairs be elected by Council.

A vote was taken and cast as follows: (26 in favour, 0 against and 0 abstentions).

It was agreed to:

- a) Adopt the revised political proportionality as set out at Appendix 4.
- b) Amend the Council's Constitution such that Council shall, at its Annual Meeting, elect a Chair and Vice-Chair of each of its Committees, Sub-Committees and Working Parties for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Should a Working Party be constituted during the Municipal year, Council (or a Committee if constituted by that Committee) may elect a Chair and Vice-Chair of that Working Party for the remainder of that Municipal Year.

- c) Reduce the number of substitutes from 3 to 2 on the Audit Committee for each group.
- d) Instruct the Director Legal and Monitoring Officer to make the necessary amendments to the Constitution to effect the changes set out in (a), (b) and (c) above.

The meeting concluded at 6:43 pm

Chair.....

Date.....