



**CAMBRIDGESHIRE  
& PETERBOROUGH**  
COMBINED AUTHORITY

## Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority: Minutes

Date: Wednesday 25th August 2021

Time: 10.30am – 12.40pm

Venue: Sand Martin House, Bittern Way, Peterborough PE2 8TY

Present: Mayor Dr Nik Johnson

Councillor A Bailey – East Cambridgeshire District Council, Councillor C Boden – Fenland District Council, Councillor W Fitzgerald – Peterborough City Council, Councillor J Neish – Huntingdonshire District Council, Professor A Neely – Vice Chair of the Business Board, Councillor L Nethsingha – Cambridgeshire County Council, Councillor M Smart – Cambridge City Council and Councillor B Smith – South Cambridgeshire District Council

Co-opted Members: D Preston – Police and Crime Commissioner and J Thomas – Clinical Commissioning Group

Apologies: Mr A Adams - Chair of the Business Board, substituted by Professor A Neely  
Councillor R Fuller – Huntingdonshire District Council, substituted by Councillor J Neish  
Councillor L Herbert – Cambridge City Council, substituted by Councillor M Smart  
Councillor E Murphy – Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

Also present: Councillor L Dupré, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

### 67. Announcements, apologies and declarations of interest

The Mayor stated that he had given a radio interview that morning to mark his first hundred days in office. It had been an honour to take on the office of mayor and he expressed his thanks to all those who had supported him during this time. He had made some great friendships and he continued to work collaboratively with many people from across the region from a wide cross-section of organisations. However, in

recent days his thoughts had been more sharply focused on what had happened over the last twenty years rather than the past hundred days. It was also approaching the twentieth anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist atrocity which had led to military intervention in Afghanistan. At the time of the atrocity he had been a young doctor and an expectant father and he was conscious that a generation had passed since then. He had been touched by what was happening in Afghanistan today and whilst the Combined Authority had no authority over the resettlement for Afghan refugees he welcomed the efforts being undertaken by on their behalf by the councils in the local area. He called on Government to be generous in its support of the Afghan refugees and stated that the Combined Authority could create a support infrastructure to engender the long-term success of resettlement in the area. He also encouraged everyone to join him and sign up to community support platforms.

The Mayor expressed his thanks to Peterborough City Council for hosting the Board on this occasion and expressed the hope that Board meetings would be held around the county in the coming months to once again bring the debate into the communities that it was representing.

Apologies for absence were reported as set out above.

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 68. Minutes – 28th July 2021

The minutes of the meeting on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2021 were approved as an accurate record, subject to a spelling correction, and signed by the Mayor.

#### 69. Petitions

No petitions were received.

#### 70. Public questions

Three public questions were received from Rod Hart, on behalf of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Climate Action Coalition; Dorothy Ball, a local resident; and Antony Carpen, a local resident. Copies of the questions and responses can be viewed on the [Combined Authority Board meeting web page](#).

Councillor Smart asked why the questions from those two members of the public who were unable to attend the meeting were not read out for response. The Monitoring Officer stated that the arrangements for managing public questions were set out in the Constitution and that a written response would be supplied. However, this could be looked at again as part of the planned review of the Constitution which would be taking place shortly.

The Mayor expressed his thanks to all three public questioners, commenting that he appreciated local groups and residents taking the time to engage directly with the Board and committees.

## 71. Annotated Forward Plan – August 2021

The Forward Plan was reviewed. At the request of the Board this now showed the changes which had been made to the Plan since it was last published.

Councillor Bailey noted a delay in some cases between decisions going to executive committees and them then being brought before the Board where this was required. She gave the example of the report on Cambridge South Station. The Interim Chief Executive undertook to look into this.

On being proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Nethsingha, it was resolved unanimously to:

Approve the Forward Plan.

## 72. Wisbech Access Strategy (Phase 1)

This key decision was added to the Forward Plan and published on 5 August 2021 under general exception arrangements.

The Mayor reminded the Board that this issue had been discussed at the previous meeting and that the Board had decided, in principle, to support the use of £1.88m of existing budget to complete design work and land acquisitions for the three remaining schemes within the Wisbech Access Strategy project, subject to the provision of a business case.

In June 2021 Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC) had reported that it would cost around £19.5m to deliver the three projects within the Wisbech Access Strategy. This sum was far in excess of the funds available. However, progressing work to the end of the detailed design stage would avoid the abortive costs of the work already undertaken and take the project to pipeline-ready status. A technical note produced by CCC was attached to the report at Appendix 1. This concluded that the project offered a benefit cost ratio of around 1.9. The Board had been advised at its July meeting that the Business Board had rejected a project change request on the basis that the project would no longer satisfy the requirements to receive local growth funding.

Councillor Boden expressed his gratitude to the Board for agreeing to meet in August in order for a decision on this to be expedited. Wisbech was the most deprived town based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation and this set of schemes was vital. He welcomed the proposal to fund the projects to the pipeline stage.

Professor Neely expressed his support for the proposal, but noted that there was little discussion around future governance or project management in the business case. The Chief Executive stated that she would be meeting with the chief executives of both CCC and the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) that afternoon and that she would raise this point with them. She would also ensure that lessons were learned from previous experiences.

Councillor Smith commented that there seemed to be considerable uncertainty regarding future funding and asked whether such funding would be available. Officers stated that the project would be progressed when funding was available.

Councillor Bailey commented that in her judgement the Business Board had taken a principled decision in rejecting the project change request. However, this was an important project and there was a need to work out how to take it forward to support Wisbech and to avoid losing the benefit of the money already spent.

On being proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Boden, it was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Approve £1.88m from the subject to approval funding within the Medium-Term Financial Plan enabling Cambridgeshire County Council to complete the purchasing of land, detailed design, and the Full Business Case for the project.
- b) Authorise the Director of Delivery and Strategy to conclude a revised Grant Funding Agreement with Cambridgeshire County Council on terms approved by Chief Legal Officer/ Monitoring Officer.

### 73. Peterborough Station Quarter

The Board was advised that Peterborough City Council, Network Rail and LNER were seeking Combined Authority funding for a strategic outline business case (SOBC) for Peterborough Station quarter. Peterborough represented an important rail interchange which provided a gateway to the wider region. There were five million passengers currently travelling through the station each year and this figure expected to grow. Some initial feasibility work had been undertaken which had concluded that the next steps should be a more detailed design and business case to showcase the transformative nature of the project for both Peterborough and the wider region. If approved, work on the SOBC would begin immediately with the aim of it being completed by the end of January 2022.

Councillor Smith commented that she was unable to support the recommendations for four reasons: the project was not part of the Combined Authority's long-term strategic plan and she felt that the organisation needed to properly plan its work programme; trains were currently running half empty due to the Covid pandemic with no sense at present of a return to pre-pandemic usage levels. The level of demand in the longer term was therefore unknown; Peterborough station had already received investment within the last ten years whereas there were other stations in the area which had received no investment; and the proposals conflicted with the Combined Authority's priorities of the environment and health and wellbeing. If the Board accepted the recommendations of the Independent Commission on Climate Change it should not, in Councillor Smith's view, be investing in multi-storey car parks. If the project was focused around regeneration then this should in her view be a zero-carbon regeneration. In response to a question from the Mayor about whether the proposal would be more acceptable if the car park was fitted with electrical vehicle charging points Councillor Smith commented that she would want to speak to the Board in the future about an electric vehicle charging strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough,

but that this must in her view be predicated on sustainable modes of travel and investment in innovative approaches.

Councillor Boden commented that the fact remained that Peterborough was the largest city in the Combined Authority area and served a much wider area. The existing bus service was not good and travelling to the station by public transport would not be a practical option for many people in the short term. The reality of continued car use at the present time should therefore be acknowledged. Councillor Boden commented that he travelled to London regularly by train and whilst the pattern of usage might have changed there were still high levels demand mid-week. Significant numbers of people had moved out of London following the pandemic, but were still looking to commute in for part of the week. Peterborough also represented a major gateway both within and beyond the Combined Authority's area. Whilst Fenland District Council might also wish to submit a LUF2 or LUF3 bid for the Board's consideration he acknowledged the value of the Peterborough Station Quarter project.

Councillor Nethsingha commented that she would not be opposing the recommendations on the basis of the investment case made by Peterborough City Council and because rail represented an important public transport option, but that she judged that Councillor Smith had made some important points. There was in her view a need to improve bus provision too and she asked whether the project could be made less car-dependent as it developed with an increased focus on active transport methods like walking and cycling to the station. Councillor Nethsingha further commented that it would in her view be helpful for the Mayor to write to Government seeking clarity around the future of Levelling Up Funding and other funding opportunities so that the Combined Authority had a longer term indication of likely funding. The Mayor stated that he would work with officers and the Department for Transport on this.

Councillor Bailey commented that the project was not solely about building a car park. It also incorporated improved cycling and walking access to the station and encouraging rail travel. She questioned Councillor Smith's assertion that the Board's priorities were environmental and public health issues as, whilst these were undoubtedly important considerations, the Combined Authority's stated purpose was to double gross value added (GVA). In her judgement there was a need for a balanced approach which addressed GVA whilst mitigating environmental and health and well-being impacts.

Professor Neely commented that he supported the recommendations, but that Councillor Smith had made some important points around improved sustainability.

Councillor Neish commented that in his view the project was about the wider aspects of improving the area, which would include looking at other forms of transport and connectivity. On this basis he would be supporting the recommendations.

Councillor Fitzgerald commented that some wrong assumptions about the project seemed to have been made. Peterborough City Council placed great importance on environmental considerations and these were embedded within its planning process. The aim was to create an iconic, green and sustainable gateway. Cycle access was a priority, but the current station layout did not encourage this. The new scheme was about re-provisioning space and would be able to accommodate this. Cars would not

be disappearing in the short-term, but there was a need to future-proof the redevelopment and make it sustainable. The project was not reliant on LUF2 funding and if this was not forthcoming alternative options would be considered, including alternative grant funding or a public/ private sector partnership. The project had been under discussion within the Combined Authority for quite some time and he expressed the hope that Board members would take comfort from his commitment to environmental considerations.

Councillor Smart commented that it was important that leaders spoke on up environmental and public health issues. However, there were areas of acute deprivation across the Combined Authority area and it was up to the Combined Authority to address those.

Councillor Smith welcomed the debate. Whilst she would not on this occasion be supporting the recommendations she expressed the hope that her challenge would help make clear the importance which the Board attached to addressing climate change. In her judgement it would be good for the Board to have a conversation around its purpose, not solely on terms of doubling GVA but in relation to other key factors like improving air quality, life expectancy and access to training. She cautioned about an expectation that things would return to the old normal post-Covid and urged that thought should be given to what life would actually look like so that the Combined Authority could plan accordingly. Climate change was reaching the point of no return and she felt that the Combined Authority needed to get better at reflecting environmental considerations in its public reports. The Mayor asked the Interim Chief Executive to reflect on this point.

The Mayor thanked the Board for their input and stated that as a Board they would work out their priorities together. Whilst acknowledging the Devolution Deal commitment to doubling GVA he was reassured that as he marked his first hundred days in office the Board was also talking about environmental and public health concerns amongst the Combined Authority's priorities.

On being proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Fitzgerald, it was resolved by a majority to:

- a) Recommend to the CPCA Board drawdown of £350,000 from the Transport Response Fund for the development of a Strategic Outline Business Case
- b) Note the programme to progress the development of the Strategic Outline Business Case.

The vote in favour included at least two thirds of all Members (or their Substitute Members) appointed by the Constituent Councils, including the Members appointed by Cambridgeshire County Council or Peterborough City Council and the Mayor.

#### 74. March – Future High Streets Funding Bid: Business Case for Additional Combined Authority Match Funding.

This key decision was added to the Forward Plan under general exception arrangements and published on 11 August 2021. Following publication, ten exempt appendices were declassified and published on the Combined Authority website on 20 August 2021. Seven appendices remained exempt from publication under Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, in that it would not be in the public interest for this information to be disclosed (information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)). The Mayor asked whether any member of the Board wanted to discuss the exempt appendices. No member expressed the wish to do so.

The decision before the Board related to a request from Fenland District Council to approve the drawdown of an additional £1.1m of subject to approval funding for the March Future Highstreet Fund. The Combined Authority Board had agreed this request in principle at its meeting on 25 August 2021, subject to the provision of a business case. This request was in addition to the £900k which the Board had previously approved under the Market Towns Programme. Market Towns projects were generally quite small, so it was deemed proportionate to have a business case given the size of the proposed increase in funding. No other public or private sector funding was available to progress this programme. The project included five transformational projects for March town centre and had a benefit cost ratio of 2.4, indicating that it represented very high value for money.

Councillor Boden commented that transformative was an over-used term, but in this case the projects proposed for March town centre would merit that description. March town centre was not fit for purpose in its current state for either residents or visitors. The fact that the local community had chosen to allocate £900k of its £1m allocation under the Market Towns Programme demonstrated the importance attached to this scheme by the local community.

Councillor Nethsingha commented that she anticipated widespread support for the proposal, given that the funding from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) might otherwise reduce. Going forward, she judged that it would be important to take account of environmental considerations such as they types of materials being used for projects of this type and the environmental consequences. Councillor Nethsingha asked whether the proposal to open up the town's frontage onto the River Nene would impact on the town's flood resilience. Councillor Boden stated that there were flooding issues in March, but that these were not fluvial problems but related to blockages in drain and gulleys. The river banks in March were quite high and secure so opening up the town's vista would not have a negative impact on flooding.

Councillor Smith commented that in her view March would benefit greatly from the projects proposed and that she was supportive of the recommendations. However, she felt that the Combined Authority needed to get better at reflecting environmental considerations in its public reports. The Mayor asked the Interim Chief Executive to reflect on this.

Councillor Smart noted that ten of the seventeen appendices to the report which had been exempt from publication had subsequently been declassified and made publicly available following challenge. He emphasised the importance of transparency in relation to the spending of public funds and asked about the process going forward.

The Monitoring Officer stated that the Combined Authority was committed to being as transparent as possible. He was not happy that the challenge had been required, but officers would take it as a reminder of the need to test and challenge any requests to exempt information from publication against the public interest test. The Mayor reiterated the importance of transparency.

On being proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Boden, it was resolved unanimously to:

- a) Accept the Business Case for the March Town Regeneration Future High Streets Fund Scheme
- b) Approve the drawdown of the £1.1m of 'Subject to Approval' Combined Authority funding for the March Future Highstreet Fund.
- c) Authorise the Chief Legal Officer and Monitoring Officer to complete the funding agreement with the grant recipient.

## 75. iMET Opportunity and Combined Authority Accommodation needs

This key decision was added to the Forward Plan and published on 16 August 2021 under general exception arrangements.

The Mayor invited Councillor Dupré, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the committee's questions on this item. A copy of the questions and responses is attached at Appendix 1.

The successful rollout of the Covid vaccination programme was leading many organisations to begin their return to office accommodation. This had coincided with an expression of interest in the purchase of the iMET building being received from a local business. Before this was progressed the Board was invited to consider whether it might want to use the iMET as accommodation for the Combined Authority, subject to the necessary alterations being made to turn it into office accommodation. Should the Board decide against this approach it was invited to authorise a market search exercise to identify the office space needed to meet the Combined Authority's future needs.

Councillor Boden sought clarification of whether the vote required the support of the Mayor in order to be carried. The Monitoring Officer stated that any vote by the Board must include a vote in favour by the Mayor, or by the Statutory Deputy Mayor in his absence, in order to be carried. This would be made clear in future reports. On that basis, Councillor Boden invited the Mayor to indicate his preference from the options set out in the report. The Mayor stated that he favoured option b), to consider instructing a market search exercise for other potential office space opportunities to meet the Combined Authority's future office needs, including looking at the potential space availability within the property assets of its constituent councils and other public sector agencies or bodies. The findings from this search would be reported back to the Board with options for consideration.

Councillor Boden concurred with this view, commenting that he was a little surprised that the Board had been invited to consider taking on a building which would require work to create office accommodation and which would deprive a local business of the opportunity to acquire the building which could see it lost to the area. However, he was concerned about the fees which would be incurred for the proposed market search for alternative accommodation for the Combined Authority. In his judgement, the organisation did not necessarily need to be located on a single site so he suggested consulting constituent councils first to establish whether there was any accommodation available within their estates. The Director of Housing and Development stated that there had been some preliminary discussions around this with constituent councils about a year ago. He offered his apologies if these discussions had not been followed up and undertook to look into this.

Councillor Bailey commented that no detailed analysis had been conducted about the amount of desk space the Combined Authority would require, with estimates ranging from 20 to 60 desks. In her judgement the iMET building was in any case too large and there was no information available about the cost of converting the space to office accommodation, on-going revenue costs or whether it would be carbon neutral. Most importantly though in her view was the wish to keep the local business which had expressed interest in purchasing the iMET in the local area. She supported the suggestion of canvassing constituent councils first about available space within their estates before considering a wider market search and felt that a full options appraisal was required. Councillor Bailey expressed disappointment that costs had already been incurred in commissioning a review of existing planning permissions for the iMET and asked that details of the cost of this work should be provided to the Board outside of the meeting.

Ms Thomas commented that the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) had saved significant sums during the past 12 months by using virtual meetings and shared meeting spaces. If organisations were moving towards new ways of working she would hope to see the Combined Authority leading that change and exploring how to make better use of the public estate to save costs and redirect the savings to the delivery of services. The Interim Chief Executive welcomed this challenge and suggested that a discussion around this should take place with the outcome brought to the Board for consideration.

Councillor Smith agreed that it would be beneficial to consider public assets collectively, but commented that she did not think a decision on the future location of the Combined Authority should be taken in advance of the arrival of the new chief executive. In her judgement a hub approach worked well for both staff and residents. Councillor Smith further commented that she would like a discussion outside of the meeting around the iMET clawback provisions to ensure that the same situation did not arise again. The Interim Chief Executive stated that officers would circulate a briefing paper to Board members setting out the position, as this issue pre-dated the establishment of both the Business Board and the Combined Authority. It could then be discussed at a Leaders' strategy meeting to look at how learning from this should be taken forward.

The Mayor stated that in initially considering this issue he had been focused on the amount of money that had been lost in relation to the iMET and the desire to salvage something from this. He had listened with interest to the debate, including the

comments around making better use of the wider public estate, but he would also want to ensure that the Combined Authority retained its own presence and identity.

Professor Neely commented that the University of Cambridge was also thinking about its use of space, but had taken the view that work patterns were still evolving. On this basis he suggested avoiding taking a fixed position too soon.

Councillor Nethsingha commented that the County Council had not yet occupied New Shire Hall and so it was unclear what capacity might be available. However, she judged that it would be important to think flexibly around the Combined Authority's accommodation needs going forward and to ensure a proper conversation around this.

Councillor Neish commented that he was aware of the local business which had expressed interest in purchasing the iMET and that it would have serious implications for them if they were unable to expand into that space. He shared the view that capacity within the constituent councils' and wider public sector estate should be explored before an external market search was considered. Councillor Fitzgerald endorsed this view, commenting that a number of the constituent councils and public sector partner organisations had large estates and that it made sense to make the best use of the public sector estate

Councillor Smart commented that he saw merit in taking expert advice to ensure transparency and as there would then be recourse available. He questioned the costs that might be associated with any accommodation offered by the constituent councils or other public sector bodies and commented that whilst home-working could be good for organisations it could sometimes be bad for their staff. On that basis he would favour a market search which included, but was not limited to, constituent councils and public sector partners.

In light of the discussion, the Mayor moved an amended recommendation:

~~Consider a potential opportunity to make an offer of £3.15m (or more) to acquire the freehold interest of the iMET centre at Alconbury Weald with a view to the CPCA occupying a significant part of the space for its own office occupation and use.~~

**Carry out a search exercise within the estate of the constituent councils and other public sector bodies in the area of the Combined Authority** ~~Consider instructing a market search exercise for other potential opportunities to secure office space to meet CPCA's future office needs. including understanding the potential space availability from property assets owned or leased by the CPCA constituent council's and other public sector agencies or bodies. Output to be reported back to the Board with options for consideration.~~

Additional text shown in **bold**, text removed shown as ~~struck through~~.

The Monitoring Officer confirmed that this did not negate the original motion.

On being proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Bailey, it was resolved unanimously to:

Carry out a search exercise within the estate of the constituent councils and other public sector bodies in the area of the Combined Authority for other potential opportunities to secure office space to meet CPCA's future office needs. Output to be reported back to the Board with options for consideration.

(Mayor)

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee questions to the Combined Authority Board: 25 August 2021

### Item 2.4: iMET Opportunity and Combined Authority Needs

Q: Does the Combined Authority have an accommodation strategy; and if not, why not and what plans are there to develop one? If it does have an accommodation strategy how does the suggestion of purchasing a freehold for a premises at Alconbury align with this strategy?

A: With the impact of Covid, the strategy to leave Alconbury to review future office requirements at an appropriate point has saved the Combined Authority from having to continue to pay for an expensive office that it would not have been able to use.

With the prospect of organisations returning to offices with appropriate Covid mitigations, I am keen to see the Combined Authority identify and secure its future office base. Hence the option of looking now at iMET in case the Board considers this appropriate, or starting a search exercise to see what options are available more widely in the market.

There are a number of principles that are emerging post-Covid. The Combined Authority wants to accommodate working from home, having a central base for Members and being carbon neutral if possible. These principles have not yet been captured in a formal strategy, but we would be happy to involve the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in that discussion if it wishes.

Q: The Combined Authority surrendered the lease on the previous accommodation at Alconbury due to public transport access. Therefore, what has happened in the interim to change that view?

A: The decision to leave Alconbury previously was based on a variety of factors, including the previous Mayor's preferences for location and an opportunity to get out of a lease that seemed expensive in terms of rental outgoings. With the occupation by Cambridgeshire County Council, public transport access to the site is expected to improve.

Q: What analysis has been done to suggest Alconbury is a suitable venue for the Combined Authority?

A: Alconbury is an established office location and if either the iMET or other premises were considered at Alconbury for the Combined Authority's future office needs, the proximity to the new County Council offices at Alconbury should offer benefits for more collaborative working.

Q: What are the overall costs for surrendering the lease of the previous premises at Alconbury?

A: The net financial impact of vacating the Incubator 2 building as of August 2021, including the costs incurred by the Combined Authority directly due to not having a large office base, is a saving of £65,000. I'm happy for officers to share a breakdown of this figure with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee outside of this meeting.

As the monthly costs incurred in the absence of an office are substantially less than the monthly costs avoided, the 'saving' will increase each month the Combined Authority continues to work remotely and to use my office in Ely as an operational hub.

The cost of acquiring and fitting out new premises won't be known until the purchase or lease of a new office proceeds. The report before the Board recommends that an offer of £3.15m for the iMET should be considered. If the Board decides not to make an offer on the iMET then officers have requested an indicative budget of £20k in order to undertake a market search and associated works. The cost of an acquisition beyond this is unknown as it will depend on the properties available on the market.

Q: General question: The Committee is concerned that three of the four substantive items on the agenda for the Board have been placed on the agenda by way of general exception notice. What plans does the CA have to ensure that adequate notice is given for significant decisions in future?

A: The Mayor shares your concerns. As part of a Governance review, the Combined Authority will be examining the process of report preparation, stakeholder engagement, and consultation. Among the expected outcomes, this will deliver better horizon scanning and timely entry on to the Forward Plan.