

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 24 November 2005.

PRESENT: Councillor D P Holley – Chairman.

Councillors I C Bates, Mrs J Chandler,
N J Guyatt, A Hansard, Mrs P J Longford,
Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers and
L M Simpson.

104. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 10th November 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

105. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Bates and Guyatt declared personal interests in Minute No. 118 by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council and the Development Control Panel respectively. Councillor Guyatt also requested that it be recorded that his participation in debate and voting would be undertaken without prejudice to the consideration and/or determination of any relevant planning application subsequently by the Development Control Panel.

Councillor Simpson declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 116 by virtue of his receipt of a pension from the Cambridgeshire Constabulary and Councillor Bates declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 116 by virtue of his membership on the Cambridgeshire Police Authority. Those Councillors, who declared personal and prejudicial interests, left the Chamber for the duration of discussion and voting on the respective items of business.

106. FINANCIAL STRATEGY - UPDATE

Further to Minute No.05/60 and by way of a report by the Director of Commerce and Technology (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet were acquainted with issues likely to affect the adoption of the Council's strategy for managing its finances in the period to 2011/12.

Having regard to the information contained in the report, the uncertainty as to the future levels of Government grant, the implications of possible changes to the grant formula and the ongoing review of the Medium Term Plan, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council be requested to defer a decision on the Council's Financial Strategy until the 22nd February 2006 and to consider the Strategy in parallel

with the budget and 2006/11 Medium Term Plan; and

- (b) that a copy of the guidance to Officers on the preparation of the Medium Term Plan be circulated for information to all Members.

107. REVIEW OF COUNCIL BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE

A report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which summarised the findings of a review by a working group into the Council's budget and expenditure

With regard to the Panel's individual recommendations, Members commented as follows:-

- ◆ that the distribution of a total spend analysis similar to Annex A of the Panel's report would be helpful to Members and could be supported;
- ◆ that the Cabinet already monitored the MTP closely with specific approval required before each scheme in the programme could proceed;
- ◆ that the recommended advice to officers on the formulation of MTP bids mirrored Management Team instructions with final consideration being given to individual proposals by the Cabinet and Council;
- ◆ that future inflation levels were reviewed on an ongoing basis and were incorporated in budget reports;
- ◆ that the Cabinet also currently favoured Option 3 in respect of Council Tax increases, subject to the content of the final grant settlement;
- ◆ that the Cabinet also supported early savings in the Council's budget and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel informed of the savings that had been achieved in the past two years;
- ◆ that the Panel be informed that a decision on the operational arrangements for the call centre had been made by the Council and that the Cabinet could not support any change in those arrangements
- ◆ that it was anticipated that efficiency savings would become apparent as services transferred to the call centre and that all vacant posts were evaluated to ensure that a need existed for them to be fitted; and
- ◆ that the Cabinet did not support any consideration of alternative funding strategies for leisure centres in the short term.

In referring to the Panel's recommendation that a decision on alternative office accommodation should not be taken in advance of approval of the financial strategy, the Cabinet stressed that a decision on the accommodation could not be deferred beyond December 2005 whereas the Financial Strategy could not be determined in advance of the grant settlement referred to in Minute No. 05/106 ante.

RESOLVED

- (a) that a total spend analysis of the Council's budget including where reasonably practicable the distribution of all unallocated items be made available for all Members; and
- (b) that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) be advised of the Cabinet's response to their recommendations as summarised above.

108. CONCESSIONARY FARES

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Environment and Transport (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which outlined the implications for the Council of the Government's decision to introduce a free concessionary bus fare scheme for those within the eligibility criteria including the over 60s and people with disabilities.

As the scheme made provision for concessionary travel within the boundaries of an individual authority after 09.30 hours only, Members were advised that a study had been commissioned by the Cambridgeshire authorities in an attempt to identify a deliverable scheme for implementation by the required date of April 2006.

Having noted that the new scheme would result in some recipients being worse off than previously, and having discussed three options identified as possible schemes, the Cabinet expressed concern over the imposition of a further new initiative on local authorities without the accompanying resources. It was therefore

RESOLVED

- (a) that a statutory minimum concessionary fare scheme for an interim 12 months period be adopted by the Council; and
- (b) that a further report and associated Medium Term Plan bid be submitted to a future meeting.

109. TREASURY MANAGEMENT INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE

A report by the Head of Financial Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which reviewed the respective levels of performance achieved during the period July – September 2005 by external fund managers in the matter of investment of the Council's capital receipts.

RESOLVED

that the content of the report be noted.

110. HUNTINGDON HIGH STREET - ENVIRONMENTAL IMPROVEMENTS

By way of a report by the Head of Environment and Transport (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were updated on progress with the Huntingdon High Street environmental

improvements scheme.

Having considered a request for the release of funding from the Medium Term Plan to enable tenders to be prepared for phase 2 of the scheme to proceed comprising improvements to the adjoining St Benedict's Court area, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the progress of the Huntingdon High Street, Environmental Improvements Scheme be noted; and
- (b) that the release of funding for phase 2 of the scheme in 2006/07 be approved.

111. MEDIUM TERM PLAN: REQUEST FOR THE RELEASE OF FUNDS

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

that the relevant funding be released from the MTP for the replacement of the bar air conditioning unit at St Neots Leisure Centre.

112. CORE POLICIES DPD - AFFORDABLE HOUSING TARGETS: PREFERRED OPTION FOR CONSULTATION

Further to Minute No.05/11, consideration was given to a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) containing a preferred option for affordable housing targets and contributions for inclusion in the Council's Core Strategy Development Plan Document (DPD). Members were reminded that the Core Strategy would establish a spatial vision for the District and criteria-based policies to guide the development and use of land and would form a framework for a range of documents.

Having considered the option proposed and in noting that a target figure of 40% or more for the total number of affordable dwellings in future housing developments was in line with the Cambridgeshire Structure Plan, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that Council be recommended to approve the proposed preferred approach for affordable housing targets as outlined in the appendix to the report now submitted as a basis for public consultation.

113. ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Head of Legal and Estates (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Council's management of assets against National Property Performance Indicators for 2004/05.

Having been acquainted with four new performance management initiatives dealing with maintenance, environmental property issues, suitability and accessibility, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted and the performance indicator information contained in Appendix A to the report approved; and
- (b) that the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy be designated as "Champion" to promote efficient and effective asset management in respect of all District Council land and property.

114. LICENSING ACT 2003 - IMPLEMENTATION

Further to Minute No.03/70 and by way of a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with progress in implementing the Licensing Act 2003. Members were reminded that the Act had abolished several existing licensing regimes administered by the licensing justices and district councils and replaced them with a new licensing regime administered by the District Council for the supply of alcohol, regulated entertainment and late night refreshment. Members were advised that the transfer had been successfully completed with over 550 applications for premises licences and club premises certificates and 600 applications for personal licences being received by the end of October 2005.

Members were reminded that two additional members of staff had been employed on temporary two year contracts in the Central Services Licensing Section to deal with the associated workload and an assessment was given of anticipated income levels and the ongoing work required in administering and enforcing the Act. In addition it was reported that the Government had now announced that the Gambling Act 2005 would be implemented with effect from September 2007 which would transfer further licensing responsibilities to the Council. Under the circumstances it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that progress on implementation of the Licensing Act 2003 be noted; and
- (b) that the preparation of a Medium Term Plan bid in respect of the estimated additional income and the cost of making permanent the existing temporary posts CN070 and CN076 in the Licensing Section be approved.

115. ST NEOTS LEISURE CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Having been advised of the resignation of Councillor I P Taylor from the St Neots Leisure Centre Management Committee and in considering the nomination from the Liberal Democrat Group, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs D E Collins be appointed to fill the vacancy on the St Neots Leisure Centre Management Committee for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

116. POLICE FORCES RESTRUCTURING

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the following item in accordance with Section 100 (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 given the need for the Council to respond to a proposal on the future restructuring of police forces in England and Wales by 5th December 2005.)

Further to Minute No. 05/99 and following receipt of a letter from the Chairman and Acting Chief Constable of the Cambridgeshire Police Authority (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Chairman updated Members on possible options for the future restructuring of police forces in England and Wales and in particular East Anglia.

Members expressed concern over the potential impact of a larger force comprising either three or six county constabularies both in terms of the level of service provided and loss of local accountability. It was suggested that any savings from the reorganisation would be minimal and it was therefore

RESOLVED

that the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to reaffirm the District Council's representations for the retention of the Cambridgeshire Constabulary as a stand-alone force.

117. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contained exempt information relating to an employee of the District Council and the terms proposed for the supply of goods and services.

118. HEADQUARTERS AND OTHER ACCOMMODATION - FINAL TENDER EVALUATION

Further to Minute No.05/77 and with the assistance of a report by Chief Officers Management Team (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the final tender evaluation for the Council's future office and other accommodation requirements.

Having considered the deliberations of the Office Accommodation Members Advisory Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels on the matter and in noting that Councillor Guyatt's request that his

participation in the debate and voting would be undertaken without prejudice to the subsequent consideration and/or determination of any relevant planning application by the Council's Development Control Panel, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the recommendations of the Office Accommodation Members Advisory Group arising from their meeting held on 21st November 2005 be endorsed and forwarded for consideration by the Council at their meeting to be held on 7th December 2005.

119. PATHFINDER HOUSE RECEPTION

By means of a joint report by the Heads of Administration and of Personnel Services (a copy of which is appended in the annex to the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a proposal to make redundant post ref CN.046 in the Central Services Directorate arising from the transfer of the Council's switchboard facilities to the call centre in September 2005 and to grant the post holder early retirement.

Having been acquainted with the recommendations of the Employment Panel on this matter, it was

RESOLVED

that a supplementary estimate be approved to enable the early retirement of the holder of ref CN.046 as set out in paragraph 5.2 of the report now submitted.

120. COUNCILLOR D P HOLLEY

In view of his decision to resign from the position of Leader of the Council with effect from 7th December 2005, the Deputy Leader on behalf of the Cabinet paid tribute to the contribution made by Councillor Holley during his 16 years as Leader of the Council and for his commitment to Huntingdonshire. Members extended their best wishes to Councillor Holley for the future.

Chairman