

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 22 February 2006.

PRESENT: Councillor J A P Eddy – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, J T Bell, Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, E R Butler, Mrs J Chandler, K J Churchill, W T Clough, Mrs D E Collins, J W Davies, D B Dew, P J Downes, J J Dutton, J D Fell, J E Garner, D A Giles, Mrs C A Godley, J A Gray, N J Guyatt, A Hansard, D Harty, D P Holley, C R Hyams, Mrs P J Longford, Mrs S A Menczer, P G Mitchell, M F Newman, R Powell, Mrs D C Reynolds, K Reynolds, T V Rogers, T D Sanderson, L M Simpson, A B Stenner, C J Stephens, P A Swales, I P Taylor, G S E Thorpe, R G Tuplin, J S Watt and Ms M Wheeler.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J D Ablewhite, S J Criswell, Mrs K P Gregory, I R Muir, J M Sadler, J Taylor and Mrs S J Vanbergen.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D H Bristow.

56. PRAYER

The Very Reverend Dr M Chandler, Dean of Ely opened the meeting with prayer.

57. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) The Ely Cathedral Music Appeal

Having welcomed the Dean of Ely to his first meeting of the Council, the Chairman, on behalf of Members, presented a cheque in the sum of £600 to the Ely Cathedral Music Appeal for which the Dean expressed his gratitude.

(b) Councillor J Taylor

Being aware of Councillor J Taylor's recent treatment for a serious illness, the Chairman extended his best wishes, on behalf of the Council, to Councillor Taylor for a speedy and complete recovery to good health.

58. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 7th December 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

59. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Mrs D C Collins, D A Giles, A Hansard, D Harty, Mrs P J Longford and I P Taylor declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 63(a) (Item No. 104) as Trustees of St. Neots Outdoor Pool.

Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, W T Clough, D B Dew, J J Dutton, J A P Eddy, J D Fell, N J Guyatt, C R Hyams, P G Mitchell, R Powell, C J Stephens, P A Swales, G S E Thorpe and R G Tuplin, as Members of the Development Control Panel, requested that it be recorded, that their participation in the debate and voting on Minute No. 63(a) (Item No. 91) would be undertaken without prejudice to the consideration and/or determination of any relevant planning application subsequently by the Panel.

60. BUDGET AND TREASURY MANAGEMENT

In conjunction with a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and Item Nos. 88 and 89 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Executive Councillor for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers addressed the Council on the Financial Strategy, Medium Term Plan for 2007 – 2011, the 2006/2007 budget and related prudential indicators contained in the Treasury Management strategy.

Members were reminded of the decisions they had taken previously which had resulted in an increase in Council Tax of £12 for a Band D property in 2006/07 and which had led to the Government subsequently capping the Council's budget. By reference to Appendix A to the Report of the Cabinet, the Council were further advised of the adjustments required to the approved MTP to take account of inflation, interest rates and level of government financial support. Councillor Rogers also welcomed the Government's new initiative to forecast settlements over a three years period in view of the greater certainty that should arise in financial planning.

Having drawn attention to the significant variations to the MTP following its review, the target set for efficiency savings and the Government's likely approach to capping, Councillor Rogers outlined two options for future Council Tax increases. Turning specifically to the recommendations of the Cabinet, Councillor Rogers explained the reasons for the option preferred, which also had been supported by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the business community. This assumed a Council Tax increase of 5% each year and would necessitate a mixture of efficiency improvements, a review of existing services and developments already included in the MTP which would be subject to review annually in the light of Government guidance. In commending the budget to the Council, Councillor Rogers advised of several late adjustments and these included proposals for improvements to public conveniences in the District and expenditure

in connection with the Headquarters and Other Accommodation Project. He also explained the reasons for the submission of a revised prudential code and Treasury Management Strategy.

In response, Councillor P J Downes on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group moved and it was duly seconded, that -

in the second bullet point in paragraph 7 of the report of the Head of Financial Services the letter "s" be added to the word "approve" in the first line and in the second line, after the word "attached", the words "but instructs the Executive Councillor for Finance to bring forward to full Council before the end of March, 2006 detailed proposals for the (presently) unspecified reduction in expenditure" be inserted.

In support of his motion, Councillor Downes suggested that the Council should not approve the budget without details of where savings could be made to achieve the shortfall predicted.

In ensuing discussion, the Leader, Councillor I C Bates reminded the Council that this issue had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) and that a report thereon would be submitted to their next meeting. On behalf of the Budget Group of the Scrutiny Panel, Councillor P G Mitchell commented that he was satisfied that savings would be achieved and that this would be progressed by the Cabinet.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was declared to be LOST. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the financial strategy as set out in paragraph 6.9 of the Report of the Cabinet and in paragraph 3.2 and Annex C of the Report now submitted be approved;
- (b) that the proposed budget and Medium Term Plan as described in revised Annexes A, C and D of the report now submitted, be approved;
- (c) that a Council Tax increase of £4.98 on a Band D property in 2006/07 be approved;
- (d) that the prudential indicators as set out in revised Annex E to the report now submitted be approved;
- (e) that the 2005/06 Authorised Borrowing Limit be increased to £32.8m;
- (f) that the Treasury Management Strategy as set out in revised Annex F to the report now submitted be approved; and
- (g) that the Head of Financial Services be authorised, after consultation with the Chief Executive and the Executive Councillor for Finance on the risk assessment, to undertake long-term borrowing in 2006/07.

61. COUNCIL TAX 2006/07

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to allow the late submission by the Head of Financial Services of tables 1 and 2 to the report submitted to incorporate the precepts of precepting authorities in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in view of the requirement for the Council formally to set its tax levels at the meeting).

In accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and with reference to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Executive Councillor for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers proposed the determination of levels of Council Tax for 2006/07 for the various parts of the Huntingdonshire District.

On being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the revenue budget for 2006/07 as submitted be approved;
- (b) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2006/07 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (the Act):-

| | £ |
|--|-------------------|
| (i) the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2) (a) to (e) of the Act Gross revenue expenditure including benefits and Parish Precepts | 61,795,831 |
| (ii) the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32 (3) (a) to (c) of the Act Gross revenue income including reimbursement of benefits and use of reserves | 41,616,680 |
| (iii) the amount by which the aggregate at (b) (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) (ii) above in accordance with Section 32 (4) of the Act Budget requirement (item i minus item ii) | 20,179,151 |
| (iv) the aggregate of the amounts payable into the General Fund for the items set out in Section 33 (1) of the Act. | 10,891,539 |

Government support

- (v) the aggregate of the amounts payable from the General Fund for the items set out in Section 33 (3) of the Act **74,053**
Collection Fund deficit
- (vi) the basic amount of Council Tax for 2006/07 in accordance with Section 33 (1) **164.42**
per band D property
District plus average Town/Parish Council Tax
- (vii) the aggregate of special items referred to in Section 34 (1) **3,400,908**
Total Town and Parish Council precepts
- (viii) the basic amount of Council Tax for 2006/07 for those parts of the District to which no special item relates **104.69**
District Council Tax per band D property
- (ix) the basic amounts of Council Tax for 2006/07 for those parts of the District to which one or more special items relate in accordance with Section 34 (3) of the Act are shown by adding the Huntingdonshire District Council amount to the appropriate Parish Council amount in column "band D" set out in table 1 attached to the Agenda.
- (x) the amounts to be taken into account for 2006/07 in respect of categories of dwellings listed in the different valuation bands in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Act are shown by adding the Huntingdonshire District Council amount to the appropriate Parish Council amount for each of the valuation bands in the columns "bands A to H" set out in table 1 hereto
- (c) that the amounts of precept issued to the Council by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority and Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Fire Authority for each of the categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands in accordance with Section 40 of the Act shown in table 1 hereto be noted; and
- (d) that, having regard to the calculations above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for 2006/07 for each of the categories of dwelling

shown in table 2 attached to the Agenda.

62. PROPOSED VARIATION TO CONSTITUTION: ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCEDURE RULES

By way of a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor C J Stephens, Chairman of the Corporate Governance Panel advised the Council of the publication of three new Statutory Instruments which had varied arrangements for access to meetings and documents of principal councils and committees thereof with effect from 1st March 2006.

Councillor Stephens reported that the changes proposed would align the access to information provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 with those of the Freedom of Information Act and make use of simpler and clearer terminology to describe categories of exempt information. Having noted that the new legislation would introduce a public interest test whereby exempt information might be discussed if it was in the public interest to do so, the Council.

RESOLVED

that the changes to the Constitution described in paragraph 2.2 of the report now submitted resulting from variations to that part of the Local Government Act 1972 relating to access for information, be approved.

63. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES

(a) Cabinet

Councillor I C Bates, Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 15th December 2005, 12th January, 2nd and 10th February 2006.

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In connection with Item Nos. 88 and 89 it was noted that the recommendations had previously been considered under Minute No. 60 ante.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 90 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 91, the Council deferred consideration of the recommendations contained therein to the penultimate item of business at the meeting.

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In connection with Item No. 98 and in response to a question from Councillor R Powell regarding the loss of car parking

spaces as a result of the proposed redevelopment of the Grand Cinema in Ramsey and the potential use of a site in Mews Close as an alternative, the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt, replied that the future of the Grand Cinema site would be influenced by the outcome of consultation on the development brief but that given recent proliferation of car parking in Ramsey it might be necessary to consider the re-introduction of car parking charges and the enforcement of parking restrictions in the town as part of a proposed review of the car parking strategy.

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(Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, P L E Bucknell and J E Garner declared a personal interest in the following item by virtue of their appointment as District Council representatives on the Board of Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership).

In connection with Item No. 99 and in response to a question from Councillor J J Dutton, the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds confirmed that funds accrued from the sale of land at Oxmoor for development and via any associated Section 106 Agreement would continue to be targeted towards projects to regenerate the Oxmoor area.

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In connection with Item No. 102 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Executive Councillor for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers undertook to respond to the questioner, in writing, regarding the duties and responsibilities of the Member Champion for risk management.

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In connection with Item No. 103 and in response to a question from Councillor J J Dutton regarding the responsibilities of the District Council in monitoring the completion of development at Oxmoor by Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership, the Leader, Councillor I C Bates indicated that the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt and the Director of Operational Services would be investigating the matter.

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In connection with Item No. 106 and in response to questions from Councillor D A Giles, regarding the relocation of the public conveniences at South Street, St. Neots, the Executive Councillor for Environment and Transport, Councillor Mrs P J Longford replied that an alternative site had yet to be secured and that she would respond, in writing, to the questioner on the question of redundancy payments to

those staff currently employed by St. Neots Town Council on public convenience maintenance.

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(Councillors I C Bates, Mrs B E Boddington, P J Downes, J J Dutton, J A P Eddy, D Harty and C R Hyams declared personal interests in the following item by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council).

In connection with Item No. 108 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, Councillor A Hansard confirmed that the District Council had a significant involvement in the proposed structure for the delivery of services for children and young people in Huntingdonshire and as far as he was aware, sufficient resources had been allocated by the County Council to achieve the new strategy.

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In connection with Item No. 116 and in response to concern expressed by Councillor P J Downes regarding the potential proliferation of bureaucracy associated with the Local Area Agreement for Cambridgeshire, the Leader, Councillor I C Bates confirmed that he shared the questioners view and that he would be monitoring carefully the development of the Agreement.

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In connection with Item No. 120 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe regarding the proposal to retain a PR/Communications consultant, in connection with the development of the Council's Headquarters and Other Accommodation, the Executive Councillor for Office Accommodation and Other Special Projects, Councillor D P Holley, explained that the consultant would ensure that proposals for a new headquarters and for the relocation of the depot were communicated effectively to the public and the Councils partners and stakeholders in accordance with a communications strategy to be prepared.

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In connection with Item No. 118 and in response to a question from Councillor Mrs M Banerjee regarding the implications of membership of Cambridgeshire Horizons Ltd, the Executive Councillor for Office Accommodation and Other Special Projects, Councillor D P Holley, advised that the Company would seek to deliver an agreed development strategy for the sub-region and that Huntingdonshire might have been disadvantaged if the Council had not joined the organisation.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, with the exception of Item No. 91 and subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 15th December 2005, 12th January, 2nd and 10th February 2006 be received and adopted.

(b) Standards Committee

Mr D H Bristow presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8th December 2005.

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In connection with Item No. 9, the Chairman informed the Council that the Committee had recently reviewed the training offered to town and parish councillors and was satisfied that it compared favourably to that provided by other authorities in Cambridgeshire. The Committee also had decided to review case examples from the Standards Board for England to learn from their experiences.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 8th December 2005 be received and adopted.

(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance)

Councillor P A Swales presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) held on 13th December 2005 and 10th January 2006 and of joint meetings with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 24th January and 7th February 2006.

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In connection with Item No. 36 and in response to a question from Councillor T D Sanderson, the Chairman suggested that it was a matter for the County Council's Scrutiny Panel to investigate the use of funding negotiated under Section 106 Agreements for highways purposes.

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In connection with Item No. 40 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Chairman indicated that he anticipated that the report requested by the Panel on the

principles and procedure to be adopted when identifying budgetary savings would be presented to the meeting of the Panel to be held in March.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) held on 13th December 2005 and 10th January 2006 and of joint meetings with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 24th January and 7th February 2006 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources)

Councillor K Reynolds presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 6th December 2005 and 3rd January and 7th February 2006.

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In connection with Item No.29 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Chairman expressed confidence that the District Council would secure, as far as possible, a concessionary fare scheme for residents of the District which would overcome the difficulties inherent in the Government's legislation.

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In connection with Item No.30 and in response to questions from Councillors C R Hyams and R Powell regarding the nature of the call handling by the District Council's call centre, the Chairman requested the Executive Councillor for Operations and IT, Councillor L M Simpson to consider the comments raised.

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In connection with Item No.31 and in response to a question from Councillor M G Baker regarding the percentage of land to be allocated for affordable housing at Moorhouse Drive, Huntingdon, the Chairman replied that whilst the Panel had contended that 40% of the land available should have been allocated for this purpose they did not wish to jeopardise the sale of the land and that in his view, it would be improper for him to comment, on the intentions of the Luminus Group at a public meeting.

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In connection with Item No.34 and in response to a question from Councillor Mrs S M Menczer regarding the establishment of a database which could record the variety of literature and information sources made available by the Council, the Chairman replied that it was not, in his opinion, the role of the Panel to become involved in that level of detail and that the questioner should contact the Head of Policy and the Executive Councillor for Operations and IT if she wished to take the matter further.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 6th December 2005 and 3rd January and 7th February 2006 be received and adopted.

(e) Development Control Panel

Councillor P G Mitchell presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 19th December 2005 and 16th January 2006.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 19th December 2005 and 16th January 2006 be received and adopted.

(f) Employment Panel

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 8th February 2005.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 8th February 2006 be received and adopted.

(g) Licensing and Protection Panel

Councillor J T Bell presented the Report of the meetings of

the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 7th December 2005 and 19th January 2006.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 7th December 2005 and 19th January 2006 be received and adopted.

(h) Licensing Committee

Councillor J T Bell presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on the 19th January 2006.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 19th January 2006 be received and adopted.

(i) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor C J Stephens presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 14th December 2005.

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In connection with Item No.13, the Chairman drew the Council's attention to the arrangements for the release of information held on e-mail under the Corporate Policy on Document Retention and Records Management.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 14th December 2005 be received and adopted.

(j) Appointments Panel

Councillor L M Simpson presented the Report of the meeting of the Appointments Panel held on 10th February 2006.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Appointments Panel held on 10th February 2006 be received and adopted.

64. ORAL QUESTIONS

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules (Paragraph 8.3) of the Council's Constitution, the Chairman proceeded to conduct a period of oral questions addressed to Executive Councillors and Panel Chairmen as follows:-

Question from Councillor R Powell to the Leader, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding a petition submitted to Cambridgeshire County Council on the need for increased safety measures on the Forty Foot Bank Road, Ramsey, the Leader replied that whilst highways were the responsibility of the County Council, the District Council would support any action to improve the safety of the stretch of road referred to.

Question from Councillor T D Sanderson to the Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Operations and Information Technology, Councillor L M Simpson

In response to a question regarding the progress of a shop mobility scheme in Huntingdon, Councillor L M Simpson replied that a scheme currently was being investigated for possible introduction on a District-wide basis.

Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Executive Councillor for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers

In response to a question regarding the number, size and reasons for insurance claims submitted against the District Council, Councillor Rogers replied that two claims had been settled in the last financial year resulting in payments of £2,000 and £8,000 involving employment and planning issues respectively. Further details could be made available to the Councillor on request.

Question from Councillor J J Dutton to the Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Operations and Information Technology, Councillor L M Simpson

In response to questions regarding the financial position of projects on Oxmoor and particularly the condition of roads, pathways and street lighting on the estate and the completion date for new HHP housing, Councillor Simpson undertook to investigate the issues raised and to respond to the questioner in writing.

Question from Councillor D A Giles to the Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Operations and Information Technology

In response to a question regarding the employment of IT and Communication Consultants for the New Headquarters and Other Accommodation Project, Councillor Simpson replied that he was unable to respond at the meeting because the details requested remained confidential.

65. ADJOURNMENT

At 3.55pm, it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned. Upon resumption at 4.15pm.

66. NOTICE OF MOTION

Before proceeding to the Motion on the agenda, the Chairman announced his intention to invoke the discretion awarded to him under paragraph 9.5 (iii) of the Council Procedure Rules and to rule that the Motion submitted by Councillor D P Holley on being moved and seconded would be dealt with at the meeting in the interests of the convenient and conducive despatch of the Council's business.

It was moved by Councillor D P Holley and duly seconded –

“that in the interests of the people of Huntingdonshire and true local accountability, the Council wholeheartedly supports the retention of Huntingdonshire PCT as an independent trust in the Strategic Health Authority area so as to maintain and enhance a patient led NHS”.

Whereupon, following discussion and having been put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

67. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: SECTION 85

The Chief Executive reported that there were no absences of Members from meetings for consideration in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

68. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to terms proposed in the course of negotiations for the acquisition and disposal of property and the supply of goods and services.

69. CABINET (CONTINUED)

Further to Minute No.63 (a) and in connection with Item No.91 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Council considered the report by the Chief Officers' Management Team on the progress of negotiations on the completion of a Development Agreement for the procurement of the

new Headquarters and Other Accommodation Project and for the location of the Call Centre. The report and recommendations of the Headquarters and Other Accommodation Members' Advisory Group meeting held on 26th January 2006 and which had been recommended for approval by the Cabinet, had also been circulated to all Members.

After recommendation (b) of the Cabinet's report had been moved by Councillor D P Holley and duly seconded, an amendment was moved by Councillor P J Downes and duly seconded that the recommendation be amended by the insertion after the word "approved" of the words "subject to an amendment to clause (v) so as to abandon the current procurement arrangements for a new Headquarters and Operations Centre and to authorise the Chief Executive after consultation with the Leader of the Council, to agree terms for the early purchase of a site for an Operations Centre."

Following discussion and having been put to the vote, the amendment was defeated.

(In accordance with paragraph 14.5 of the Council Procedure Rules, Councillor D A Giles requested that it be recorded that he had voted for the amendment).

Following further discussion on the Motion, it was

RESOLVED

that the recommendations set out in paragraph 2.4 (i) – (vi) of the report of the meeting District Council Headquarters and Other Office Accommodation Members' Advisory Group held on 26th January 2006 be approved.

(In accordance with paragraph 14.5 of the Council Procedure Rules, Councillor D A Giles requested that it be recorded that he had voted against the Motion).

The meeting concluded at 5.25pm.

Chairman