

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, 15 March 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor I C Bates – Chairman.
Councillors P L E Bucknell, Mrs J Chandler,
Mrs P J Longford, T V Rogers and
L M Simpson.

APOLOGY: An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor A Hansard.

166. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 22nd February 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

167. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Mrs P J Longford declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 174 by virtue of being a smoker and left the Chamber for the duration of the discussion and voting thereon.

168. CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

By way of a report by the Head of Policy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet was invited to consider the content of a draft Corporate Equality Policy, together with an associated action plan required to attain Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government.

Having noted the Policy's main aims and objectives, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the content of the draft Corporate Equality Policy and associated Action Plan be approved.

169. MEDIUM TERM PLAN - HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT:REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF FUNDING

By way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a request for the release of funding from the Medium Term Plan as the Council's contribution towards commissioning an assessment of housing needs in the Cambridgeshire Sub-Region.

Having been advised that the findings of the assessment would inform and support the Council's Housing Strategy and Planning Policies, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the release of funding in respect of the Council's contribution towards the cost of an assessment of housing needs in the Cambridge Sub-Region be approved.

170. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME: UPDATE

Further to Minute No. 06/160 and by means of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a proposal to withdraw the Local Development Framework (LDF) Core Strategy and submit a revised Local Development Scheme, incorporating an updated timetable for delivery of the LDF and Development Control Policy documents to the Secretary of State.

The Cabinet noted that changes to the Core Strategy had been recommended by Go-East and the Planning Inspectorate to reflect the latest emerging guidance regarding the spatial content of the document. Having acknowledged the need for an Interim Planning Policy Statement to provide a framework for continuity of the development control function in the meantime, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the revised Local Development Scheme, appended to the report now submitted, be approved for submission to the Secretary of State;
- (b) that the Head of Planning Services be authorised to request the Secretary of State via Go-East to withdraw the submitted Core Strategy Development Plan document; and
- (c) that the need to adopt an Interim Planning Policy Statement to provide for effective continuity in terms of the development control function be noted.

171. USE OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDERS (CPOS) TO ACQUIRE RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY

By way of a report by the Head of Environmental and Community Health and of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the principle of invoking compulsory purchase powers to acquire long-term vacant residential properties where there appeared to be no other prospect of them being brought back into residential use.

Having considered the content of the report, the financial implications associated with acquiring property and the recommended procedure to be followed, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Director of Operational Services be authorised to appoint Environmental Health Officers and Environmental Health Enforcement Officers to exercise the powers of entry set out in Section 54 of the Housing Act 1985 and Section 15 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 for the purpose of survey or examination to determine if Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers should be exercised or progressed;
- (b) that further reports be submitted to Cabinet as necessary addressing those properties considered suitable for compulsory purchase, the case for compulsory purchase, the statement of reasons and a draft CPO;
- (c) that the Head of Environment and Community Health Services be authorised to submit orders approved by Cabinet to the Secretary of State for confirmation and then to complete the CPO procedure;
- (d) that the Head of Housing Services be requested to seek a developer prepared to take over any property acquired by CPO from the Council at the established market value and to transfer ownership on those terms; and
- (e) that the cost of a CPO procedure, estimated at £21.6k per property, be funded from the Repairs Assistance budget subject to a maximum of two acquisitions per annum.

172. TOWARDS A CAR PARKING STRATEGY FOR THE MARKET TOWNS

With the aid of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the findings of a review of the contents of the Huntingdonshire Car Parking Strategy 2005-2016 undertaken by the Council's consultants, Steer Davies Gleave (SDG).

In discussing the key recommendations made by SDG, the Cabinet acknowledged the importance of developing a tailored approach to future car parking needs based on the specific requirements of individual market towns rather than the current generic district-wide approach. Furthermore, Members recognised that certain issues should be investigated further to alleviate parking problems in town centres including the viability of park and rides schemes, better signage and the management of disabled parking. Having also been acquainted with the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) on the matter, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the findings of the consultant's study be noted;
- (b) that a formal Car Parking Strategy and action plan be developed for consideration by the Cabinet;
- (c) that a Members' Car Parking Working Group comprising five Conservative, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent Member, be established to develop and recommend a district-wide car parking strategy and action plan; and
- (d) that nominations for membership of the Working Group referred to in the preceding resolution be made via party groups and that the Chief Executive be authorised to make the appointments.

173. HEALTH ACT, 2006: SMOKING

With the assistance of reports by the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the requirements of the Health Act 2006 ("the Act") in terms of prohibiting smoking in public places and the consequential enforcement and other implications for the District Council.

Members were informed that from 1st July 2007 the Act would prohibit smoking in virtually all enclosed public places and workplaces in England. To ensure the successful implementation of the legislation a comprehensive programme of education and an enforcement framework would be required along with the requirement for authorised officers to undertake the enforcement duties. In discussing the associated financial implications, Members' attention was drawn to the grant award of approximately £80,431 from the Department of Health for undertaking such duties in the first year. Having expressed concern about funding for the new duties in the longer term, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services and the Director of Operational Services be authorised to appoint suitably qualified, experienced and trained officers to carry out duties arising under the Act and associated regulations;
- (b) that the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services and the Director of Operational Services be authorised, after consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor, to institute legal proceedings for contravention of the Act and its associated Regulations;
- (c) that funding received from the Department of Health as outlined in Paragraph 6 of the report now submitted be welcomed to support the Council's implementation and enforcement of the Act;

- (d) that appropriate representations regarding the potential financial impact of implementing the legislation in the longer term be made to the Local Government Association and the Members of Parliament for the Huntingdon and North West Cambridgeshire Constituencies; and
- (e) that the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services be requested to report further to the Cabinet in January, 2008 on progress in implementing and enforcing the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements.

Chairman