

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, 20 February 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor P A Swales – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, M G Baker,
K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, J T Bell,
Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell,
K J Churchill, Mrs K E Cooper, S J Criswell,
P H Dakers, J W Davies, D B Dew,
P J Downes, J J Dutton, R W J Eaton, J D Fell,
A N Gilbert, P M D Godfrey, Mrs C A Godley,
J A Gray, A Hansard, D Harty, C R Hyams,
Mrs P A Jordan, Ms S Kemp, L W McGuire,
P G Mitchell, M F Newman, R Powell,
D J Priestman, K Reynolds, T V Rogers,
J M Sadler, T D Sanderson, L M Simpson,
C J Stephens, G S E Thorpe, R G Tuplin,
P R Ward, J S Watt and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors R W D Bailey, E R Butler, R S Farrer, J E Garner, D A Giles, I R Muir, Mrs D C Reynolds and P K Ursell and Mr D L Hall.

51. PRAYER

The Reverend D Busk, Vicar of Godmanchester, opened the meeting with Prayer.

52. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 5th December 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

53. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors Mrs K E Cooper, R W J Eaton, D Harty and G S E Thorpe declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 56 – Item No. 73 by virtue of their membership of St. Neots Town Council and as Trustees of St. Neots Outdoor Swimming Pool and left the Chamber at the appropriate time in the proceedings.

Councillor I C Bates, declared a personal interest in Minute No. 56 – Item No. 34 by virtue of his position as Board Member of Cambridgeshire Horizons.

54. PARISH COUNCIL ORDERS

Further to Minute No. 45 of the meeting of the Council held on 5th December 2007 and having regard to a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillor D Harty, Chairman of the Elections Panel, reminded Members that the recently concluded review of parish arrangements

in Huntingdonshire had recommended changes to the size of membership of certain Councils and that the making of the necessary Orders was reserved to Council.

For clarity, Councillor Harty advised that those changes affecting County and District Council boundaries could only be made currently by the Secretary of State on the recommendation of the Boundary Committee and that it was not anticipated that a decision in this respect would be forthcoming for sometime.

Therefore, in accordance with the new scale of parish council representation, the Council

RESOLVED

that the appropriate Orders be made under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997 be made to –

- (a) decrease the membership of Catworth Parish Council from 9 to 7 councillors with effect from 5th May 2011;
- (b) decrease the membership of Tilbrook Parish Council from 7 to 5 councillors with effect from 5th May 2011;
- (c) increase the membership of Godmanchester Town Council from 15 to 17 councillors with effect from 1st May 2008;
- (d) decrease the membership of Holme Parish Council from 9 to 7 councillors with effect from 5th May 2011;
- (e) decrease the membership of Upwood and The Raveleys Parish Council from 11 to 9 councillors with effect from 5th May 2011;
- (f) decrease the membership of Elton Parish Council from 11 to 9 councillors with effect from 6th May 2010;
- (g) increase the membership of Yaxley Parish Council from 13 to 17 councillors with effect from 5th May 2011;
- (h) decrease the membership of Great and Little Gidding Parish Council from 8 to 7 councillors with effect from 1st May 2008;
- (i) decrease the membership of Great Staughton Parish Council from 11 to 9 councillors with effect from 5th May 2011; and
- (j) group the parishes of Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy under the common parish council of Offord Cluny and Offord D'Arcy Parish Council consisting of 11 councillors with effect from 1st May 2008.

55. FINANCIAL PLAN, MEDIUM TERM PLAN, 2008/09 BUDGET AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

In conjunction with a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of

which is appended in the Minute Book) and Item Nos. 61 and 62 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Executive Councillor for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers, addressed the Council on the Financial Plan, Medium Term Plan for 2009/2013, 2008/09 budget and related Prudential Indicators contained in the Treasury Management strategy. In accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, the Council also considered proposals as to the levels of Council Tax in 2008/09 for the various parts of the Huntingdonshire District.

In opening the debate, Councillor Rogers reminded Members that the Council continued to balance expenditure on service priorities against the requirement to set a Council Tax. He made reference to the implications on the budget of variations in interest rates and inflation and acknowledged the contributions made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and members of the business community to the budgetary process which had originally commenced in September 2007.

In drawing Members' attention to the Council's decision at its meeting in December (Minute No. 47 (a) refers) to support a policy of limiting the increase in the budget requirement to 4.99%, Councillor Rogers explained that since then, alternative financial strategies had been considered. Given ministerial advice and to avoid the risk of capping, the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Cabinet had recommended the adoption of Option B contained in Section 4.10 of Appendix A to the report now submitted which, in their view, offered the best balance between minimising the level of spending adjustment required and the risk of capping in 2008/09. Councillor Rogers acknowledged that the adoption of this strategy would require further efficiency savings. He also referred Members to a letter that he and the Leader of the Council had sent to the Minister for Local Government seeking an indication of the principles which the Government would apply when exercising capping powers but to which a reply had yet to be received.

Although suggesting that he thought it unlikely that the Council would be threatened by capping, Councillor Rogers indicated that he foresaw a situation where services would need to be curtailed as the Council's reserves became depleted. He urged Members to recognise that the Council had to do all it could to raise revenue by other means such as the imposition of charges for services. Given that the acceptance of Option B would balance expenditure levels on the wide range of services offered by the Council against the desire to retain an affordable council tax, Councillor Rogers commended the recommendations by the Cabinet to Council as set out in the report of the Head of Financial Services.

In response to a question by Councillor Mrs M Banerjee, Councillor Rogers explained that the proposal to remove the general contingency of £144,000 from the budget would reduce still further the need to identify future spending adjustments, that the contingency provision had not been used for several years and that any unavoidable items of expenditure which might arise could be funded from the revenue reserves.

Councillor J D Fell expressed his disappointment at the level of under-funding provided by the Government, particularly in view of the performance and efficiency that the Council had demonstrated in recent years and Councillor A Hansard drew the Member's attention to the fact that only 8.4% of total council tax revenue was retained for expenditure by the District Council with the Council having no control over the remainder.

Having highlighted the variations in the precepts set by Parish Councils,

Councillor J A Gray congratulated the Cabinet for their hard work in presenting a balanced and reasonable budget capable of meeting the significant financial challenges which lay ahead. The Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates expressed the view that Cambridgeshire authorities should jointly make representations to Central Government to strongly underline how poorly funded local government was in the County.

In response to Councillor Rogers' address, Councillor P J Downes, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group, expressed his gratitude to Officers for the clarity of the budget documents and suggested that reforms were needed to the local government finance system if the Council was to receive the scale of Central Government funding to which it should be entitled. Councillor Downes indicated his support for Option B, welcomed the opportunity given to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels to contribute to the debate and envisaged that difficulties would increase for the Council over the next 4/5 years as the level of reserves continued to fall.

Councillor P J Downes also moved an amendment to the Motion and it was duly seconded -

“that the following words be added after the word “excluded” at the end of the first bullet point of the recommendation contained in paragraph 3.1 of the report of the Head of Financial Services – ‘subject to an increase in the budget for recycling sites on page 36 of the Council agenda to £57,000 with consequential adjustments to the Council’s final budget requirement and the additional expenditure met from reserves, in order to investigate potential retention of Buckden Household Waste Recycling Centre as a weekend amenity and a report submitted to Cabinet in due course when investigations have been completed’.”

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

Councillor Downes further moved and it was duly seconded –

“that in Annex D to Appendix A of the report of the Head of Financial Services, the following words/figure be added in columns two and three after Bid No. 363 in the Transportation Section – ‘Road Safety Scheme: A141, Huntingdon (column 2) and £150,000 in 2008/09 (column 3)’.”

The Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates, explained that this matter had been discussed at a meeting of Cambridgeshire County Council on the previous day when Councillor Downes had been advised that the matter was the subject of ongoing discussions. Councillor Bates suggested that it would be inappropriate for this matter to be discussed at this point in the proceedings and in accordance with Standing Order 11.10 (d), he moved and it was duly seconded -

“that the question be now put”.

On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

Accordingly, the amendment proposed by Councillor Downes was put to the vote and declared to be LOST.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the proposed budget for 2008/09, Medium Term Plan for 2009/2013 and Financial Plan, as set out in Annexes C, D, E and F to the report now submitted be approved;
- (b) that the Treasury Management Strategy and Prudential Indicators, as set out in Appendix A to the report of the Cabinet now submitted be approved;
- (c) that a Council Tax increase of 4.99% representing a Council Tax of £115.39 for a Band D property in 2008/09 be approved;
- (d) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2008/09 in accordance with Sections 32 and 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 Town/Parish Precepts	71,005,662
(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	48,470,515
(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 plus Parish/Town Precepts (item i minus item ii)	22,535,147
(iv) the aggregate of the amounts payable into the General Fund for the items set out in Section 33 (1) of the Act. Government support	12,156,971
(v) the aggregate of the amounts payable to the General Fund for the items set out in Section 33 (3) of the Act Collection Fund deficit	27,881

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| (vi) | the basic amount of Council Tax for 2007/08 in accordance with Section 33 (1)
<i>District plus average Town/Parish Council Tax</i> | 180.07 |
| (vii) | the aggregate of special items referred to in Section 34 (1)
<i>Total Town and Parish Council precepts</i> | 3,737,487 |
| (viii) | the basic amount of Council Tax for 2007/08 for those parts of the District to which no special item relates
<i>District Council Tax</i> | 115.39
<i>per band
D property</i> |
- (ix) the basic amounts of Council Tax for 2008/09 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 2008/09 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 attached to the Agenda.
- (e) 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 attached to the Agenda be noted; and
- (f) 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 figures shown in table 2 as the amounts of Council Tax for 2008/09 for each of the categories of dwelling shown.

56. 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 13th December 2007 and 31st January 2008.

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In connection with Item Nos. 61 and 62, it was noted that the recommendations had been considered previously under Minute No. 55 ante.

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In connection with Item No. 63 and following appreciation having been expressed to Members and Officers who had contributed to the successful outcome of the Overview and Scrutiny review of on-line petitions, the recommendation contained in Item No. 63 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 71 and in response to questions from Councillors T D Sanderson and R Powell, the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell replied that consideration was being given to the provision of additional car parking for the town as part of current work on the Huntingdon West Area Action Plan, that poor access meant it was difficult to enhance facilities at Great Northern Street Car Park and that he would again raise the issue of the parking of commercial vans owned by Luminus in the Riverside Park. He indicated that he would respond to the questioner with regard to the latter question in writing when the outcome was known.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 13th December 2007 and 31st January 2008 be received and adopted.

(b) Standards Committee

Councillor T D Sanderson presented the Report of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 6th December 2007 and 31st January 2008.

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Councillor Sanderson drew the Council's attention to the submission made by the Committee to the Secretary of State

for Communities and Local Government which had recommended that implementation of the new Code of Conduct regime should commence with effect from 1st September 2008 and not 1st April as planned.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 6th December 2007 and 31st January 2008 be received and adopted.

(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny (Service Delivery) held on 4th December 2007, 8th January and 5th February 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 21 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Criswell undertook to respond to the questioner in writing regarding a suggestion that the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership should lobby the Government for Cambridgeshire to become an English for speakers of other languages targeted area,

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In connection with Item No. 26 (b) and in response to a question from Councillor R W J Eaton, Councillor Criswell acknowledged the appreciation of Councillor Eaton for the work of the Panel on the study on disability access and noted his request to raise the poor condition of pavements with Cambridgeshire County Council in the study final report.

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In connection with Item No. 26 (c) and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Criswell acknowledged the progress achieved by the State of the District Consultation Working Group and indicated that he too was hopeful of a satisfactory conclusion to the study.

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In connection with Item No. 26 (d) and in response to a question from Councillor T D Sanderson, Councillor Criswell replied that although the work of the Adoption of Roads and Sewers Working Group was at an early stage, the Group might investigate the role of the various agencies in the adoption of roads and sewers with a view to shortening the timescale when such works were completed.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) held on 4th December 2007, 8th January and 5th February 2008 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support)

Councillor J A Gray presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 11th December 2007 and 15th January 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 31 and in response to questions from Councillors T D Sanderson and J J Dutton, Councillor Gray advised the questioners that the Panel had established a working group to examine procedures for the negotiation, implementation, monitoring and expenditure associated with Section 106 Agreements and that whilst the terms of reference of the group had yet to be finalised, it was likely to investigate thoroughly the issues of concern to Members.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor J S Watt regarding cycling routes, Councillor Gray assured the questioner that he would continue to liaise with Officers to secure the improvement and safety of cycle routes.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 11th December 2007 and 15th January 2008 be received and adopted.

(e) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) held on 29th January and 6th February 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) held on 29th January and 6th February

2008 be received and adopted.

(f) Development Control Panel

Councillor P G Mitchell presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 17th December 2007 and 21st January 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 17th December 2007 and 21st January 2008 be received and adopted.

(g) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor C J Stephens presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 12th December 2007.

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In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 20.2 and on being moved and seconded, it was noted that the recommendation contained in Item No. 11 now stood adjourned without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

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In connection with Item No. 15 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Stephens acknowledged that whilst there was insufficient participation locally in youth councils at town and parish level to justify a district youth forum as originally envisaged at this time, this did not preclude the opportunity to re-visit the idea of a District-wide forum in the future.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 12th December 2007 be received and adopted.

57. ORAL QUESTIONS

In accordance with the Council's 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 P H Dakers to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding suggested end times for agenda items and meetings, the Leader, Councillor Bates, replied that it would be difficult to anticipate the length of any meeting so that an attempt to estimate a closing time on agenda would be problematic and difficult to achieve in practice.

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Question from Councillor J J Dutton to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

In response to a question regarding the incidence of parking on verges at Norfolk and Essex Road, Huntingdon and whether the verges in question were in the ownership of the District Council, Councillor Bucknell undertook to investigate the land ownership issue and to undertake a visit to the site to which he invited the questioner and Councillor Miss Kemp.

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Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Executive Councillor for Operations, Parks and Countryside, Councillor C R Hyams

In response to a question requesting that further consideration be given to the method of distinguishing properties occupied by the frail, elderly and vulnerable for refuse collection purposes in order to prevent distraction burglaries, Councillor Hyams replied that he was investigating the matter and had requested details of incidents of this nature from the Police.

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Question from Councillor T D Sanderson to the Leader, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question requesting an update on plans for the future of Huntingdon Town Hall and the reason why a commuted sum of £8,000 had yet to be transferred to the Town Council for the provision of a play area at Stukeley Meadows, Councillor Bates undertook to provide a written response on both issues.

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Question from Councillor R Powell to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

In response to a question requesting an update on the progress of the Tesco development at Ramsey, Councillor Bucknell confirmed that negotiations were continuing with regard to the submission of an application for planning permission but that he would write to the questioner in further detail on the current position.

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Question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, to the Executive Councillor for Operations, Parks and Countryside, Councillor C R Hyams

In response to a question in which it was alleged that there was a tendency for wheeled bins not to be returned to the curtilage of properties after refuse collections resulting in hazards for the elderly, disabled and parents with pushchairs, Councillor Hyams undertook to reply to the questioner in writing and to copy the reply to all Members of the Council.

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Question from Councillor Miss S Kemp to the Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, Councillor A Hansard

In response to a question regarding the need to update the tourist information leaflets and electronic Tourist Information Points to reflect the fact that the Library and Tourist Information Office were no longer located at Princes Street, Huntingdon, Councillor Hansard undertook to respond to the questioner in writing.

58. 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.

The meeting concluded at 4.20pm.

Chairman