

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, 16 April 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor P A Swales – Chairman.

Councillors M G Baker, K M Baker,
Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, J T Bell,
Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell,
E R Butler, K J Churchill, Mrs K E Cooper,
S J Criswell, J W Davies, P J Downes,
J J Dutton, R W J Eaton, R S Farrer, J D Fell,
J E Garner, A N Gilbert, D A Giles,
P M D Godfrey, J A Gray, A Hansard,
D Harty, C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan,
Ms S Kemp, P G Mitchell, I R Muir,
M F Newman, R Powell, D J Priestman,
Mrs D C Reynolds, 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.

Mr D L Hall (Independent Member)

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J D Ablewhite, P H Dakers, D B Dew, L W McGuire and P K Ursell.

59. PRAYER

The Reverend J Pullen, Vicar of St. Ives, opened the meeting with Prayer.

60. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Councillor Mrs C A Godley

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillor Mrs C A Godley, who had died suddenly on 22nd February 2008 having served as District Councillor for the Godmanchester Ward since May 2000. Councillor C R Hyams, Executive Councillor for Operations, Parks and Countryside led tributes to Councillor Mrs Godley followed by the Leader, Councillor I C Bates and Councillor P J Downes, Leader of the Opposition on behalf of their respective groups, with Councillor J J Dutton contributing his own personal memories of her. Members observed a minute's silence in Councillor Mrs Godley's memory.

(b) Civic Charity Ball

The Chairman announced that his Civic Ball held on 22nd February 2008 had raised £4,200 for the Huntingdon and

District Sea Scouts, the Salvation Army, the Great Ormond Street Children's Charity and the Huntingdon, Peterborough and Cambridge Multiple Sclerosis Therapy Centre.

(c) Council Membership

The Chairman referred to the impending retirement of Councillors J D Fell and K Reynolds, both of whom were not seeking re-election to the District Council. Mention also was made of former Councillor R W D Bailey who had resigned from office since the previous meeting. The Council recorded their thanks to those Members for their services during their respective periods of office and extended best wishes to them and their families for the future.

61. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20th February 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

62. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor M F Newman declared a personal interest in Minute No. 64(b) Item No. 15 by virtue of his membership of Pidley-cum-Fenton Parish Council.

63. REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION - ON-LINE PETITIONS

Further to Minute No. 56(g) of the meeting of the Council held on 20th February 2008 and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 20.2, the Council considered a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a series of changes to the Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) contained in the Constitution to enable on-line petitions to be processed.

Having indicated their support for the proposed changes and commended the work of Councillor A N Gilbert in leading the original Overview and Scrutiny Panel study which had led to the proposed introduction of on-line petitions, the Council

RESOLVED

that the following changes be made to the Council Procedure Rules (Standing Orders) of the Council's Constitution –

that in Part 4 of the Constitution the second and third paragraphs of 10A.4 be deleted to be replaced by:

“A written petition shall contain the name, address and signature of each person who signed it. The name and address shall be in a legible format. An on-line petition shall contain the name and address of each person who is party to it. A petition shall indicate which one of the signatories is to present the petition.

The petition shall be sent to office of the Chief Executive who shall decide whether the petition

concerns a matter on the Agenda for a full Council meeting and if it is not, it will be scheduled for inclusion on the Agenda for the next ordinary full Council meeting. A maximum of three petitions will be presented at any meeting.

If an on-line petition does not have the requisite number of signatories or the organiser is not prepared to present it to the Council, the petition shall be submitted for consideration to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel, subject to the petition containing the names and addresses of at least 10 persons who live or work or own property in the District.”.

64. 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 21st February, 13th March and 3rd April 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 74 and in response to a series of questions from Councillors P J Downes, Mrs B E Boddington, J E Garner, J A Gray, D A Giles and Mrs M Banerjee, the Leader, Councillor I C Bates and Councillor P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport replied that by adopting the Environment Strategy, the Council was taking the first step in responding to a number of challenges with regard to environmental issues; that there might be occasions when difficult decisions would be required and a balance of view taken as to the cost benefit of various options; that Cambridgeshire had accepted waste for disposal from London for many years; that it was equally important to consider the sustainability of local rural communities and the contrasting lifestyles of towns and villages; and that the Strategy and its associated action plan represented the beginning of a five-year programme of projects to address climate change, the efficient use of resources and the protection and improvement of the environment and would be reviewed annually to respond to emerging issues and technology. The Leader also undertook to respond, in writing, to the suggestion that the principles of biodiversity were damaging food production and farming. In his response, the Leader paid tribute to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework), Members, Officers and former Councillor N J Guyatt for their contribution to the preparation of the Strategy. Whereupon, and having been put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

that the Environment Strategy be approved and adopted by the Council subject to the Director of

Environmental and Community Services being authorised to approve any minor textual changes and the final format of the document, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport.

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In connection with Item No. 77 and in response to a question from Councillor D J Priestman, regarding proposed improvements to the Riverside Park, Huntingdon, the Leader replied that the masterplan for the Park would be subject to public consultation prior to a decision being taken as to how the scheme was to be progressed. Councillor J J Dutton added that further details of the proposals had been presented at a meeting of the Huntingdon Environmental Improvements Advisory Group held on the previous day.

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In connection with Item No. 79 and in response to questions from Councillors Mrs M Banerjee and P J Downes regarding the State of the District Engagement Events and their disappointment at the Cabinet's decision to question the accuracy of the resource and financial implications thereof, the Leader of the Council pointed out that further information had been sought from the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) after which the matter would be considered again by the Cabinet.

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In connection with Minute No. 83 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Leader replied that it was a matter for individual Councillors as to the mileage rate that they claimed on Council business within the maximum permissible and that he had elected to be paid a mileage allowance of 40p per mile rather than the rate recommended under the NJC Car Allowances Scheme.

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In connection with Minute No. 85 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Leader replied that he too welcomed the progress achieved on the shared services initiative, the potential for further joint arrangements with other authorities and in particular the possibility of sharing arrangements for the administration of the revenue and benefits service.

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Whereupon, it was further

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report

of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 21st February, 13th March and 3rd April 2008 be received and adopted.

(b) Standards Committee

Mr D L Hall presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 6th March 2008.

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Mr Hall drew attention to the availability of training for Members in advance of the publication of regulations for the local assessment of Code of Conduct allegations which would be held at South Cambridgeshire District Council on 23rd April 2008 and he advised that the regulations which would prescribe the new framework for managing complaints were still awaited.

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In connection with Item No. 17 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, Mr Hall reported that since the commencement of the standards regime there had been nineteen complaints, two investigations and three hearings involving District and Parish Councillors in Huntingdonshire and that he endorsed the questioner's compliment to the Monitoring Officer and his staff for their efforts in support of the work of the Committee.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 6th March 2008 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) held on 1st April 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 10 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Criswell assured the questioner that he would pursue the various issues raised by the Panel during their debate on the Environment Strategy.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) held on 1st April 2008 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) held on 4th March and 1st April 2008.

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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 March and 1st April 2008 be received and adopted.

(e) Overview and Scrutiny (Service Support)

Councillor J A Gray presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 12th and 20th February and 11th March 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 40 and having acknowledged the success of the process which engaged the public in decision making at meetings of the Development Control Panel, the Chairman encouraged all Members to respond to the questionnaire which had been circulated as part of the review being undertaken by the Panel of the new procedures to establish whether there were any changes which might improve the system still further.

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In connection with Item No. 41 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, which suggested that there were insufficient full-sized football pitches in Huntingdon should those located in the Riverside Park, Huntingdon be replaced, Councillor Gray replied that he hoped that the Huntingdonshire Football Association would be invited to contribute as part of the public consultation on the Masterplan for the Riverside Park.

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In connection with Item No. 45 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Gray also welcomed the improvement in communications with the Council's Call

Centre which had been prompted by the Panel and he thanked Members for their contributions to the work of the Panel over the past year.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 12th and 20th February and 11th March 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 25th February and 17th March 2008.

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Councillor Mitchell drew attention to Item No. 21 and the development opportunities presented by the former Primary Care Trust Office suite at Primrose Lane, Huntingdon and his interest in the outcome of the consultation on the content of the design brief for the site.

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In connection with Item No. 23 and in response to a question from Councillor C R Hyams, Councillor Mitchell replied that he would advise the questioner when the arrangement to send a quarterly report of current enforcement cases to all Members would be re-instated.

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In terms of Item No. 26, Councillor Mitchell indicated that he was hopeful that the improved performance of the Development Control Section would result in the lifting of the designation of the Council as a "Standards Authority" for major planning applications.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 25th February and 17th March 2008 be received and adopted.

(g) Employment Panel

Councillor K Reynolds presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 6th February, adjourned

and reconvened on 17th March 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 16 and having thanked his colleague Panel Members, Officers and the Employees Side Representatives for their support and co-operation in reaching an agreement on the annual pay award for employees, Councillor Reynolds added, in his response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, that the Panel also had discussed the potential for the exclusion of senior posts from the PE Inbucon scheme, the negotiation of pay settlements over a two/three year period and the possibility of a differential pay award for lower graded staff.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 6th February, adjourned and reconvened on 17th March 2008 be received and adopted.

(h) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor C J Stephens presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 26th March 2008.

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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. 16 now stood adjourned without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 17 was declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 26th March 2008 be received and adopted.

65. MOTION ON NOTICE

Before proceeding to the Motion on the Agenda, the Chairman

announced his intention to invoke the discretion available to him under paragraph 9.5(i) of the Council Procedure Rules and to rule that the following Motion on being moved and seconded would be referred without discussion to the Corporate Governance Panel.

It was moved by Councillor P J Downes and duly seconded –

“that this Council, whilst welcoming the possibility of District Council funding to upgrade the A141/Kings Ripton Road junction to a light controlled junction with pedestrian crossing, deplores the unconstitutional action of the Leader by announcing this “decision” without authorisation and calls on him to act in future within Council procedures and protocols”.

Whereupon, the Motion was referred to the Corporate Governance Panel.

66. 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 P J Downes to the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery), Councillor S J Criswell

In response to a question 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, Councillor Criswell replied that the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership Board would consider the matter at their meeting on 28th May 2008.

Question from Councillor J D Sadler to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding the potential for the District Council to benefit from an award from the Big Lottery Fund, the Leader, Councillor Bates referred to three schemes locally where external funding might be achieved.

Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding the rationale for the decision by Cambridgeshire County Council to transfer waste from Buckden recycling centre to Waterbeach as part of a PFI waste contract, the Leader, Councillor Bates replied that, whilst he was unable to comment in detail on the matter, he was aware that the decision had been taken following discussions over many years and meetings of the County Council’s Scrutiny and Cabinet bodies and that the decision would also affect other Districts in the County. He therefore suggested that Councillor Baker draw his concerns to the Officers and Members of the County Council.

Question from Councillor G S E Thorpe to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question which suggested that Cambridgeshire County Council was considering the granting of a subsidy for a new bus service between Cambourne and St Neots, subject to a contribution also being forthcoming from the District Council, Councillor Bates explained that he did not have sufficient information available to be able to answer the question directly but he undertook to provide a written response to the questioner on the issue.

Question from Councillor Mrs K E Cooper to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

In response to a question requesting an indication of the steps being taken by the District Council to make provision for allotments in the Local Development Framework in accordance with Government guidance, Councillor Bucknell replied that the provision and maintenance of allotments was a function for town and parish Councils and an area over which the District Council had no direct control.

Question from Councillor D A Giles to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question requesting an indication of the timescale for the signing of a parish charter with town and parish councils, the Leader, Councillor Bates replied that as far as he was aware, neither the County nor other District Councils in Cambridgeshire had yet to sign a charter and that given the mixed response received thus far to a questionnaire sent to all parish councils in this respect, there appeared little interest from the local councils to pursue this matter further.

Question from Councillor R W J Eaton to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding the District Council's support of a campaign to support the Bargroves Resource Centre in St Neots as a public amenity and whether the Council also would offer financial assistance to the Town Council and community groups in St Neots to enable them to support the campaign, Councillor Bates explained that he had insufficient information to hand to respond to the questioner at the meeting but that he would raise the issue with Cambridgeshire County Council and reply in due course.

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 regarding the difficulties experienced by concessionary bus pass holders in Ramsey who were unable to use their passes for the service leaving Ramsey at 9.15am, Councillor Bucknell replied that whilst bus timetables were outside the control of the District Council he would seek to encourage Stagecoach Buses to consider rescheduling their Ramsey service so it left at 9.30am or

later. Councillor Bucknell also reported that 19,200 concessionary bus passes had been issued to date by the District Council.

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.

The meeting concluded at 4.09pm.

Chairman