

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Burgess Hall, St Ivo Leisure Centre, St Ives on Wednesday, 18 February 2009.

PRESENT: Councillor J W Davies – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, K M Baker,
M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates,
J T Bell, Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell,
K J Churchill, W T Clough, S J Criswell,
P H Dakers, Mrs J A Dew, D B Dew,
P J Downes, R S Farrer, J E Garner,
P Godley, 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, Mrs D C Reynolds,
T V Rogers, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens,
L M Simpson, G S E Thorpe, R G Tuplin,
P K Ursell, P R Ward, J S Watt and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, Mrs K E Cooper, J J Dutton, R W J Eaton, A N Gilbert, P M D Godfrey, J A Gray, J M Sadler and C J Stephens.

53. PRAYER

The Bishop of Huntingdon, the Right Reverend Doctor D Thompson opened the meeting with prayer.

54. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Councillor I R Muir

The Chairman paid tribute to Councillor I R Muir who had died on 9th December 2008, having served as a District Councillor for a total of 20 years during which time he had held a variety of positions including the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Deputy Leader. Councillors I C Bates, Leader of the Council, P J Downes, Leader of the Opposition and P L E Bucknell, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport paid tribute to Councillor Muir commending his contribution to both the Council, his community as Ward Councillor for Ramsey and more widely in pursuit of his leisure pursuits. Particular mention was made to Councillor Muir's courage and determination in continuing to attend Council meetings as his health began to deteriorate. After a prayer by the Bishop of Huntingdon, Members stood and observed a minute's silence in Councillor Muir's memory.

(b) **Accommodation Changes**

The Chairman encouraged Members to be guided by their agenda as meetings of Council and Committees would be held in various venues across the District over the next 12 – 18 months pending the completion of the new accommodation project.

(c) **Eastfield House**

The Chairman reported that he had been pleased to represent the Council at the official opening in January of Eastfield House by the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire.

(d) **Pathfinder House**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman thanked those who had been involved in the development, construction and transition of staff to the new Pathfinder House without major disruption of services.

(e) **Priory Park Pavilion**

The Chairman reported that he had welcomed Sir Trevor Brooking to St. Neots on 12th February to perform the official opening of the new pavilion at Priory Park which had attracted a grant of £300,000 from the Football Foundation.

(f) **Call Centre**

The Chairman indicated that he was pleased to announce that the District Council's call centre had retained its accreditation for customer service excellence following a recent inspection which was the replacement for the Charter Mark Award held previously.

55. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillors K M Baker, M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill and P K Ursell, declared a personal interest in Minute No. 58 (a) (Item No. 77 of the Cabinet Report) and a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 58 (a) (Item No. 75 of the Cabinet Report) by virtue of their appointment as District Council representatives to the Luminus Homes Group.

Councillors D Harty, G S E Thorpe and P K Ursell declared a personal interest in Minute No. 58 (a) (Item No. 61) and Minute No. 58 (c) (Item No. 30) by virtue of their membership of St. Neots Town Council.

Councillor L W McGuire declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 58 (f) (Item No. 21) as the owner of a boat at Hartford Marina and having had a close association with a number of people affected by the enforcement action.

56. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 3rd December 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

57. FINANCIAL PLAN, MEDIUM TERM PLAN, 2009/10 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. 58 and 59 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment, Councillor T V Rogers, addressed the Council on the financial plan, medium term plan 2010 to 2014, 2009/10 budget and related prudential indicators contained in the Treasury Management Strategy. In accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, the Council also considered proposals as to the levels of Council Tax in 2009/2010 for the various parts of the Huntingdonshire District.

In his opening remarks, Councillor Rogers drew Members' attention to the pay award of 2.2% for employees which was less than anticipated and the overspend of £150,000 on the concessionary bus fare scheme which he suggested could be offset by the award of LAGBI funding in the order of £150,000. He acknowledged the contributions made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and members of the Business Community to the budgetary process.

Councillor Rogers drew Members' attention to key issues and a series of changes which had occurred as a result of the economic downturn which had had an effect on the budget. These included depletion of the capital and revenue reserves and falls in income from planning applications, industrial rentals and land charges. He added that the Council would be operating in a period of uncertainty for some time as the length and severity of the current economic downturn could not be predicted. He added that further resources might be required to cope with a growing homelessness problem and to meet any further variations in income.

Members were advised that the Council expected to end the current financial year with revenue reserves of £19m, that it was the expectation that £12.6m in revenue support would be received from the Government and that £3.7m from the reserves would be used to fund services and maintain a low Council Tax in the financial year 2009/2010. Councillor Rogers emphasised that the Council would continue to search for efficiency savings and other sources of income. Despite these initiatives, Councillor Rogers forecasted that revenue reserves would be exhausted by approximately 2013. In addition to Cabinet measures to address these issues, Councillor Rogers informed the Council that a Working Party comprising Councillors K J Churchill, P J Downes, J E Garner, L W McGuire, T V Rogers and R J West had been appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) to identify options for further budget savings and opportunities for new funding.

In terms of the Treasury Management Strategy, Councillor Rogers reported that the Cabinet had indicated support for corporate bonds and that the strategy was recommended to Council with this addition

or its equivalent.

Before concluding, Councillor Rogers reported that if supported by Council, the budget would increase by 4.38% resulting in a Band D Council Tax of £121.15 or £2.33p per week, the 19th lowest district tax level of the 238 districts. He commended the recommendations of the Cabinet to Council as set out in the report of the Head of Financial Services.

In response to Councillor Rogers' address, Councillor P J Downes, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group, acknowledged the difficulties faced by the Council given the current unpredictable nature of the economy and the saving adjustments to the budget which needed to be identified by 2013/2014. Referring to the financial summary on page 17 of the agenda, Councillor Downes considered whether it was prudent to propose a Council Tax increase of 4.99% given the uncertainty of capping. Mindful not to disrupt frontline services, he proposed that the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Finance and the Environment review the content of the Corporate Services budget to achieve a reduction in expenditure consistent with the difference in income between a Council Tax of 4.99% and one of 3.9%.

Councillor I C Bates reminded the Council that the budgetary process had commenced in the Autumn, that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels had had ample opportunity to discuss the budget in detail and that it was not conducive to the Council's business to make suggestions at such a late stage without a full understanding of the consequences. A number of Members spoke in the ensuing debate. In response to questions, Councillor Rogers informed the Council that funding of housing benefit claims was reimbursed by central government, that the cost of a re-billing exercise should the Council be capped for setting a Council Tax in excess of the Government's expectations would be £60,000 and that it would have been preferable for detailed proposals to have been raised at the Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting to allow time for proper debate and consideration.

Councillor Downes moved an amendment to the Motion and it was duly seconded –

“that a Council Tax increase of 3.9% for 2009/2010 be approved in principle, that the Leader of the Council, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Transport and the Chief Executive seek to identify and recommend savings of £66,000 from the Corporate Services budget, and if supported by the Council, subsequent amendments be made to the Council's budget and Council Tax resolutions”.

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

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

(a) that the proposed budget for 2009/2010, Medium Term

Plan for 2010/2014 and Financial Strategy as set out in Annexes (a), (b), (c) and (d) 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 subject to the inclusion of corporate bonds;
- (c) that a Council Tax increase of 4.99% representing a Council Tax of £121.15 for a Band D property in 2009/2010 be approved;
- (d) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2009/2010 in accordance with Sections 32 and 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992:-

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(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	73,486,453
(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	49,949,498
(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)	23,536,955
(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	12,572,251
(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 surplus	27,882
(vi) the basic amount of Council Tax for 2009/10 in accordance with Section 33 (1) District plus average Town/Parish Council Tax	188.70

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|--------|---|---|
| (vii) | the aggregate of special items referred to in Section 34 (1)
Total Town and Parish Council precepts | 3,914,987 |
| (viii) | the basic amount of Council Tax for 2009/10 for those parts of the District to which no special item relates
District Council Tax | 121.15
per band
D
property |
| (ix) | the basic amounts of Council Tax for 2009/10 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. | |
| (x) | the amounts to be taken into account for 2009/10 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. | |
- (e) that the amounts of precept issued to the Council by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority and Cambridgeshire and 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 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 2009/2010 for each of the categories of dwelling shown.

58. 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 18th December 2008 and 29th January 2009.

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In connection with Item Nos. 58 and 59, it was noted that the recommendations had been considered previously under Minute No. 57.

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In connection with Item No. 61 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, Councillor Bates reported that St. Neots Town Council would be consulted shortly on the possible relocation and development of customer services in St. Neots.

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(Having declared a personal and prejudicial interest, Councillors K M Baker, M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, K J Churchill and P K Ursell left the meeting during discussion of the following item).

In connection with Item No. 75 and in response to questions from Councillors G S E Thorpe and M F Shellens on the legality and ethnics of the proposed remuneration of Councillors appointed to represent the District Council on the Luminus Board, Councillor Bates replied that this type of arrangement was becoming less unusual and was a matter for the registered social landlord and not the District Council. However, Councillor Bates undertook to arrange for a written reply to be sent to the questioners.

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In connection with Item No. 77 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes with regard to the transfer of the leasehold interest in Council-owned land fronting St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon to the Luminus Group, Councillor Bates indicated that he would reply to the questioner in writing.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 18th December 2008 and 29th January 2009 be

received and adopted.

(b) Standards

Mr D L Hall presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 4th December 2008.

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Further to Item No. 13, Mr Hall advised the Council that since the transfer of responsibility for handling code of conduct complaints from the Standards Board for England to local authorities in May 2008, the Sub-Committee had considered eleven complaints and only one had been required to be referred for investigation. He considered that this represented a good indication of the understanding among Councillors of the Code locally.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 4th December 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 Panel (Service Delivery) held on 2nd December 2008, 6th January and 3rd February 2009.

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In connection with Item No. 35 and in response to questions from Councillors P J Downes and J E Garner, Councillor Criswell confirmed that the Government was responsible for selecting the preferred option for the future governance and operation of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital, that the proposals had been presented to the Panel as part of the consultation arrangements and any indication of the cost of the process to date was considered to be commercially sensitive information.

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In connection with Item No. 39, Councillor Criswell drew Members' attention to the conclusion of the study into disability access across the District and the approval of the Panel's recommendations by the Cabinet. He thanked all those involved in the undertaking of the study on behalf of the Panel.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) held on 2nd December 2008, 6th January and 3rd February 2009 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support)

Councillor R J West presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 9th December 2008 and 13th January 2009.

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In connection with Item No. 31 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Executive Councillor for Planning and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell updated the Council on progress of discussions held thus far with the bus companies to align the connections between train and bus services operating from Huntingdon and St. Neots stations.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 9th December 2008 and 13th January 2009 be received and adopted.

(e) 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 27th January 2009.

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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 27th January 2009 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 15th December

2008 and 19th January 2009.

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(Having declared a personal and prejudicial interest, Councillor L W McGuire left the meeting during discussion of the following item.)

In connection with Item No. 21, Councillor Mitchell drew Members' attention to the decisions of the Panel to establish a Working Group to seek to resolve the question of possible unauthorised occupation of the various accommodation units at Hartford Marina, to defer the proposed enforcement action for six months and to prepare supplementary planning guidance on marinas.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the Development Control Panel held on 15th December 2008 and 19th January 2009 be received and adopted.

(g) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor M G Baker presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 10th December 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 10th December 2008 be received and adopted.

(h) Employment Panel

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 3rd February 2009.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendations contained Item No. 15 were declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 3rd February 2009 be received and adopted.

59. ORAL QUESTIONS

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

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

In response to a question regarding reports that Marshalls Aerospace had discontinued their interest in relocating to the airfield at Mildenhall, Councillor P L E Bucknell indicated that he was unable to confirm whether the company would renew their interest in relocating to RAF Wyton. However if this should be case, he undertook to pursue the possible relocation to Huntingdonshire having regard to the importance of the additional employment opportunities which might be generated.

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

In response to a question regarding the effect on gate fees at recycling centres of the lower resale values for recyclables, Councillor Hyams replied that although negotiations were continuing with various companies and Cambridgeshire County Council, there was likely to be an increase in gate fees with the date for implementation having yet to be decided.

Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

(Councillor P L E Bucknell declared a personal interest in the following matter as a Member of the East of England Regional Assembly).

In response to a question regarding the suggestion that a development of 20,000 homes had been proposed for the Alconbury Airfield site, Councillor Bucknell assured the questioner that the District Council would continue to object to any proposal for housing development of that size at that location.

60. 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 4.05 pm.

Chairman