

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Corporate Training Suite, Eastfield House, Huntingdon on Thursday, 18 December 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor L M Simpson – Vice Chairman in the Chair.
Councillors P L E Bucknell, K J Churchill, D B Dew, A Hansard and T V Rogers

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I C Bates, C R Hyams and Mrs D C Reynolds.

96. MINUTES

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

97. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor A Hansard declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 99 by virtue of his appointment as Trustee to St Neots Museum and left the room for the duration of the discussion and voting thereon.

Councillor K J Churchill declared a personal interest in Minute No. 103 by virtue of his appointment as the District Council's representative on Luminus Homes.

98. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

By way of a report by the Head of Policy and Strategic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet considered the Council's operational performance against 37 short, medium and long-term objectives presented in "Growing Success" – the Council's Corporate Plan. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Service Delivery) and (Service Support) also were submitted to the meeting (copies of which also are appended in the Minute Book).

In terms of those objectives where actual performance had not progressed as well as anticipated, Executive Members were assured that a system was now in place to ensure that applications for loft and cavity wall insulation were being processed within five working days and it was accepted that the current economic downturn had adversely affected the ability of the Council to achieve the target of affordable housing commitments on qualifying sites.

Referring to the comments by the Head of Housing Services on the objective "to achieve a low level of homelessness", it was confirmed that the data collated reflected the current position in the District only but that the Council was aware that homelessness and the need for

debt advice was increasing and that additional financial provision had been made available to the Citizens Advice Bureau and other voluntary organisations by the County Council to assist in this respect. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing comments, the performance achieved against priority objectives contained within "Growing Success" the Council's Corporate Plan be received and noted.

99. CUSTOMER SERVICE DEVELOPMENT IN ST. IVES AND ST. NEOTS

Further to Minute No. 157 of the meeting held on 22nd February 2007, the Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the outcome of a review of services delivered by the St Ives and St Neots Customer Services Centres. The Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) also had submitted their comments on the conclusions of the review (a copy of which also is appended in the Minute Book).

Whilst commending proposals to extend and improve the services offered to customers via local centres and particularly in St Neots and St Ives town centres, the Cabinet were of the view that such services should be delivered, if possible, from a High Street or central location. In this respect, the Cabinet felt unable to support, currently, any option to remodel existing offices. Arising from their detailed discussion, the Cabinet requested the Head of Customer Services to investigate the financial viability of acquiring shop units in St Ives and St Neots, to explore the possibility of sharing the properties with one or more partners and, on the recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery), to consult local Councillors when considering the location of any alternative accommodation.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that, subject to the foregoing comments, the proposed increase in the range of services to be offered by local offices in St Ives and St Neots be noted;
- (b) that the relocation of the St Neots Tourist Information Centre be approved in principle with existing staff subsumed within the Customer Services Team; and
- (c) that the Head of Customer Services investigate the availability of alternative accommodation for Customer Services Centres in central locations in St Neots and St Ives town centres.

100. DEVELOPMENT OF OPTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT DPD

The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Planning Services to which was attached a copy of the draft Development Plan Document (DPD) (copies of both documents are appended in the Minute Book). Members noted that the DPD formed part of the Local Development Framework, would support the Core Strategy and East of England Plan and would set out the Council's policies for managing development in Huntingdonshire including the assessment and determination of planning applications. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) on the document were received (copies of which also are appended in the Minute Book).

Executive Councillors were advised that the draft policy had evolved from the Huntingdonshire Interim Planning Policy Statement, 2007 and from those representations received during the Issues and Options Consultation and Initial Sustainability Appraisal and had been updated to reflect changes in national guidance. It was anticipated that public consultation would commence in mid January. Having regard to the comments submitted by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support), Members were assured that the Master Plan for the Great Fen Project would be considered separately by the Cabinet and therefore it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that, subject to an amendment to the ninth word in the first line of the draft policy on page 78, to replace the word "will" with "may", the content of the DPD, Development of Options and the Sustainability Appraisal be approved for the purposes of consultation; and
- (b) that the Head of Planning Services be authorised, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transportation to undertake any minor editing and updating of the text of the document considered to be necessary prior to publication.

101. LETTINGS POLICY

A report by the Head of Housing Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a proposal to vary the Council's letting policy.

Executive Members were advised that the current policy, adopted in June 2007, provided for an assessment of the circumstances of each individual application to the Council's housing register and for applying a degree of priority to applications if considered necessary. However, it had become apparent that a delegation which had previously been used in exceptional circumstances had been omitted, in error, from the current policy. Therefore to prevent any disadvantage to a priority applicant, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the Council's letting policy be varied and the Head of Housing Services be authorised, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health, to

award priorities to applicants with exceptional circumstances, where those circumstances are not adequately covered and, pending a further review of the policy, to correct unforeseen detrimental consequences which would disadvantage an individual's opportunity for being housed in comparison with the priority of other applicants.

102. WEB STRATEGY 2009 - 2011

By way of a report by the Head of Information Management (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet reviewed the content of a revised web strategy and the supporting action plan for a three year period 2009 -2011.

Having commended the style of the suggested new page layout for the Council's website as illustrated in Appendix 2 to the report now submitted, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the Web Strategy 2009 – 11 be approved.

103. COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE CENTRE - SAPLEY EAST

Consideration was given to a joint report by the Directors of Environmental and Community Services and of Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a proposal for the Council to act as a key partner in the establishment of a Community Interests Company (CIC) to deliver a community enterprise centre within the Sapley Square East Development Area in accordance with the emerging Master Plan.

Members were informed that the development of a community based enterprise centre was an accepted element of regeneration schemes providing small scale employment, skill and learning opportunities to match particular community needs. It was further noted that the proposed initiative accorded with the objectives of the Local Economy Strategy and the activities of the Council and its partners in these areas. In terms of funding, current and future funding opportunities would be maximised if the community enterprise centre was owned and controlled by a Community Interest Company. A further report on the Sapley East Master Plan would be submitted to the Cabinet in March 2009.

Having acknowledged the requirement to consider the governance arrangements for the new Community Interests Company, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that an application be submitted for grant support from the East of England Development Agencies Investing in Communities Programme for the construction of a community enterprise centre in the Sapley East area;
- (b) that a previous decision to reinvest the proceeds of the

disposal of land in this regeneration scheme to produce future community benefits be reaffirmed;

- (c) that the principle of establishing a Community Interest Company which owns and manages the proposed community enterprise centre and other assets if opportunities arise be supported;
- (d) that the Director of Environmental and Community Services be authorised to obtain an agreement, in principle, from appropriate organisations to form a community interest company and to work with those organisations to prepare a robust business plan to demonstrate the viability of the community enterprise centre; and
- (e) that consideration be given to a Master Plan for the regeneration of the Sapley East area and a Business Plan for the community enterprise centre before a final decision is made by the Cabinet in March/April 2009.

Chairman