

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 29 September 2010.

PRESENT: Councillor J J Dutton – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, M G Baker, K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, J T Bell, P L E Bucknell, E R Butler, S Cawley, B S Chapman, K J Churchill, Mrs K E Cooper, J W Davies, Mrs J A Dew, D B Dew, P J Downes, P M D Godfrey, P Godley, J A Gray, S Greenall, A Hansard, D Harty, S M Van De Kerkhove, M F Newman, P D Reeve, T V Rogers, T D Sanderson, C M Saunderson, M F Shellens, Mrs P E Shrapnel, L M Simpson, C J Stephens, P A Swales, G S E Thorpe, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, P R Ward, J S Watt and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, W T Clough, S J Criswell, R S Farrer, N J Guyatt, C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan, P G Mitchell, A Monk, Mrs D C Reynolds and P K Ursell.

### 29. PRAYER

Former Councillor J Garner of Sawtry opened the meeting with prayer.

### 30. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### (a) Merchant Navy Day

The Chairman expressed his gratitude to those Councillors who had supported him at the ceremony to commemorate the Merchant Navy by the raising of the Merchant Navy Flag.

#### (b) Anglia in Bloom

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman congratulated the various towns and groups in Huntingdonshire on their success in the recent Anglia in Bloom awards. In advising the Council that some award winners would be attending the national ceremony being held that day in Birmingham, the Chairman urged his colleague Members to encourage residents and businesses in their respective wards to take part or sponsor the event in future years.

(c) **Ramsey**

The Chairman congratulated Ramsey following the recent announcement that the town had been awarded Big Lottery funding of £1 million over ten years to help residents address local issues and develop the skills and confidence to change and influence matters in the town.

(d) **Local Democracy Day**

The Chairman encouraged Members to join in the activities planned for Local Democracy Day which were being held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House on 13th October 2010.

**31. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 23rd June 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**32. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

Councillors B S Chapman, Mrs K E Cooper, D Harty, G S E Thorpe and S M van de Kerkhove declared a personal and prejudicial interest in Minute No. 38 (a), Item No. 29 and Minute No. 38 (c), Item No. 12 by virtue of their membership of St Neots Town Council.

**33. COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**

The Chairman reminded Members of the decision by the Council to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) to enable headline debates and "White Paper" proposals to be discussed by Members in an open manner. The Council therefore

RESOLVED

that Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) be suspended for the duration of the discussion on Minute No. 34 during which time the common law rules of debate be observed by Members and applied by the Chairman.

**34. COUNCIL DEBATE**

*(Councillor J A Gray took his seat in the Civic Suite at 7.15 pm and Councillor Mrs J A Dew left the meeting at 7.55 pm.)*

Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Housing and Public Health welcomed Dr S Brown, Chairman and Mrs E Sergeant, Managing Director of the Local GP Consortia: Hunts Health to the meeting to lead a discussion on the implications for the Council and the public of changes proposed in the Government White Paper "Equity and Excellence – Liberating the NHS". Before inviting Dr Brown to address Members, Councillor Hansard reminded the Council that the White Paper proposed a major restructuring, not just of health services but also of Councils' responsibilities in relation to health improvement and the co-ordination of health and social care as well as plans to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy and devolve power for the delivery of health services locally.

With the assistance of a powerpoint presentation, Dr Brown explained that Hunts Health was a pilot organisation tasked with forming a consortia of GP practices which would work with other health and care professionals and in partnership with local communities and authorities to commission NHS services for their patients. He added that NHS Cambridgeshire would maintain statutory responsibility for all PCT functions until new statutory organisations were formed and that, thus far, ten practices were members of the consortia with several expressing an intention to join in the future. It was Dr Brown's view that this approach to health care could generate efficiencies across the NHS and improve social care and public health through stronger joint working.

In closing, Dr Brown welcomed the opportunity offered to address the Council at an early stage in the development of this process and indicated that he looked forward to building on the relationship which already existed between the NHS and the District Council.

Councillor G S E Thorpe asked how the new polyclinics envisaged by the Health Minister, Lord Darzi, would be funded. In response, Mrs Sergeant replied that it was her understanding that there would be a national formula for the allocation of funds based on prescribed criteria which would comprise a variety of measures including deprivation. Dr Brown added, in response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens, that he could not identify any major differences between the consortia proposals and the polyclinic model and although health care would remain free, GP consortia would have experience of patient care with clearer links to Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and social care agencies in the community.

In terms of the future role of the District Council, Dr Brown envisaged that the new approach would encourage GPs to get involved in all aspects of the community including housing, the environment and social inclusion issues all of which would demand the input of the District Council, local strategic partnership and neighbourhood management initiatives. He added that it was important that each organisation should co-operate and work positively together to avoid duplication of services for the health and well-being of all Huntingdonshire residents.

Following a question from Councillor R J West regarding the potential for conflict between the role of GPs in terms of health treatment and finance, Dr Brown accepted that there could be a conflict between the commissioning and service arms of the consortia but that GPs would not necessarily have an involvement in the process nor the decisions taken by the Hunts Health Board in this respect.

Referring to the Yaxley consortia, Councillor Mrs M Banerjee asked whether community care staff would be transferred to the new practice. Mrs Sergeant replied that this would be dependent upon an assessment, by the consortia, of the services they might wish to commission and provide. Furthermore and in response to a question by Councillor T V Rogers in respect of occupational therapy, Dr Brown added that the NHS also had to manage financial constraints imposed by the new Government efficiently and innovatively as possible to effect the levels of services which could be provided

particularly for the elderly and that the occupational therapy service would be one which would be considered at an early stage of the process.

Councillor P M D Godfrey drew attention to a perceived disparity of treatment and standard of health care available around the country which had led to some being more proactive than others in early diagnosis of health problems. He questioned whether Hunts Health would seek to encourage consistency across GP practices and discontinue local rationing to avoid raising patients' expectations about the level of service they may be likely to receive. In reply, Dr Brown acknowledged that there was a requirement to standardise care and, whilst levels of primary care in Huntingdonshire were good he was aware that services in some areas were more variable. He added that the new consortia approach would present an opportunity to improve standards across the District and that this represented one of the objectives of the new organisation.

Councillor Hansard drew attention to the proposal which suggested that the consortia would be required to monitor their own performance. Dr Brown indicated that he was unable to comment in detail on how this would be achieved but it was his expectation that guidance would become available to assist and encourage GPs to participate in a form of appraisal process.

Whilst commending the new approach, Councillor P J Downes raised two concerns relating to the importance of the relationship between GP practices and children's centres and the need to maintain enhanced levels of participation in patient groups. Dr Brown confirmed his support for the retention of both initiatives and reported that there would be a non-executive patient representative on the Hunts Health Board.

As Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates indicated the Council's willingness to engage with the consortia adding that the authority's involvement was essential to improve the health of residents in the District. He suggested that the new proposals represented, in his view, a return to GP group fund holding and that he would hope for their continued involvement in public health prevention so that issues relating to young smokers and obesity could continue to be addressed. Whilst there was some danger that preventative work might be lost, Dr Brown was hopeful that both local authorities and other agencies could progress joint initiatives but this would be subject to further discussions between partners.

Having commended the contents of the White Paper, Councillor P D Reeve asked about the practicalities and risk involved in its implementation. Dr Brown was of the view that the greatest risk to the process was failure, the loss of expertise and the difficulty in managing resources, including staff. However, if the proposal was to succeed it could result in less expensive, accessible and local health services.

To conclude the debate, Councillor Hansard thanked Dr Brown and Mrs Sergeant and colleagues for attending the Council meeting and for answering Members' questions.

## **35. FINANCIAL FORECAST**

With the assistance of a report by the Director of Commerce & Technology (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and referring to Minute No. 39, Item No. 20 post, the Executive Councillor for Finance & Customer Services addressed Members on the options available to the Council prior to commencement of the 2011/12 budget and medium term process. Mindful also of the outcome of the Government's comprehensive spending review to be announced on 20th October 2010, Councillor Rogers referred to a series of issues in detail.

Members were reminded that at 31st March 2010, the District Council had £15.9 million in revenue reserves and that £1.9 million had been set aside as a further contingency to meet any costs arising from steps which would be taken to achieve savings. Capital expenditure also was £6.2 million lower than budgeted. Councillor Rogers also explained and commended the continuation of the Council's approach to calculation of the Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). Given the uncertainty over the Revenue Support Grant, Councillor Rogers advised that the Council had anticipated a 25% reduction in grant over the next five years which could, with formula changes, result in the loss of grant amounting £2.8 million by 2014/15.

Having regard to the forecast gap in funding, the Executive Councillor described the options available to the Council to increase fees and charges, reduce services or facilities or delete services altogether. More positively, he added that there were opportunities to attract additional grants. Councillor Rogers concluded by referring to the programme for the budget process, which included the implementation of schemes for voluntary and compulsory redundancy, and by pointing out that there might be an opportunity for the Council in 2011/12 to consider raising council tax without the risk of capping or other Government restraints.

Responding to Councillor Rogers' address, Councillor G S E Thorpe indicated his concern that the Council was to embark on a scheme of voluntary redundancy without having a clear plan of the services which the Council wished to retain. Whilst noting the Member's view, Councillor Rogers informed the Council that the enhanced voluntary redundancy scheme would be offered to senior management in the first instance and that thereafter regard would be given to the outcome of the recent public consultation and views expressed by the business sector when reviewing service provision.

Councillor P D Reeve was of the opinion that the shortfall in Government funding to the District Council could be offset by the Government's contribution to the European Union when it should be used to protect jobs and services locally.

Councillor M F Shellens urged the Council not to under-estimate how difficult it would be to achieve £2 million of reduction in net costs in 2011/12 and was of the opinion that urgent consideration should be given by Members to the strategic direction of the Council in terms of the services it could continue to provide in the future.

Whereupon, upon being put to the vote, it was

## RESOLVED

that the report and challenges to be addressed over the next five months be noted.

### **36. EXECUTIVE POLICY ISSUE**

Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy & Transport updated the Council on the outcome of the recent Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment consultation exercise which had invited private and public land owners to identify land for the provision of future gypsy and traveller sites. Councillor Dew also advised the Council of the Government's latest statement in respect of gypsies and travellers issues.

The Council noted that the consultation had been successful in terms of the interest it had generated and that the events had been well attended. Some 3,000 representations regarding the appropriateness of potential sites had been received. Given the recent abolition of regional spatial strategies, Councillor Dew indicated that Government guidance appeared now to suggest that local authorities would be best placed to determine site provision for gypsies and travellers. The Government also currently was reviewing all relevant regulations and applicable planning policy guidance and pending the outcome of this review, Councillor Dew suggested that it would be inappropriate for the Council to make any decisions regarding site provision. However, he added that in this period of uncertainty, the Council would continue to robustly contest gypsy and traveller planning appeals and determine new proposals for temporary provision.

Having thanked the Executive Councillor for his statement, Councillor P M D Godfrey commented that the continuing uncertainty made it difficult for those Councillors with potential sites in their wards to be able to respond to residents. In acknowledging that the impasse was not helpful, Councillor Dew undertook to write on behalf of the Council to the appropriate Minister of State to request that the Government's review be concluded as quickly as possible. In answer to a similar question from Councillor Mrs Banerjee, Councillor Dew indicated his willingness to respond to enquiries from concerned residents should these be referred to him. In the meantime, he undertook to forward a copy of his statement to all Councillors.

Further to a question from Councillor P D Reeve, the Executive Councillor undertook to advise the questioner how many written representations submitted in response to the SHLAA exercise had been rejected because they were considered to be inappropriate. In conclusion and in answer to a question from Councillor S M van de Kerkhove, Councillor Dew concurred that whilst the current situation could result in an influx of planning applications, these would be determined in accordance with the development management process in the normal way.

### **37. DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE WORKING GROUP**

By reference to a report by the Working Group appointed to undertake a review of the democratic structure (a copy of which is

appended in the Minute Book), Councillor K Churchill, Executive Councillor for Resources & Policy reminded the Council of the details of two aspects of the review which remained to be concluded. These related to the format of the Employment Panel, arrangements for meetings of the Employee Liaison Advisory Group and the way in which former Members and leading citizens of Huntingdonshire could be formally recognised by the Council.

Having regard to the conclusions of the Working Group and the views of the Cabinet, the Council

#### RESOLVED

- (a) that no change be made to the terms of reference, composition, etc of the Employment Panel;
- (b) that with effect from 1st December 2010, the Employee Liaison Advisory Group comprise four Members of the Employment Panel, with meetings of ELAG being held approximately four weeks before meetings of the Employment Panel;
- (c) that the titles of Honorary Aldermen and Honorary Alderwomen be introduced for current and future Members of the Council who cumulatively have served a minimum of fifteen years as an elected Councillor on the District Council;
- (d) that, in the absence of any formal recognition currently for the Council to demonstrate its appreciation publicly to persons who have contributed to public life or the community in Huntingdonshire, the titles of Honorary Freeman and Honorary Freewoman be introduced by the Council;
- (e) that the Council Programme meeting, introduced as part of the Working's Group's initial proposals for the democratic structure review and comprising representatives of all political parties, be responsible for the identification of suitable individuals for the honorary titles referred to in resolutions (c) and (d) above; and
- (f) that a modest address or memento be awarded to qualifying individuals of honorary titles and produced in house by the authority.

#### **38. FORMAT OF THE COUNCIL'S EXECUTIVE: THE CHOICE OF EXECUTIVE LEADER OR ELECTED MAYOR**

Having regard to a report by the Head of Democratic & Central Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillor K Churchill, Executive Councillor for Resources & Policy reminded the Council of the requirement, under the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, to consider a new form of executive arrangement with effect from May 2011.

Councillor Churchill explained that the District Council had consulted

on two options – an executive leader or an elected mayor and that under both formats, the person elected or appointed would become responsible for the discharge of the Council’s executive functions. In accordance with the requirements of the Act, an extensive consultation exercise had been undertaken using a variety of measures from mid-May to the end of July. Whilst this had not attracted much interest, those who had responded had indicated a clear preference for an executive leader.

The Executive Councillor reminded the Council that it had previously accepted a recommendation from the Working Party not to hold a referendum on the choice of executive on the basis that this would lengthen the timescale for the consultation exercise and in the absence of any interest locally for an elected mayor, not justify the estimated cost of a referendum of approximately £125,000.

Having been satisfied that the consultation arrangements had been sufficient despite the poor response from the public, the Council

**RESOLVED**

that the proposals for a change in governance arrangements in accordance with the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 as set out in Appendix B attached to the report now submitted be approved and a formal resolution to change the governance arrangements submitted to a Special Meeting of the Council convened for the purpose.

**39. 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 22nd July and 16th September 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 20, it was noted that the recommendation had been considered previously under Minute No. 35 ante.

On the same subject, and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, the Leader, Councillor I C Bates undertook to consider the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the employment of external consultants at a future meeting of the Cabinet.

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In connection with Item No. 21, it was noted that the recommendation had been considered previously under Minute No. 38 ante.

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In connection with Item No. 24 and in response to a question from Councillor P L E Bucknell, Councillor D B Dew, Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy & Transport reported that Cambridgeshire County Council had taken a decision to delete £2 million from its transport budget which would have a consequential effect on the progress towards the introduction of civil parking enforcement. Councillor Dew indicated that he would keep the Council informed of developments in this regard.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 22nd July and 16th September 2010 be received and adopted.

**(b) Standards Committee**

Mr D L Hall presented the Report of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 8th July and 9th September 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 8th July and 9th September 2010 be received and adopted.

**(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)**

Councillor J D Ablewhite presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 15th July and 9th September 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 15th July and 9th September 2010 be received and adopted.

[In accordance with Council Procedure Rule No. 14.5, Councillor M F Shellens requested that it be recorded in the Minutes that he had abstained in the vote on the Motion.]

**(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)**

Councillor P M D Godfrey presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 13th July and 14th September 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 12 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, Councillor Godfrey reported that the Panel had not yet received a response from the Cabinet on the possibility of offering a package of help and guidance to town and parish councils to enable them to provide public conveniences if they chose to do so.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 13th July and 14th September 2010 be received and adopted.

**(e) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)**

Councillor R J West presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 6th July and 7th September 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 6th July and 7th September 2010 be received and adopted.

**(f) Development Management Panel**

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 19th July, 16th August and 20th September 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 19th July, 16th August and 20th September 2010 be received and adopted.

**(g) Employment Panel**

Councillor P A Swales presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 26th July 2010.

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In connection with Item No. 6, Councillor Swales expressed his appreciation to those Employees' Side representatives who had been involved in negotiations on the pay award for 2010/11 particularly given the difficult financial climate in which negotiations had taken place.

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In connection with Item No.7, Councillor Swales reported that the revised redundancy policy would now be sufficiently robust to be able to respond in the event that it was required to be used during the current legislative and economic climate.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 26th July 2010 be received and adopted.

**(h) Appointments Panel**

Councillor L M Simpson presented the Report of the meeting of the Appointments Panel held on 22nd July 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Appointments Panel held on 22nd July 2010 be received and adopted.

**(i) Corporate Governance Panel**

Councillor T D Sanderson presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 30th June 2010.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 30th June 2010 be received and adopted.

#### **40. ORAL QUESTIONS**

In accordance with the Council 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 P J Downes to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates**

Councillor Bates undertook to respond at the earliest opportunity to a question first asked by the questioner at the previous Council meeting in connection with the savings which had been achieved from the introduction of the doorstep collection of glass recyclables in the period 29th March - 4th May 2010.

##### **Question from Councillor D M Tysoe to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy & Transport, Councillor D B Dew**

In respond to a question regarding a requirement to review planning guidance on wind turbines and wind farms, Councillor Dew reported that it was not his intention to update the Council's current policies given that policy CS1 relating to applications of this nature, contained in the District Council's Core Strategy, had been adopted in September 2009 and that supplementary planning guidance was published in 2006. Both documents were available on the intranet/internet.

##### **Question from Councillor M F Shellens to the Executive Councillor for Finance & Customer Services, Councillor T V Rogers**

In response to a question regarding the Council's position in the table of authorities with the lowest council tax level in England and Wales, Councillor Rogers replied that Huntingdonshire was placed in twentieth position with a band D council tax of £124.48 with West Dorset District Council in twenty-first place with a band D council tax of £124.42.

##### **Question from Councillor R J West to the Deputy Leader, Councillor L M Simpson**

In response to a question regarding the importance of Member development, Councillor Simpson concurred with the questioner and added that consideration was being given to extending the training available in those specialist areas expected of the role and responsibilities of a Councillor.

##### **Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Chairman of the Council, Councillor J J Dutton**

In response to a question regarding the content of an article contained in the periodical "Private Eye", Councillor Dutton reaffirmed how privileged he felt to be able to fulfil the position of Chairman of

the Council.

**Question from Councillor B S Chapman to the Leader of the Council, Councillor I C Bates**

In response to a question regarding the level of investment recently made by the District Council in St Neots, Councillor Bates concurred with the questioner that recent investments had demonstrated the District Council's commitment and that work would continue to address existing and emerging issues in the town.

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

In response to a question regarding support for farmers markets in Huntingdonshire, Councillor Bates replied that he would verify his understanding of the support given to farmers markets by both the District and Town Councils and town centre initiatives and respond to the questioner in writing.

**Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy & Transport, Councillor D B Dew**

In response to a question regarding the benefit to Members of a training session on planning design and conservation issues, Councillor Dew undertook to look into the possibility of arranging such an event in the future.

**Question from Councillor D M Tysoe to the Executive Councillor for Environment and Information Technology, Councillor J A Gray**

In response to a question regarding the steps being taken by the District Council to expedite the connection of Hamerton village to main sewerage, Councillor Gray replied that he was aware that the existing system was not working satisfactorily but that the scheme of improvement was being progressed by a private company, albeit slowly, and that he and his colleague Executive Member, Councillor Dew, would seek to lobby for the scheme to be implemented as priority.

**Question from Councillor M F Shellens to the Chairman of the Council, Councillor J J Dutton**

In response to a question regarding the content of his letter to all Members dated 29th July 2010 concerning standards of behaviour and dress at Council meetings, Councillor Dutton confirmed that he had no intention of withdrawing the sentiments he had expressed in the letter at that time.

**41. MEMBERSHIP OF COUNCIL COMMITTEES AND PANELS**

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor P D Reeve indicated his wish to vary the membership of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) and accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor P D Reeve be appointed to replace Councillor A Monk in the membership of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) with immediate effect.

The meeting concluded at 9.50 pm.

Chairman