

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 20 October 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.
Councillors B S Chapman, J A Gray,
N J Guyatt, T D Sanderson and D M Tysoe.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors I C Bates, D B Dew, Mrs J Dew, J W Davies and A Williams.

46. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 22nd September 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

47. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor Chapman declared a personal interest in Minute No. 52 by virtue of his role as advisor to the Huntingdonshire Citizens' Advice Bureaux.

48. FINANCIAL MONITORING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2011/12

By means of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet was acquainted with anticipated cost variations and timing changes in the Capital Programme for the 2011/12 financial year.

In considering the main variations to the programme, Members have been advised of the early repayment of a mortgage by a Housing Association. Although this money could now be utilised to fund other schemes, Executive Councillors noted that the redemption would result in a significant loss of interest. Having suggested that any future loan be subject to an early repayment clause, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the report be received and the expenditure variations noted.

49. FINANCIAL MONITORING - REVENUE BUDGET 2011/12

The Cabinet received a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the projected budget outturn for 2011/12 together with details of variations from the previous forecast.

Members noted that the expected outturn of revenue expenditure was £22.2m which represented a reduction in the approved budget of £398,000. However, Executive Councillors acknowledged that some £3m of reserves was required to balance the budget. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

50. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANTS AND CHARGES ON PROPERTIES

Pursuant to Minute No 11/42 and by way of a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a proposal to put charges on properties to recover certain costs of Disabled Facilities Grants (DFGs) together with the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels (Social and Economic Well-Being) thereon.

Members were advised that the Housing Grants, Consultation and Regeneration Act (as amended) had given local authorities the discretion to impose a limited charge on adapted properties of owner occupiers for repayment if their property was sold within ten years and if the DFG cost more than £5,000. Having noted that the maximum that could be reclaimed was capped at £10,000 and in recognising that most adaptations do not add to the home's capital value with the exception of the garage and outbuilding conversions and extensions, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that charges be placed on properties where owner occupiers receive a disabled facilities grant in excess of £10,000 (excluding HIA fees) where the grant is for a garage or outbuilding conversion, or extension or any combination of these;
- (b) that the Heads of Legal and Democratic Services and of Housing Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, be authorised to determine the most effective and efficient procedure for placing charges on properties to include the development and adoption of a repayment scheme; and
- (c) that the Head of Housing Services be authorised to decide whether to seek repayment in accordance with paragraph 2.5 of the report now submitted.

51. CAMBRIDGESHIRE PUBLIC SECTOR ASSET MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

By way of a report by the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the background to the

Making Assets Count Programme and Cambridgeshire Public Sector Asset Management Strategy. The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

Members were advised that the Programme aimed to deliver high quality and effective management of public sector assets in Cambridgeshire. An essential part of this was the development of an Asset Management Strategy, bringing together public sector organisations across Cambridgeshire to develop a joined-up approach to the management and use of their property assets.

Having noted the benefits of sharing assets, proposals to establish a Project Board in each of the district areas and the terms of reference for the proposed Huntingdonshire Board, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that the Making Assets Count Programme and the establishment of a Huntingdonshire Making Assets Count Board be supported; and
- (c) that the Cambridgeshire Public Sector Asset Management Strategy be endorsed.

52. VOLUNTARY SECTOR REVIEW

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Environmental & Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the findings of a review of the Voluntary Sector Organisations that hold commissioning agreements with the Council. The report had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

Executive Councillors were advised that officers have met with representatives of the affected organisations to discuss the potential impact of a reduction in grant funding on service users, their ability to attract external funding and the organisations' capacity to use their financial reserves to offset any budget reductions.

In considering budget reductions, Members concurred with the Panel that a 50 % reduction in funding could place some of the organisations in a vulnerable position and may result in an increase in demand for services provided by the Council and other public sector service providers, the cost of which could exceed any grant reductions.

Particular reference was drawn to accommodation costs for some of the organisations, Members concurred with the panel that alternative accommodation options should be investigated with a view to achieving efficiencies.

Having acknowledged the excellent work of each of the organisations and in stressing the Council's commitment to supporting them, the

Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that officers be requested to continue negotiations with appropriate organisations and other statutory partners in an attempt to facilitate organisational change; and
- (c) that savings potential of alternative accommodation arrangements be investigated.

53. GREEN HOUSE PROJECT UPDATE

A report by the Head of Environmental Management was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress on the Council's Green House Project, together with the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) thereon.

By way of background, Members were advised that the scheme had been an exemplar project which had successfully demonstrated practical and appropriate cost-effective retrofit energy efficiency, renewable energy and water efficiency measures.

Members' attention was drawn to three possible options for the future of the properties the first being, the sale of both properties in line with the current Medium Term Plan and two further options to enable the retention of the St Ives Green House as a showcase property until the end of the financial year 2013/14

Having concurred with the Panel that more efforts should be made to promote the project and in suggesting that alternative names should be explored to avoid any confusion over the "Greenhouse" title, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the St Ives Green House be retained until March 2014 and the St Neots property rented with the additional revenue costs being met from the existing Environmental Projects revenue budget;
- (b) that the development of the project as the main mechanism for the Council to deliver the Government's Green Deal initiative in conjunction with project partners be supported, subject to its rebranding; and
- (c) that a further report on progress of the Project be submitted to Cabinet in October 2012.

54. ST. IVES WEST URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

(Councillors I C Bates, J W Davies, Mrs J A Dew and A Williams – local ward Members and Councillor D B Dew, Chairman of the Development Management Panel, were in attendance and spoke on this item)

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the content of the draft St Ives West Urban Design Framework, produced as guidance in order to shape the delivery of housing and new strategic green space within this area in accordance with the strategic direction of growth identified within the adopted Core Strategy.

The Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, explained that the title of the finalised document would be "St Ives West Urban Design Framework" and to avoid any confusion regarding the proposed status of the guidance the sub-title references in the draft document, specifically "Planning Brief 2011", "Supplementary Planning Document" and "Planning Policy Document" would be deleted from the finalised document.

Executive Councillors were of the opinion that on balance the framework would bring forward high quality residential development, with an associated large publicly accessible area of green open space, which it is intended would be transferred into public ownership and would serve to protect St Ives town and the village of Houghton & Wyton from inappropriate development. Members were specifically reminded that the planning guidance contained within the document was not intended to define, presume or endorse the release of sites with the area, nor constitute any formal site allocation.

In reviewing the issues involved, the Cabinet considered comments by Councillors Bates and Williams on the responses in the consultation document and the concerns held by the residents of Houghton & Wyton regarding the inadequate area of green space separation between the village and St Ives, the impact of the framework on traffic on the A1123 and to issues questioning the documents legal status. At the same time, Councillors Mrs J Dew and Davies, ward Members for St Ives, and Councillor D B Dew as Chairman of the Development Management Panel addressed the Cabinet in support of the document.

Having considered the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being), the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the Head of Planning Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing and the Chairman of the Development Management Panel, be authorised to finalise and approve the St Ives West Urban Design Framework as planning guidance to inform Council policy and future decisions on potential development applications.

55. SAFETY ADVISORY PANEL

The report of the Safety Advisory Panel held on 7th September 2011 was received and noted.

Chairman