

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, 22 February 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor J J Dutton – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar,
M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates,
Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, G J Bull,
E R Butler, S Cawley, B S Chapman,
W T Clough, S J Criswell, I J Curtis,
J W Davies, D B Dew, P J Downes,
R S Farrer, P M D Godfrey, P Godley,
J A Gray, S Greenall, N J Guyatt, A Hansard,
G J Harlock, R Harrison, D Harty, R B Howe,
C R Hyams, A R Jennings,
S M Van De Kerkhove, Mrs P J Longford,
A J Mackender-Lawrence, P G Mitchell,
P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers,
T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, P A Swales,
R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, P R Ward, J S Watt,
R J West and A H Williams.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker, K J Churchill, Mrs J A Dew, Mrs P A Jordan and P K Ursell.

52. PRAYER

Prior to commencement of the formal proceedings, the Right Reverend D Thomson, Bishop of Huntingdon invited those present to join him in Prayer.

53. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Former Councillor J C Mugglestone

It was with great sadness that the Chairman confirmed the recent death of former Councillor J C Mugglestone who had served the Council with distinction for over 28 years as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of various Committees and of the Council.

His successor as Ward Councillor for Kimbolton and Stoneley, Councillor J A Gray paid a personal tribute to Mr Mugglestone for the help and support he had offered to him over many years and suspected that, given his love of planning, he would have welcomed the opportunity to have taken part in the debate which was to follow.

The Council stood for a few moments in silent tribute to their former colleague.

(b) **Councillor M G Baker**

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman congratulated Councillor M G Baker on his award of an MBE in the New Year's Honours.

(c) **Her Majesty The Queen's 60th Anniversary and Chairman's Grants**

The Chairman informed the Council that he had written formally to the Queen, on behalf of the Council, to congratulate her on the 60th Anniversary of her accession to the throne. He also updated Members on his decision to award grants totalling £2,500 to various local charities and organisations.

(d) **Events**

The Chairman announced that a collection at the Holocaust Memorial Service on 24th January 2012 held at St. Mary's Church, Huntingdon had raised £237 which had been donated to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

Councillor Dutton looked forward to his Chairman's Reception to be held on 16th March 2012 at the Wood Green Animal Shelter and invited those Members who wished to join him on the evening to obtain their tickets soon.

(e) **Good News**

Having been reminded of the Council's involvement in RECAP, the waste partnership, the Chairman announced that a design guide produced by the Partnership had been nominated for a Royal Town Planning Institute Award.

54. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 14th December 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

The Chairman invited the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite to update the Council on the content of correspondence received from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government in response to the Motion on Council Tax carried unanimously at the last meeting.

The Executive Leader was pleased to report that the Secretary of State had accepted the view of the District Council that the current methodology for the calculation of Council Tax was too complex and inflexible for application across all Councils. Whilst it was too late to vary the approach for the forthcoming financial year, the Secretary had indicated a willingness to consider representations for future years. Councillor Ablewhite reported that the Council would continue to lobby the Government in support of the agreed joint Motion. Whilst pleased to hear this response from the Secretary of State, Councillor P J Downes, Leader of the Opposition, requested that, as the

response appeared to convey a matter of principle, the Executive Leader share the information with the Local Government Association.

55. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor P J Downes declared a personal interest in Minute No. 57 given the potential for consideration of grant funding to the voluntary sector under this item and his family relationship with an employee of the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Councillor J J Dutton declared a personal interest in Minute No. 57 by virtue of his appointment as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor to the Board of Directors, Citizens' Advice Bureau.

56. COUNCIL DEBATE

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. 56 during which time the Common Law Rules of Debate be observed by Members and applied by the Chairman.

The Chairman invited the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt to open the debate by introducing Dr M Bingham, Deputy Director, Department of Communities and Local Government who was present to explain how the proposed planning system might operate in practice in Huntingdonshire.

By way of a powerpoint presentation, Dr Bingham explained that it was the Government's vision to devolve power, controls and responsibility to the lowest possible levels of authority such as Town and Parish Councils, Districts and in some instances, even individuals. It was the objective to encourage citizens to become active in driving improvements in their local areas and to generate the idea of local ownership and democratic control of communities and the life of individuals. He added that this ethos was particularly fundamental in planning as it was hoped it would deliver a plan-led system that empowered local people to shape their surroundings whilst facilitating sustainable growth and encouraging the idea that development could positively develop a community.

To secure these changes, Dr Bingham described the various forms which had been proposed by the Government. Principally these were led by the Localism Act which, in terms of planning, would abolish regional strategies, expect local authorities to address cross-boundary issues in Plans, offer Town and Parish Councils the opportunity to produce neighbourhood plans and introduce the community infrastructure levy to channel, more effectively, the contributions received from developers towards those communities in which development might take place. In addition, the Act would place an obligation on developers to consult those most likely to be

affected by way of comprehensive pre-application consultation. Decision making on major infrastructure also would be returned to Ministers.

The second major Reform would be the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) – which would contain streamlined and accessible national planning policy designed to promote sustainable development whilst protecting and enhancing the natural historic environment. It was the expectation that the final version of the Framework would be published at the end of March. Dr Bingham drew attention to several issues in the Framework which included the commitment to a “Town Centre First” policy, requirements for market and affordable housing, green belt protection and policies on low carbon renewable energy and development in flood risk areas. Lastly, the Council was informed that it was the Government’s intention to de-regulate and simplify the planning system by reviewing the Use Classes Order, widening permitted development rights and requiring the determination of applications within specified timescales.

In terms of the responsibility of a local planning authority, Dr Bingham reminded Members that Huntingdonshire would need to maintain an up to date local plan, which as far as possible, met the needs of the area, provided support to neighbourhood planning bodies, thought strategically about infrastructure planning and streamlined local procedures. Despite all these requirements, Dr Bingham assured the Council that the basic elements of planning remained the same and that local planning authorities remained at the heart of the planning system.

In the questions that followed, Dr Bingham confirmed, in response to a question from Councillor R J West, that the framework did not contain specific proposals to strengthen the role of the planning authority in the protection of existing heritage and conservation.

Whilst welcoming the Government’s intention to simplify the planning system, Councillor M F Shellens drew attention to the continuing conflict between those who wished to protect the green belt and those who wanted to build houses. Dr Bingham suggested that whilst this would always remain a problem for planners, the Government was at least hopeful of involving communities in neighbourhood planning, establishing compulsory community engagement and providing incentives to accept development in suitable locations by the provision of CIL. Councillor J A Gray raised the issue of wind farms and his frustration at the inability to penalise retrospective planning applications. In conceding that the development of wind farms would continue to be an emotive issue, Dr Bingham could not anticipate any change in the Government’s approach to their location. He added that freedom to allow local authorities to set their own planning fees still was under consideration by Ministers although there was a general direction in place to assist local authorities in establishing strong measures to address those who choose to develop without permission.

Referring to the District Council’s aborted consultation on gypsies and travellers, Councillor P M D Godfrey asked what the timescale would be for the issue of Government Policy in this respect given the difficulty in which the District had found itself in having to respond to

applications and appeals. Dr Bingham confirmed that the Council's approach to such applications should remain un-changed at present. Whilst the Government had undertaken specific consultation on gypsies and travellers he was unable to comment on how this would be taken forward.

In response to a series of questions from Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, R S Farrer, P G Mitchell and T V Rogers, Dr Bingham replied that the position of an Inspector should be strengthened by the NPPF and the duty to publish a local plan, that the involvement of Councillors in the planning process should remain unchanged, that a local plan should continue to prescribe the design standards which a local authority might aspire to and that design briefs would continue to play an important role in this respect and that the duty to co-operate would form one of the tests of soundness for local plans as authorities would have to demonstrate that they have consulted adequately.

Referring to the objective in the NPPF – Planning for People, Councillor P J Downes discussed the situation whereby there were insufficient smaller homes available in villages for elderly people and a tendency for the planning system to reject such development when it came forward. Dr Bingham suggested that key to the new system would be the opportunity for a community to realise small development through a neighbourhood plan order and the community right to build. Planning policy would not be as restrictive as previously in this respect.

In answer to a further series of questions from Councillors J D Ablewhite, S M Van De Kerkhove and P D Reeve, Dr Bingham commented that the new system presented a genuine opportunity for a community to realise a specific scheme within its area providing that such development did not depart from strategic policy, that the general provision for referendum had been deleted from the Localism Bill, that neighbourhood plans would be required to “fit” local plans and consequently accord with the national framework and that neighbourhood planning could not be used as a means to block development. Dr Bingham reaffirmed his understanding that there would be no change to the role of the Planning Inspectorate. In his view, the Inspectorate was a highly respected body with a good reputation. He added that it was important to retain an independent body to satisfy the right of an individual to a second opinion. Finally, Dr Bingham confirmed that should it be established that a statutory body had not acted reasonably in advice which may have been given to a local planning authority, that body could be made liable for costs in the event of a successful appeal.

Councillor Guyatt thanked Dr Bingham for his presentation and concluded by urging the Government to allow local authorities to set the level of Council Tax to meet the cost of necessary infrastructure that CIL alone could not provide and that such investment be directed towards the eastern region and the areas which generally are generating most growth.

57. MEDIUM TERM PLAN, BUDGET AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

(See Minute No. 55 for Members' Interests.)

In conjunction with a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and Item Nos. 56 and 57 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Executive Councillor for Resources addressed the Council on the Medium Term Plan, 2012/2013 budget and related prudential indicators contained in the Treasury Management Strategy and moved the recommendations of the Cabinet.

In accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, the Council also considered proposals for the levels of Council Tax in 2012/2013 for various parts of the Huntingdonshire District.

In his opening remarks, Councillor Gray acknowledged the contribution made to the budgetary process by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and Members of the business community. He also described the approach taken by the Cabinet towards Treasury Management which had involved a degree of risk management in seeking to achieve a balance between investment and return. He suggested that the Council continue to be prudent in the management of its borrowing and investments.

Although not wishing to repeat the points raised at the last meeting, Councillor Gray made reference to several other issues which would impact on the budget. The most significant of these related to pay and allowances, voluntary sector and disabled facilities grants and a proposed new homes bonus of £1.913m which was £37,000 greater than previously forecast. In terms of risks and reserves, Councillor Gray referred to the examples which had been used to measure the potential impact of various international financial issues on the Council's financial position and how these had been used to establish a lower end figure for inclusion in the budget as the risk provision and a higher end figure in the event that an extra level of risk might emerge. At the suggestion of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and having regard to the advice contained in Annexes C and D hereto, the proposed budget was based on not allowing reserves to fall below £4.5m. With the assistance of the Panel, this position would be reviewed again in September to ensure it remained appropriate.

Having regard to Council Tax levels, the Executive Councillor for Resources advised the Council that although acutely aware of the difficulty any increase in Council Tax could present to those with limited incomes, the Cabinet had decided not to recommend acceptance of the Government's offer of a 2.5% increase in grant as this would place the Council at a clear disadvantage in the future and make it difficult to manage innovatively to preserve valued services.

Having regard to the view expressed by the Council on the draft budget and MTP at the last meeting, the Executive Councillor described the significant adjustments which had been made to the budget since then which now included a major proportion of the

voluntary sector grant budget and funding for CCTV and service centres in St. Neots and Yaxley which has specifically been highlighted to Members. Councillor Gray believed that the proposed budget had achieved a balance which protected services for residents and met the responsibilities of the Council as an employer. In commending the proposed budget and MTP to the Council, Councillor Gray reminded Members that a significant effort would be required to maintain current achievement of a balanced budget and he called on all Members to continue to work together to generate new ideas to provide a continuing sound financial basis for the future.

In response, Councillor P J Downes, on behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group indicated that it would not be his intention to propose an amendment to the budget given the opportunity offered to comment on it through the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and in view of the limited flexibility which remained to vary it further. Councillor Downes acknowledged that potentially, the Council's financial situation would remain uncertain for many years but he welcomed the strenuous efforts which had been made to make savings. He particularly commended the decision of staff to accept a pay freeze in 2012/2013 but suggested that next year's pay award should seek to reduce the differential between those on higher and lower grades. Whilst welcoming the re-instatement of part of the voluntary sector grants budget, Councillor Downes expressed concern at the potential impact of forthcoming changes to benefit legislation on the voluntary sector but welcomed the sensible collaboration between neighbouring authorities in the sharing of services suggesting that council tax collection could be a possible shared service in the future.

Regarding the long term structure of the Council, Councillor Downes suggested that consideration should be given to a reduction in the overall size of Council membership and the Cabinet and in the number of senior staff. In terms of the former he contended that an opportunity to review Ward boundaries in future years could reduce the number of Councillors from 52 to 39 and save an estimated £160,000 - £170,000 per annum.

Having also commended work undertaken on the proposed budget, Councillor S Greenall reiterated his concern at the cost of hire staff and consultants with the latter well in excess of the sum originally budgeted. He added that he had enjoyed his role as Vice-Chairman on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and the detailed work undertaken by the Panel on One Leisure and the Document Centre which had uncovered an opportunity to save approximately £21,000 on external printing. Councillor Greenall also commended the staff employed in the document centre.

As Executive Leader, Councillor Ablewhite referred to the extensive discussions with the voluntary sector which had led to the reinstatement of grant funding. In particular, Councillor Ablewhite indicated that the Citizens Advice Bureau had received 88% of its funding from the District Council which compared very favourably with the contributions made by neighbouring authorities. Whilst lower than in previous years, the Bureau had indicated their availability to work within reduced parameters and given an assurance that voluntary groups would not suffer because of any reduction proposed.

A Motion for a recorded vote having been LOST, it was moved by Councillor J A Gray, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

- (a) that the proposed budget for 2012/2013, Medium Term Plan for 2013 – 2017 and financial plan as set out in Appendix A to the report by the Head of Financial Services now submitted be approved;
- (b) that the Treasury Management Strategy and prudential indicators as set out in Appendix B to the report by the Head of Financial Services now submitted be approved;
- (c) that a Council Tax increase of £4.34 (3.5%) representing a level of £1.28.51 for a Band D Property be approved for 2012/2013;
- (d) that the Council note the Council Tax Base for the whole Council area and individual Towns and Parishes (set out below) as approved by the Chief Officers' Management Team on the 5 December 2011 under delegated powers.

The tax base (T) which is the amount anticipated from a District Council Tax of £1 is £60,125.

- (e) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2012/13 in accordance with the requirements of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 as amended by the Localism Act 2011 (the Act) :-

- (i) the aggregate of the **£86,444,605** amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A(2) (a) to (f) of the Act

Gross revenue expenditure including benefits, Town/Parish Precepts

- (ii) the aggregate of the **£74,010,336** amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 31A (3) (a) to (d) of the Act

Revenue income including reimbursement of benefits, specific and general grants, use of reserves and any transfers from the collection fund.

- (iii) the amount by which the aggregate at (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (ii) above in accordance with Section 31A (4) of the Act **£12,434,269**

This is the "Council Tax Requirement" including Parish/Town Precepts (item i minus item ii). It is the cash sum to be funded from District, Town and Parish Council Taxes.

- (iv) the Council Tax requirement for 2012/13 divided by the tax base (T) in accordance with Section 31B (1) of the Act **£206.81**

District plus average Town/Parish Council Tax (item iii divided by District taxbase)

- (v) the aggregate of all "Special Items" referred to in Section 34(1) of the Act. **£4,707,605**

The total value of Parish/Town precepts included in i and iii above.

- (vi) the Basic Amount of Council Tax for 2012/13 being item iv less item v divided by the tax base (T) in accordance with Section 34 (2) of the Act. **£128.51**

The District Council's Band D Tax for 2012/13.

- (vii) the basic amounts of Council Tax for 2012/13 for those parts of the District to which one or more special items (Parish/Town precepts) 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 to the Agenda.

- (viii) the amounts to be taken into account for 2012/13 in respect of categories of dwellings listed in particular 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 to the Agenda.
- (f) that the amounts of precept issued to the Council by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority and Cambridgeshire & 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 to the Agenda be noted; and
- (g) that, having regard to the calculations above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Act, hereby sets the figures shown in Table 2 as the amounts of Council Tax for 2012/13 for each of the categories of dwelling shown. ***This is the total Council Tax to be collected, incorporating the requirements of all of the relevant bodies, for each town or parish area.***

TAXBASE 2012/13

	£
Abbotsley	249
Abbots Ripton	127
Alconbury	561
Alconbury Weston	276
Alwalton	125
Barham & Woolley	26
Bluntisham	750
Brampton	1,820
Brinton & Molesworth	136
Broughton	87
Buckden	1,170
Buckworth	50
Bury	610
Bythorn & Keyston	137
Catworth	144
Chesterton	59
Colne	360
Conington	73
Covington	43
Denton & Caldecote	25
Diddington	28
Earith	580
Easton	72
Ellington	233
Elton	294

Farcet	580
Fenstanton	1,170
Folksworth & Washingley	342
Glatton	132
Godmanchester	2,455
Grafham	237
Great & Little Gidding	122
Great Gransden	458
Great Paxton	370
Great Staughton	325
Haddon	25
Hail Weston	235
Hamerton & Steeple Gidding	53
Hemingford Abbots	333
Hemingford Grey	1,195
Hilton	452
Holme	239
Holywell-cum-Needingworth	985
Houghton & Wyton	805
Huntingdon	7,465
Kimbolton & Stonely	600
Kings Ripton	83
Leighton Bromswold	85
Little Paxton	1,340
Morborne	10
Offord Cluny & Offord D'Arcy	510
Old Hurst	98
Old Weston	90
Perry	262
Pidley-cum-Fenton	152
Ramsey	2,930
St Ives	5,840
St Neots	10,820
Sawtry	1,725
Sibson-cum-Stibbington	215
Somersham	1,395
Southoe & Midloe	158
Spaldwick	235
Stilton	795
Stow Longa	64
The Stukeleys	415
Tilbrook	111
Toseland	38
Upton & Coppingford	87
Upwood & The Raveleys	430
Warboys	1,375
Waresley-cum-Tetworth	146
Water Newton	40
Winwick	40
Wistow	216
Woodhurst	152
Woodwalton	85
Wyton-on-the-Hill	425
Yaxley	3,000
Yelling	145

DISTRICT COUNCIL TOTAL 60,125

58. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

In compliance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011, the Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor N J Guyatt presented a report by the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached the District Council's pay policy statement for 2012/2013. The statement, which was required to be approved by the Council by 31st March 2012, would now be produced annually and would detail the Council's policies relating to officer remuneration.

Having reported that the Returning Officer had waived his entitlement to an election fee and that the post had responsibility for District Council elections only, it was MOVED by Councillor Guyatt, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

that the pay policy statement for 2012/2013 be approved.

59. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

(a) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 19th January and 16th February 2012.

.....

In connection with Item No. 56, it was noted that the recommendations had been considered previously under Minute No. 57.

.....

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

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 19th January and 16th February 2012 be received and adopted.

(b) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Councillor T V Rogers presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 5th January and 2nd February 2012.

.....

In connection with Item No. 39 and in response to a question from Councillor Greenall, Councillor T V Rogers concurred with the suggestion that those voluntary organisations that currently had service level agreements with the Council should receive guidance from the Council for financial planning purposes, in the event that they do not continue to benefit from the same level of funding in the future.

.....

In connection with Item No. 40 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor T V Rogers confirmed that he also had concerns regarding the potential impact on Huntingdonshire of changes to the Housing Benefits system but that the Panel had been advised that in the absence of any accurate estimate of any impact, it was not practical to make provision in the 2012/2013 budget for any increase in homelessness that might result.

.....

In connection with Item No. 46, Councillor T V Rogers announced that the District Council's Call Centre had recently been commended by external assessment and would be used as a model to illustrate excellent practice to other authorities. Councillor Rogers congratulated staff on this achievement.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 5th January and 2nd February 2012 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor P M D Godfrey presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 10th January and 9th February 2012.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 10th January and 9th February 2012 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 3rd January and 7th February 2012.

.....

In connection with Item No. 48 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Criswell reported that he would expect to receive an announcement shortly on the proposed future for the Mental Health facility in Acer Ward at Hinchingsbrooke Hospital.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 3rd January and 7th February 2012 be received and adopted.

(e) **Development Management Panel**

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 19th December 2011 and 16th January 2012.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 19th December 2011 and 16th January 2012 be received and adopted .

(f) **Licensing and Protection Panel**

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 25th January 2012.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 25th January 2012 be received and adopted.

(g) **Employment Panel**

Councillor P A Swales presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 8th February 2012.

.....
Councillor Swales asked the Council to join him in congratulating Mr T Newland on his 22 years of service in local government and in sending best wishes to him for his retirement.

.....
Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 8th February 2012 be received and adopted.

60. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

As the Council wished to discuss items which were confidential, it was

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting as the business to be transacted contained exempt information under paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972.

(Councillor C R Hyams declared a personal interest in the following Item by virtue of his membership of Huntingdon Town Council.)

In connection with Item No. 43 of the Report of the Cabinet and in response to a question from Councillor P D Reeve, Councillor Ablewhite advised Members that the Council continued to provide a CCTV service to the market towns but such provision could be enhanced should the Town Councils wish to contribute towards the cost. He confirmed that Ramsey Town Council had acknowledged the requirement for a higher level of provision and thus had contributed to a continued CCTV service in the Town.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor C R Hyams regarding the current position on the possibility of Cambridgeshire Constabulary contributing towards the cost of the CCTV service, the Executive Councillor for Healthy & Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson confirmed that currently the Police did not contribute to the cost of the service, that charges would be imposed for use and that a PCSO supervised the control room when no District Council staff were available.

.....

In connection with Item No. 18 of the Report of the Employment Panel and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Ablewhite acknowledged the contribution made to the Authority by its staff and assured the Council that the new approach to sickness absence reporting would ensure that any new employment policies in this respect in the future would be based upon accurate and meaningful information.

.....

On the conclusion of questions on those items considered to be confidential, it was

RESOLVED

that the press and public be re-admitted to the meeting.

61. 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 R Harrison to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question regarding the progress of the Armed Forces Community Covenant, Councillor Ablewhite advised Members that Cambridgeshire County Council, as Lead Authority, had set up a Working Group to consider practical ways in which to support the covenant and that he understood from his discussions with the Deputy Leader of the County Council that consultation on the way forward would begin shortly.

.....

Question from Councillor C R Hyams to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

Following a question regarding support for Huntingdon Community Radio and a suggestion that the station might be broadcast in the Leisure Centres and other appropriate places, Councillor Ablewhite asked the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson to look into this possibility.

.....

Question from Councillor M F Shellens to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question which highlighted that visitor displays had not been updated to reflect recent changes in Huntingdon Town Centre, Councillor Ablewhite commented that this only served to illustrate how much the District Council had committed to the Town over the year in terms of new and planned development. Whilst it was disappointing that the Town had lost certain retail chains, he was

aware that the Town Centre Manager worked hard to ensure all shop units remained full.

.....

Question from Councillor Mrs M Banerjee to the Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor B S Chapman

In response to a question regarding staffing issues at the Yaxley Community Information Centre, Councillor Chapman confirmed that a new member of staff had been appointed and it was expected that the Centre in Yaxley would operate from the beginning of April on Wednesday and Friday between 9.00am – 4.30pm and on Tuesday and Thursday in Ramsey. The Centres would be closed over lunch from 12 – 1pm. Councillor Chapman undertook to respond to the questioner in writing on the savings which had been achieved from the reduction in the service.

.....

Question from Councillor M F Shellens to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question regarding the future of the development of Huntingdon Town Centre in the event that Churchmanor Estates chose to withdraw its support for the scheme, Councillor Ablewhite assured the Council that the benefits of the project overwhelmingly outweighed the minimal risk associated with the scheme, that he was confident that pro-active investment in the Town Centres would bring longevity and generate increased business and that the relocation of Sainsburys and improvements to the Huntingdon link road were key to encouraging other development to take place.

.....

Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a question regarding the potential for land in Brington and Bythorn to be used as an alternative location for former residents of Dale Farm, Councillor Guyatt assured the questioner that the Enforcement Section in the Planning Division would monitor the sites in question to ensure that no unauthorised occupation would occur and that in the absence of new National Planning Guidance on Gypsies and Travellers any applications for the extension of temporary or permanent positions would be determined by the District Council in the light of current District Council policy and Planning Regulations.

.....

Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor B S Chapman

In response to a question regarding the intention of the District Council to develop a protocol for the distribution of the new homes

bonus, Councillor Chapman replied that he was aware that one District Council had embarked upon a consultation process with Parish Councils whereby such authorities could apply to them for a percentage of the new homes bonus for use towards infrastructure in their communities but that other authorities appeared to have adopted the same practice as Huntingdonshire and were using funds for the benefit of the District as a whole. Councillor Chapman was of the view that the model used was not one that Huntingdonshire should follow.

.....

**Question from Councillor P D Reeve to the Executive Leader,
Councillor J D Ablewhite**

In response to a question regarding the improvement of communications with Members, Councillor Ablewhite reported that, whilst there were many opportunities for Members to access information, it was the role of the new Corporate Team to improve communications with local Members.

**Question from Councillor R S Farrer to the Executive Leader,
Councillor J D Ablewhite**

Further to an earlier question, Councillor Ablewhite undertook to discuss the possibility of District Council support for local radio stations.

The meeting ended at 10.05pm.

Chairman