

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 13th September 2012.

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

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Mrs M Banerjee for Item No. 34.

32. COUNCILLOR N J GUYATT

Having been advised of Councillor N J Guyatt's ill health, the Cabinet expressed their good wishes for his speedy recover.

33. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 19th July 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

34. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

35. DESIGN PRINCIPLES FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

(Councillor Mrs M Banerjee, Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel [Environmental Well-Being] was in attendance and spoke on this item.)

The Cabinet considered a report of a Working Group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to examine concerns raised over the Loves Farm development in St Neots and to make recommendations to inform future developments.

It was reported that the Working Group had investigated various issues causing concern to residents living on the development over access routes to and within the site, the density of housing and prevalence of affordable housing. In order to obtain an objective assessment from a planning prospective, a building for life assessment had been completed by the Working Group which rated the site as a 'silver' standard.

In reviewing the Working Group's recommendations, Executive Councillors noted four principal actions that would be introduced as part of the next phase of the development including better co-operation with the Highways Authority and the Environment Agency, improved targeted design policies in the New Local Plan and extra engagement with residents in neighbouring areas.

Having acknowledged the steps being undertaken to deal with residents' concerns and in thanking the Working Group for their

efforts in producing a thorough and comprehensive report, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

36. FINANCIAL FORECAST

By way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet were acquainted with the present position in relation to the Council's financial forecast for the period up to 2016/17 together with the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) thereon.

In considering the information contained in the report, Members have been informed of progress to date in the achievement of savings and have acknowledged the uncertainty surrounding the forecast and a number of assumptions which will be clarified over the next few months. Particular attention was drawn to the Localisation of Business Rates and Council Tax Benefits, changes to Council Tax allowances and the New Homes Bonus for 2013/14.

It was reported that Working Groups had been established by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) to review the Council's current and future borrowing and to examine the Council's level of reserves.

Having requested Officers to review the level and predictions for New Homes Bonus on a quarterly basis, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report be noted;
- (b) that the annuity basis for the calculation of Minimum Revenue Provision as set out in Annex B to the report submitted be approved; and
- (c) that Council be requested to consider the contents of the report now submitted and the challenges that need to be addressed over the coming months.

37. THE TECHNICAL REFORM OF COUNCIL TAX

A report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) was submitted summarising the Government's proposals to reform Council Tax with effect from 1st April 2013 and the consequential implications to the District Council. The report had been considered also by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

Executive Councillors were advised that the Government intends to give local authorities the discretion to set the level and period of charge for unoccupied and unfurnished domestic properties, second homes and uninhabitable properties. Furthermore, a billing authority

would have the option to levy an empty premium on properties left vacant for over two years.

Having noted the potential income which could be generated from the reforms and referring to the likely reduction in revenue from the Localisation of Council Tax Rebates, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report now submitted be noted;
- (b) that, subject to the enactment of the relevant legislation and in order to prepare financial forecasts and a draft budget, the following changes to Council Tax Policy be agreed in principle:-
 - (i) that unoccupied and unfurnished (Class C) properties be granted a 100% discount for one month and then 0% thereafter;
 - (ii) that second home discounts be reduced to 0%;
 - (iii) that uninhabitable properties (Class A) be granted 100% discount for a maximum of twelve months (no change);
 - (iv) that empty homes premium be levied after two years at 50% in addition to the 100% charge currently made; and
 - (v) that monthly instalments continue to be due on the 15th day of each month (extended to those who request 12 monthly instalments) but Managers be permitted to include an additional later instalment date purely as an incentive for those opting to pay by direct debit; and
- (c) that the publication of a Cambridgeshire Council Tax booklet be supported and the Council's continued involvement in this area of joint working approved.

38. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FROM 1ST APRIL 2013

With the assistance a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet were presented with details of a local Council Tax Support Scheme which would replace the current national Council Tax Benefit Scheme from 1st April 2013.

Members were informed that under the new arrangements the Council would be subjected to a reduction in funding of at least 10% which will have an impact on the £8.1m awarded in Council Tax Benefit per annum to around 9,400 claimants. Executive Councillors were advised that pensioners and the most vulnerable claimants must be protected from any changes and receive the same amount of support that they would under the current scheme. In that respect, the Cabinet has concurred with the views of the Overview and Scrutiny

Panel (Economic Well-Being) that the funding shortfall should not be passed onto the remaining recipients of support and that the Council should make up part of the difference. In that respect, Executive Councillors were advised that the Council would be in a position to offset some of the costs by generating extra income under the new Council Tax Support Scheme.

With regard to the current consultation exercise being undertaken on the new arrangements, Executive Councillors recognised that not all Council Tax payers would be consulted and concurred with the Panel that this should be taken into account when all the responses are analysed.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

39. JOINT STATEMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND PETERBOROUGH BY THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES

By way of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet was invited to consider the contents of a Joint Statement on the Development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by the Local Authorities which would be used in the development of new local plans. The Statement had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

Members were advised that the document was an update of the first Joint Statement developed in 2010 and now incorporated Peterborough Unitary Authority as well as the Cambridgeshire Authorities. It would provide a basis for the authorities to continue to work together at a strategic level across administrative boundaries and to plan effectively for growth.

RESOLVED

that the contents of the Joint Statement on the Development Strategy for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough by the local authorities be endorsed.

40. NEW GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES ON THE HOME ENERGY CONSERVATION ACT 1995 (HECA) AND DELIVERY OF THE GREEN DEAL IN HUNTINGDONSHIRE

A report by the Head of Environment Management was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) seeking the Cabinet's view on the content of guidance produced by the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change requiring all local authorities with housing responsibility to prepare reports by 31st March 2013 setting out plans to implement practical, cost effective energy conservation measures to achieve significant improvements in the energy efficiency of residential accommodation in their areas.

In considering the information contained in the report, Executive Councillors' attention was drawn to the Government's flagship environmental initiative the "Green Deal". The initiative would provide householders with up-front loan finance for installing cost effective energy efficiency measures in their homes and would be available for commercial and public buildings.

Members noted that about 70% of Huntingdonshire's housing stock was likely to have some potential for green deal measures. Having acknowledged the benefits of working in partnership with commercial Green Deal providers and community partners to facilitate and deliver a local scheme, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that further work be undertaken by Officers of the Environment Team, in conjunction with Officers from other Cambridgeshire Authorities, to develop an outline business case for an action plan to deliver the procurement of a joint local authority Green Deal offering for Cambridgeshire; and
- (b) that Officers be requested to present the outline business case, once completed, to Members for consideration including a full appraisal of the work streams and resources required to procure and deliver a green deal scheme for Cambridgeshire.

41. FIXED PENALTY NOTICES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CRIME

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Operations (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) outlining a new fine level for fixed penalty notices for failing to place waste in the prescribed receptacle for household and commercial waste, Section 46 and 47 respectively of the Environmental Protection Act refers.

Having been advised that the Government had introduced a default level for these notices of not less than £60 and no more than £80, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that a fixed penalty notice charge of £80 reduced to £60 if paid within ten days be approved for Section 46 and 47 offences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

42. DRAFT CAMBRIDGESHIRE HEALTH & WELL BEING STRATEGY 2012-17 - CONSULTATION RESPONSE

With the aid of a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet considered a suggested response on behalf of the Council to a consultation paper issued by NHS Cambridgeshire on the Draft Cambridgeshire Health and Well-Being Strategy 2012-17. The Strategy had been considered by a Working Group of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) whose comments were

relayed to the Cabinet.

Having considered the terms of the proposed priorities identified by the Shadow Health and Well-Being Board as being important for local people and in noting how Partners would work together effectively to address them, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services, after consultation with the Executive Leader, be authorised to respond to the consultation as outlined in the report now submitted.

43. SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

The report of the meeting of the Safety Advisory Group held on 27th June 2012 was received and noted.

44. LOCALISATION OF BUSINESS RATES - UPDATE

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the following urgent item in accordance with Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 given the need to submit the final pooling proposal, following agreement from all authorities, on 19th October 2012)

Further to Minute No 12/25 and by way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Cabinet were updated with progress made to date on the establishment of a local business rates pool as part of the Government's rates retention scheme. Members were advised that Cambridgeshire County Council, as the identified lead authority, had made an expression of interest to the Government on behalf of the Cambridgeshire authorities.

In considering the proposed management agreement for the scheme, the distribution of the rates received between the partners and in noting that all partners would be able to review the scheme annually, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report now submitted be noted; and
- (b) that the proposed management proposals as set out in Annex B of the report be approved and the Managing Directors authorised to make subsequent minor changes as necessary, after consultation with the Executive Leader.

Chairman