

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, 14 November 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs B E Boddington – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar, M G Baker, K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, P L E Bucknell, G J Bull, E R Butler, R C Carter, S Cawley, B S Chapman, K J Churchill, S J Criswell, I J Curtis, J W Davies, D B Dew, P J Downes, R S Farrer, R Fuller, D A Giles, J A Gray, S Greenall, N J Guyatt, G J Harlock, R Harrison, D Harty, R B Howe, C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic, S M Van De Kerkhove, Mrs P J Longford, A J Mackender-Lawrence, P G Mitchell, M C Oliver, J W G Pethard, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds and T V Rogers, M F Shellens, D M Tysoe, P K Ursell, R J West and A H Williams.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors W T Clough, Mrs L A Duffy, A Hansard and T D Sanderson.

40. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Chairman's Events

The Chairman described some of the events which she had attended during October and in particular thanked all those Members who had supported her Charity Dinner held at the George Hotel, Buckden on 8th October which had raised approximately £1,750 for the Chairman's Charities.

(b) Town and Parish Councils

The Council was informed of a new initiative led by the Chairman which involved welcoming to Pathfinder House for an informed tour and refreshments, the Clerks and Councillors from Town and Parish Councils in Huntingdonshire. As these occasions had appeared to be a great success, the Chairman invited Members to contact her should they wish to involve any parishes in their Wards.

(c) Christmas Carol Concert

The Chairman asked Members to confirm whether or not they would be attending the Civic Carol Concert which was to be held in St. Mary's Church in Huntingdon on 5th

December 2012. The concert would comprise a service of nine lessons and carols and an address from the Right Reverend Conway, Bishop of Ely.

41. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 26th September 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

42. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared by the Members present.

43. LEADERSHIP DIRECTION AND REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

The Chairman invited Councillor J D Ablewhite, as Executive Leader of the Council to lead the presentation by Cabinet Members. Councillor Ablewhite indicated that each of the Executive Councillors would highlight the achievements of their respective portfolio areas during the year. On the conclusion of each of the presentations, the Council would be requested to formally adopt the Leadership Direction.

Councillor Ablewhite reminded the Council of the importance of the local economy and was pleased to add that small businesses continued to flourish with the assistance of the District Council whilst unemployment figures remained well below national average. Members were reminded that they had contributed to the economic assessment which would contribute towards the evidence base for the new local plan. Mention also was made of the recent decision to establish a business improvement district in Huntingdon which could be the way forward for towns, given the benefits that should derive from a shared business plan. In November, Councillor Ablewhite also was pleased to host a visit by the Secretary of State, Mr E Pickles to Huntingdonshire. He was present at the opening of the Enterprise Zone at Alconbury Weald as work has begun on the construction of the first incubator employment unit which would eventually be used to accommodate small businesses. Units would be available for use by local businesses and hopefully employ local people. The Executive Councillor also referred to the launch of Huntingdonshire Matters and Shape Your Place – both examples, in his view, of how localism should operate in practice. Councillor Ablewhite closed by describing the recent visit by the County Council's Cabinet to St. Neots and how this event and other projects would raise the profile of the town. A joint statement by the District and County Council would formalise this commitment in the future and ensure work continued there towards the key issues of growth and development.

The Leader of the Principal Opposition, Councillor P J Downes welcomed the overall direction of Councillor Ablewhite's statement but asked if he had had the opportunity to discuss with the Secretary of State the impact of the Government's current policy on Districts with low council tax levels. Councillor Ablewhite advised the questioner that he was hopeful of a positive change to the present situation in the next financial year.

In terms of the Leadership Direction, and in response to a suggestion

by Councillor Downes that this should have made a definitive reference to the voluntary sector, the increasing ethnic diversity of the District and the need to improve communications between staff and Members, as highlighted by the recent staff survey, Councillor Ablewhite was able to assure the Councillor that whilst not specifically mentioned it was implicit that these issues would continue to be addressed by the Council's leadership.

As Executive Councillor for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt opened his address by referring to the largest planning application ever received by the Authority which had been submitted by Urban and Civic for the former airfield at Alconbury. As previously mentioned, an application also had been submitted for the first incubator unit on the Enterprise Zone. As this was determined within 36 days, the Executive Councillor extended his congratulations to those Officers who had contributed to this achievement adding that this was an indication of the District Council's commitment to streamlining the planning process for the Enterprise Zone. It was anticipated that this development would enable students from Huntingdonshire Regional College to develop skills leading to permanent job opportunities.

Councillor Guyatt reminded the Council of the continuing consultation on the new local plan and emphasised how important it was that this should be completed quickly. He added that until a new local plan was in place, the District Council would remain vulnerable to inappropriate development. He urged all Councillors to involve themselves in the consultation to endeavour to ensure the plan, when adopted was robust and sound, particularly given the Government's view of the importance of housing to the economic recovery of the country.

Working in consultation with local people was highlighted as a feature of 2012 as Councillor Guyatt referred to the success of the Urban Design Framework for RAF Brampton and the achievement of the pedestrian bridge at St. Neots railway station after consultation with the County Council and Network Rail. He also added that work continued on the delivery and governance of the community infrastructure levy. In thanking Members and Officers for their support during the year he asked Councillors to encourage the Parish Councils in their Wards to involve themselves in the local plan process.

In the questions which followed, Councillor R J West suggested that the Parish Council should be made aware to what degree the District Council sought to influence the provision of infrastructure. Councillor Guyatt confirmed that discussions with the Department of Transport might achieve a positive outcome for the A14 in Huntingdonshire but that he would now turn his attention to the A428 and A47 as both links were important to the economy of the District. These discussions also would comprise the possibility of a new railway station at Alconbury and the extension of the guided bus to Alconbury and elsewhere.

In response to a question regarding the status of the Core Strategy and the possibility that the validity of this document might be extended to cover the period prior to adoption of the new local plan,

the Executive Councillor admitted that he had drawn this suggestion to the attention of the Secretary of State.

In answer to a question from Councillor G J Harlock, Councillor Guyatt was hopeful that the phrase "meaningful contribution" in terms of the degree of entitlement of Town and Parish Councils to a proportion of CIL levy would be confirmed in the new year.

In welcoming the impact which the development of Alconbury Airfield would make to the District, Councillor P J Downes questioned whether the project would drive the improvements to the A14 which were essential to the District.

Referring briefly to the content of the proposed scheme of improvements to the A14, Councillor Guyatt suggested that this would involve the removal of the viaduct in Huntingdon although the detail of this aspect of the scheme still was under discussion as was the possibility of tolling as a way to receive contributions from HGVs travelling through the District from the continent. He added that it was the intention to separate local and through traffic.

Councillor D B Dew expressed the view that the District Council could contribute to economic recovery by achieving its housing targets and considered that this drive was critical to both the District and Country as a whole.

On another subject, Councillor R S Farrer requested confirmation that the Development Management Division had sufficient resources to respond to the Alconbury applications. Councillor P L E Bucknell also expressed concern that an application in his Ward involving a manufacturing business had been delayed un-duly. The Executive Councillor pointed out that the Urban and Civic application which had been determined within 36 days had benefited from pre-consultation and that if this approach was adopted by applicants it would assist the efficiency of the planning process.

As Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor B S Chapman also referred to the importance of the processes and systems which were being put in place by the Information Management Division to ensure that CIL could be implemented effectively. In this respect, he mentioned that the District had hosted a conference for Officers from the Eastern Region on CIL and that the Authority led the way in developing a system to implement the CIL process.

Following the debate at the last Council meeting, Councillor Chapman reminded the Council of the welfare reforms which were to be introduced from April 2013 and the consultation exercise which had been conducted ahead of the introduction of the new scheme.

Once again, the Customer Services Team had achieved an accreditation for customer services excellence and the call centre continued to perform well in comparison with other Authorities in national surveys.

In response to his address, Councillor R J West questioned whether IT systems will be sufficiently robust to respond to the changes to

welfare reform and in reply, Councillor Chapman informed the Council that IMD currently were working on this project but that he was confident that the required software would be in place by April 2013.

Specific questions from Councillor M F Shellens and P D Reeve in respect of the detail of the Council Tax Support Scheme were responded to by the Executive Councillor. These related to the effect on those of retirement age and the protection of disabled people and blue badge holders under the proposed scheme. Councillor Chapman reaffirmed the Council's intention to continue to support those in greatest need.

Councillor K J Churchill expressed concern at the ability of Customer Services to respond in a timely manner to the likely increase in questions from the public on changes to welfare reform after the demise of other advice services but was assured by the Executive Councillor that alternative agencies, in replacement for the CAB, would support the advisory services offered by the District Council. Similarly, Councillor Churchill was anxious that the Call Centre would be able to respond to the increased demands placed on it by the withdrawal of the CAB service and again he was assured that additional training and resources have been allocated to ensure that the District Council could provide good levels of service in the event of increased pressures.

Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, commenced his presentation by referring to the Council's decision to enter into a shared service with LGSS to provide HR, payroll, organisational and workforce development services to the Council. Whilst acknowledging that this had proved to be a difficult decision to take, the staff formerly employed in HR had successfully been transferred to the LGSS service and although still premature, the indication was that the transfer had proved successful with any issues which had arisen being resolved in consultation with Heads of Services and Managers.

In terms of the budget and due to the hard work and commitment of staff and Members, the Council had achieved savings of £2.3m but the Executive Councillor pointed out that there would be more difficult decisions to take in the future if the Council was to continue to achieve a balanced budget. Councillor Gray indicated that he would welcome the assistance of Members and Officers and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) in this process.

Regarding the Council's Estates and Property, Councillor Gray explained that he had overseen the sale of Castle Hill House with mixed emotions but had commenced an exercise to identify the remaining commercial assets and landholdings across the District to seek to maximise their use and, if appropriate, rationalise the extent of the portfolio. He would undertake to report the outcome of this exercise to Members when appropriate.

In response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens regarding the likelihood of the continuation of the new homes' bonus (NHB), Councillor Gray confirmed that the contribution represented a quarter of the revenue income of the Council. It was his view that housing growth was essential to economic recovery but he was aware of the

risk to the District Council should the NHB be withdrawn. He added that the Cabinet had decided to monitor the levels of NHB on a regular basis and had begun to plan, in the event that the bonus was no longer forthcoming.

On the same subject, Councillor S M Van De Kerkhove expressed his concern that the Council would become vulnerable should there be a change in government which might result in the withdrawal of the NHB. Although the Executive Councillor was of the view that the Council could only operate to existing guidelines, he accepted that it had responsibility to look to the future and consider how the District Council would proceed should it be decided that the NHB should be withdrawn. In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Gray anticipated that in the event of the withdrawal of the NHB, an exercise might have to be conducted to value the services to be continued to be provided by the District Council. Referring to the District Council's policy for the disposal of assets, Councillor Gray indicated that these were considered on a case by case basis and that he would not favour the wholesale sale of the Council's assets unless land and property were surplus to requirement. Any decision to dispose, would only be taken after consultation with Members.

In terms of the individual circumstances described by Councillor Giles, Councillor Gray requested that these be forwarded to him to enable further discussion with relevant Officers.

Councillor K Churchill referred to the Making Assets Count Initiative and asked whether this incorporated use of redundant buildings. In response, the Executive Councillor reported that his review of commercial properties sat outside the remit of Making Assets Count. However, Councillor Gray acknowledged that Cambridgeshire Authorities could do more to encourage better use of assets as evidenced by the letting of the Civic Suite to NHS Cambridgeshire.

In the absence of Councillor T D Sanderson, Councillor N J Guyatt presented the report on the Healthy and Active Communities Portfolio. The Council was advised that One Leisure had attracted over 1.7m visitors and had 120,000 registered members in 2012. Members also were reminded that Centres had been awarded the Bronze Medal for Best UK Small Chain in the Health Club Awards in September. A new call centre had been introduced to streamline booking of facilities at all Centres and 7,500 had taken part in activities organised by the Sports and Active Lifestyle Team for Old and Disabled People.

The Sports and Active Lifestyle Team also had begun to work to develop and improve the infrastructure of sport and physical activity across the District by offering support to clubs, coaches, instructors and organisations with funding, facilities and training development. Partnership working with Papworth Hospital, Sports Club and Parish Councils also had continued to develop.

Councillor Guyatt concluded by reminding the Council that the Executive Councillors for Resources and Healthy and Active Communities would be considering applications for grant assistance shortly.

Lastly, Councillor D M Tysoe presented his report on the activities of the Environment Portfolio. This included references to the enhancement of parks around the District by the planting of commemorative trees, the planting of Jubilee Wood at Alconbury Weald and the award of Queen Elizabeth II status to Sapley Playing Field and the Riverside Park in Huntingdon.

Councillor Tysoe reported that two PCSOs were currently working in the CCTV Centre, the first Authority in the country to develop this type of exchange. The Green House and Making Assets Count Project continued to be successful and having extended the type of material able to be recycled by residents, recycling rates had continued to rise over the last six months.

Following questions from Councillor S Greenall regarding a proposal to charge for a second green bin, Councillor Tysoe replied that a decision had yet to be taken by the Cabinet in this respect but it was an example of the many unpopular decisions the Council might have to consider in the future.

Before closing the presentation, the Executive Leader paid tribute to the work and dedication of Officers and requested the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects) to convey the Council's appreciation to them for their contributions. He also extended his thanks to all Members for their commitment and support referring in particular to the way in which the Chairman, Councillor Mrs B E Boddington had raised the profile of the Authority and was working tirelessly to improve working relationships across the District with both Town and Parish Councils and The Armed Forces.

Whereupon, it was proposed by Councillor Ablewhite, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

that the Leadership Direction be adopted.

44. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (ECONOMIC WELL-BEING)

As Chairman of the Selection Panel, Councillor G J Bull introduced a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which described the process for the appointment of an Independent Member to a vacant position on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

Having explained that interviews had been conducted by a Selection Panel on 7th November 2012 and advised Members of the outcome of the Panel's deliberations, the Council

RESOLVED

that Mr R Eacott be appointed to serve on the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) for a four year term of office.

45. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

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

Councillor T V Rogers presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 4th October 2012.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 4th October 2012 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor D Harty presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 9th October 2012.

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In connection with Item No. 18 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes regarding the difficulties which could result from the introduction of a charge for collecting a second green bin, Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for the Environment was of the view that if managed efficiently, the provision of a differential service to residents should not present problems nor result in an increase in fly tipping. However, Councillor Tysoe undertook to investigate the questioner's proposal to use the former recycling centre on Brampton Road, Buckden for residents to dispose of their green waste.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor P D Reeve which enquired whether the proposal would have an impact on landfill charges and council tax levels, Councillor Harty accepted that the initiative required to be reconsidered by the Panel.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 9th October 2012 be received and adopted.

(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held

on 2nd October 2012.

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In connection with Item No. 24 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes in which he expressed concern that the Huntingdonshire CAB had closed before a replacement advice service had been established, Councillor Criswell concurred with the questioner that it was regrettable that there would be a period when no advice service would be available but the CAB had closed earlier than expected and as it had not been possible to prevent volunteers from leaving the organisation.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 2nd October 2012 be received and adopted.

(d) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th October 2012

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In connection with Item No. 23, it was noted that the Leadership Direction had previously been considered by the Council under Minute No. 43.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 18th October 2012 be received and adopted.

(e) Development Management Panel

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meeting of the Development Management Panel held on 15th October 2012.

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Councillor R J West referred to the current consultation exercise on the proposed new local plan which was due to close on 23rd November 2012 and asked how local

Members could remain involved in the process.

Councillor Dew underlined how important it was for Members to respond individually to the consultation and to continue to remain engaged in the process by encouraging Town and Parish Councils in their Ward to do likewise to seek to influence future neighbourhood plans. Councillor Dew added that the Development Plan Policy Advisory Group shortly would begin to consider the proposed plan in detail and that both he and Members of the Group would welcome any contributions from Members should they wish to contact him.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Development Management Panel held on 15th October 2012 be received and adopted.

(f) **Licensing Committee**

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Panel held on 23rd October 2012.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 23rd October 2012 be received and adopted.

(g) **Corporate Governance Panel**

Councillor E R Butler presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 25th September 2012.

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Councillor Butler gave a presentation on the work that the Panel had undertaken during the year and reminded the Council that it had considered matters as varied as the Annual Accounts, internal and external audit work, whistle blowing, complaints, the management of risk and procedures to reduce fraud. The Panel also prepared a Government Statement on behalf of the Council. Of particular concern to the Panel of late, had been problems encountered with the 2010/2011 accounts. The Panel has monitored this situation and would continue to seek improvements in the process, such that the Council comfortably meet future deadlines.

The Panel also intend to seek assurance during the year on the pay review, the outsourcing of HR and Payroll and the business continuity process.

In response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, and arising from its duty to consider changes to the Constitution, Councillor Butler acceded to a request for the Panel to reconsider at a future meeting, the introduction of a scheme of substitution as a way of informing back benchers of the business arising on all Panels and to increase the pool of knowledge and experience.

On the same subject, Councillor J A Gray paid tribute to the valuable work undertaken by the Panel and the benefit the Council derived from the experience and knowledge of its Members who continued to perform a vital role as the Council's watchdog.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 25th September 2012 be received and adopted.

46. 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 Kadewere to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question seeking the support of the Executive Leader for a proposal to change the use of a public open space to provide a car parking area in Essex Road, Huntingdon to meet the wishes of local residents, Councillor Ablewhite was unable to make any commitment without further details and requested that the questioner advise him of the background to his request after the meeting.

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

In response to a question regarding the future operation of the Huntingdon Community Service, Councillor Ablewhite advised the questioner to raise his concerns with the Leader of the Labour Group on Cambridgeshire County Council so that the matter might be raised with the appropriate Authority.

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

In response to a question regarding the possibility of the Council providing assistance and support to the community covenant as a way to increase its impact, Councillor Ablewhite replied that he was disappointed that the initiative had not gained more support and momentum and that he would discuss the matter with his counterpart at the County Council to seek to encourage that Authority to take further action but that he was content for the District Council to support the initiative albeit within current budget constraints.

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

In response to a question regarding the investment by the District Council in the proposed multi-storey car park in Huntingdon and the potential for compensation to be paid should Churchmanor and Sainsburys choose to withdraw from their commitment to the Town due to the current economic downturn, Councillor Ablewhite assured the questioner that it was essential to encourage vibrancy in Huntingdon and that this scheme provided an opportunity to work with partners to achieve this objective. He added that preparations for the scheme continued to progress and that he was hopeful of a start on-site early in the New Year.

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

In response to a question regarding the closure of the Huntingdonshire CAB, Councillor Ablewhite admitted that he too was hugely disappointed at the closure of the CAB in November but he assured the Council that he was working to secure resources which might achieve an interim solution in the short term.

Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question regarding the success of the Huntingdonshire Matters Conference and its contribution to partnership working, Councillor Ablewhite confirmed that the initiative was gaining momentum and interest and represented a positive example of how to deliver localism in practice.

47. COMMITTEE/PANEL MEMBERSHIP

The Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite proposed and it was duly seconded, and

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor Mrs L Kadic be appointed to the membership of the Licensing and Protection Panel/Licensing Committee in place of Councillor R Fuller; and
- (b) that Councillor R Fuller be appointed to the

membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel
(Social Well-Being) in place of Councillor Mrs L Kadic.

The meeting closed at 9.43pm.

Chairman