

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, 24 January 2013.

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

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor N J Guyatt.

84. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13th December 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

85. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor T D Sanderson declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 92 by virtue of his membership of Huntingdon Town Council. Councillor D M Tysoe declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 89 as the Clerk of Ellington Parish Council.

86. FINANCIAL MONITORING - CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2012/13

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) highlighting variations to the approved Capital Programme 2012/2013 and the consequential estimated revenue impact. It was

RESOLVED

that the report be received and the expenditure variations noted.

87. FINANCIAL MONITORING - REVENUE BUDGET 2012/13

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing expected variations in revenue expenditure in the current year.

Particular attention was drawn to the New Homes Bonus Scheme and Executive Councillors were mindful of the possibility that the forecast for delivery of new homes may not materialise thereby affecting the level of bonus allocated by the Government. Members were advised that development would be monitored closely and the likelihood of achieving forecast amounts included in the quarterly monitoring reports.

In discussing the total amounts of payments written-off in the year for

Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rates, Members were reminded that from 2013 the amounts written off will affect the level of business rates the Council is allowed to retain and this may have an impact on the Council's financial position.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the spending variations in the revenue budget be noted.

88. HOUSING BENEFIT CHANGES AND THE POTENTIAL IMPACT ON HUNTINGDONSHIRE

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on the Government's Welfare Reform Programme and the impact of changes to the Housing Benefit system upon Huntingdonshire residents. The changes had been presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

Executive Councillors were advised that the Local Housing Allowance rates used to work out Housing Benefit entitlement had been reduced in April 2011. Under the transitional protection arrangements existing tenants had received 9 months protection from the changes. Although some claimants had seen a reduction in benefit of over £70 per week, only a small number had been in contact with the Council for advice.

Members' attention was drawn to further reforms being implemented in April 2013, including the introduction of a benefit cap, the abolition of Council Tax benefit and changes to the calculation of the Local Housing Allowance and to the assessment of Housing Benefit for working age people living in social housing. Executive Councillors were advised that many households would be affected by more than one of the welfare reforms with some experiencing a significant reduction in their benefit entitlement. In that respect, Members were assured that all claimants have been contacted to advise them of their personal changes and advice and help had been offered to them by the Council. Furthermore, in response to an increase in statutory homelessness applications, a Medium Term Plan bid had been made for extra funds to cover the cost of homelessness.

Having thanked members and officers for their efforts in responding to the welfare changes in an efficient and effective manner, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

89. ALLOCATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUBSIDY GRANT

Further to Minute No. 12/17, the Cabinet received a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which drew attention to the implications for Parish and

Town Council precepts of the Government's Local Council Tax Support Scheme.

Executive Councillors were advised that changes to funding to help eligible households with Council Tax payments will affect the setting of the parish and town council precepts for 2013/2014. However, they felt that the impact of the changes on income could be compensated for by each local council being given a share of the District Council's Council Tax Subsidy Grant. Having considered the options suggested in the report and in stressing that they could not guarantee that a similar grant would be given in future years, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the grant allocation to Town and Parish Councils appended to the report now submitted be approved.

90. SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

In receiving a report of the Safety Advisory Group held on 29th November 2012, Members' attention was drawn to the need for detailed training analysis to be carried out and the lack of skills gap analysis. Having received assurances from the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects) that he would investigate the matter, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the Safety Advisory Group be noted.

91. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority that holds that information) and/or to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matters arising between the authority and office holders.

92. LOAN TO HUNTINGDON GYM

With reference to a joint report by the Head of Legal and Democratic and Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a request by Huntingdon Olympic Gymnastics Club for a loan to enable them to erect a second gymnasium.

The Executive Leader outlined the background to the request and gave a brief summary of the Club's current financial position. He explained that the Club had secured a grant towards part of the construction costs from British Gymnastics but would require further funding to meet the outstanding shortfall.

In discussing the risk associated with the request, Members' attention was drawn to the conclusions reached by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) on the matter. In that respect and given the difficulty of securing a charge on the building because the freehold is owned by the Town Council, Executive Councillors concurred with the Panel that the Town Council should be approached to act as a guarantor for the loan. Having discussed the possibility of other funding streams including the Community Infrastructure Levy and in recognising the community benefit the proposal would have for the district, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that a loan to Huntingdon Gym be approved on the terms set out in paragraph 3.3 of the report now submitted;
- (b) that a supplementary capital estimate for the loan be approved with the revenue impact being met from the loan repayments;
- (c) that Officers be requested to instigate discussions with Huntingdon Town Council with a view to them agreeing some form of guarantee on the loan; and
- (d) that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be authorised to complete the necessary legal documentation.

93. BUSINESS PLAN ONE LEISURE

By way of a report by the General Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the contents of a proposed Business Plan for One Leisure. The report which included options for improving the centres cost effectiveness had been considered also by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

In discussing the financial summary, Executive Councillors were of the opinion that the focus should remain on controllable net expenditure. Furthermore, they emphasised the need to ensure that the practice of recharging between services was equitable across the Council. Members also questioned why forecast revenue returns for One Leisure Huntingdon were significantly lower than those for One Leisure St Neots and St Ives. In response to which the General Manager, One Leisure, explained that the level of investment at One Leisure Huntingdon had been considerably lower than the other centres and the fitness studio, spa and pool were smaller. He added that expansion of the Centre was limited partly due to land ownership issues.

In concluding their discussions, Executive Councillors acknowledged the steps being taken to improve controllable income and expenditure and thanked all those involved. Having noted that information on the Plan's progress would be submitted to future meetings, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the General Manager (One Leisure), in consultation with the Head of Paid Service, be authorised to achieve a level of savings of the order of £250,000 as part of the wider Business Plan and in accordance with appropriate consultation procedures.

Chairman