

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, 20 February 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs B E Boddington – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar,
K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates,
P L E Bucknell, G J Bull, R C Carter,
B S Chapman, K J Churchill, W T Clough,
S J Criswell, I J Curtis, J W Davies, D B Dew,
P J Downes, R S Farrer, D A Giles, J A Gray,
S Greenall, N J Guyatt, A Hansard,
G J Harlock, D Harty, 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,
T V Rogers, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens,
R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, R J West and
A H Williams.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M G Baker, E R Butler, S Cawley, Mrs L A Duffy, R Fuller, R Harrison, R B Howe and P K Ursell.

60. PRAYER

The Reverend D Bush, Priest In Charge of the Church of St. Mary the Virgin in Godmanchester opened the meeting with Prayer.

61. MINUTES

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

Referring to Minute No. 57, Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Environment indicated that he would respond by email to the question he had received from Councillor K J Churchill regarding frozen green recycling bins.

62. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Chairman's Events

The Chairman briefly described the programme of the recent Holocaust Memorial Service which she had hosted in the Civic Suite on 28th January 2013 and thanked those Members who had attended for their support.

Mention also was made of the Chairman's successful visit to Littlehey Prison where, together with the Executive Leader and Vice-Chairman, Councillor Baker she was escorted on a tour of the prison buildings. Councillor Mrs Boddington encouraged other Members to visit and asked that those interested should contact her so that appropriate arrangements could be made.

Having reminded the Council of their decision to confer the Freedom of the District of Huntingdonshire upon RAF Alconbury and RAF Molesworth at a special meeting in November, the Chairman advised that she was making plans to celebrate the honour at an event to be held on 20th April 2013 and whilst more details would be circulated to Members nearer the time, she requested the Council to make a note of the date in their diaries.

(b) Chairman's Consort

On behalf of the Council, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite extended his best wishes to the Chairman's Consort and husband, Mr J Boddington for a speedy recovery following his recent accident.

(c) Mr T Parker (Managing Director, Resources)

The Chairman advised Members that Mr T Parker would be leaving the Council's employment at the end of February after seven years service as Director of Commerce and Technology and more recently Managing Director (Resources).

In wishing to place on record the Council's appreciation for Mr Parker's loyal service, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite paid tribute to his skills, knowledge and professionalism. These sentiments were endorsed and seconded by Councillor P J Downes, Leader of the Principal Opposition Group. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council's appreciation for the services of Mr T Parker be formally placed on record.

63. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

None were declared.

64. MEDIUM TERM PLAN, BUDGET AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS

Further to Minute No. 52 of the meeting of the Council held on 19th December 2012 and in conjunction with a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and Item Nos. 58 and 59 of the Report of the Cabinet, the Executive Councillor for Resources presented to Members the Medium Term

Plan, 2013/14 Budget, the Treasury Management Strategy and other associated matters for the Council's consideration and approval.

In accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, the Council also considered proposals for levels of Council Tax in 2013/14 for various parts of the Huntingdonshire district.

In his opening remarks, Councillor Gray reminded the Council of the financial objectives of the Cabinet - to achieve a balanced revenue budget by the financial year 2016/17, to stabilise revenue reserves at £5.4m, to establish a protocol for borrowing and investment and to regularly monitor the levels of new home bonus allocated by the Government. Councillor Gray was content to report that the Council was meeting its targets in this respect. On behalf of the Council, Councillor Gray extended his appreciation to the Heads of Financial Services and Customer Services and their teams for their contributions to this position.

By reference to the report of the Head of Financial Services, Councillor Gray updated the Council on developments since its meeting in December and the consequences of these for the District Council's services. He acknowledged the support for the proposed level of Council Tax increase and the contribution made to the budgetary process by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) and members of the business community.

In concluding, Councillor Gray reminded Members of the significant savings which already had taken place which included a reduction in staff, re-organisation of refuse rounds, installation of PV Panels, a proposed increase in car parking charges and joint procurement. Despite these attempts to reduce expenditure, Councillor Gray assured the Council that projects considered to be beneficial and strategic still would proceed and in this respect he referred to current development at One Leisure, St Ives, the release of upfront funding for the Huntingdon West relief road and the Huntingdon multi-storey car park, the net cost of which would be recovered over a period of years.

Even with the proposed Council Tax increase, the Council was informed that further savings of £1.5m by 2014/15 rising to £2.6m in 2017/18 still required to be achieved which would present a major challenge to the authority. Conscious of the needs and demands of the local community in the current economic climate and the responsibility placed on the Council to provide a range of statutory and obligatory services for local people, Councillor Gray moved the recommendations of the Cabinet which were duly seconded by the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite.

In response, Councillor M F Shellens expressed his appreciation for the skilful and measured way in which the budget had been compiled and presented to the Council by Officers and the Executive Councillor. Specifically, he requested that Town and Parish Councils be given early indication of proposals for the next financial year, he welcomed the additional funding proposed to assist the homeless but could not support the development of the multi-storey car park in

Huntingdon fearing that it would be under-utilised if Sainsburys was not replaced in the town centre by high interest stores.

Councillors K J Churchill, P J Downes, S Greenall, C R Hyams, P D Reeve and R J West also contributed to the debate that followed during which, amongst various issues, particular mention was made of the possibility of contributions from the Police Authority towards CCTV, the changes proposed by the Government to Council Tax principles in 2013/14 influenced during discussions between the Executive Leader and Baroness Hanham, the decisions that the District Council had taken thus far to make savings in the overall direction of travel, the need to maintain the vitality of town centres and the impact of car parking charges. A separate debate took place on the Treasury Management Strategy before the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite requested that the appreciation of the Council for the hard work and efforts of the Executive Councillor, Councillor J A Gray and the Head of Financial Services and his team in achieving a budget for 2013/14 be placed on record.

A Motion for a recorded vote having been lost, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the proposed budget for 2013/14, Medium Term Plan for 2014-18 and Financial Plan as set out in Appendix A to the report by the Head of Financial Services now submitted by 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 by approved;
- (c) that a Council Tax increase of £4.67 representing a level of £133.18 for a band D property be approved for 2013/14;

For resolutions (d) - (h) and Tables 1 and 2 please see published Minutes contained in Council Agenda - 24th April 2013

65. GREEN PAPER ITEM - MEMBER DEVELOPMENT

Councillor R G Tuplin, Chairman of the Member Development Working Group addressed the Council on the progress and continuing importance of Member Development since the Member Development Charter was originally awarded to the District Council in July 2011. Councillor Tuplin also was able to announce that following review, the South-East Employers had, that day, concluded that the District Council had continued to meet the Charter Standard and had provided excellent examples of Best Practice in the new evidence it had presented to them.

Members were reminded of the purpose of the Charter, the role of the Member Development Working Group and new initiatives being pursued by the Working Group to develop a mentoring programme,

pilot personal development plans and hold familiarisation briefings with Directorates over the course of the year.

In closing, Councillor Tuplin encouraged Members to take advantage of all training opportunities offered to them, to complete their annual skills audit in June and to request help and support should they need it from the Member Development Officer.

As Councillor Tuplin had reported that the Executive Leader had graduated from the Leadership Academy led by the Local Government Association (LGA), Councillor Ablewhite added how important it was for Members to keep abreast of legislative and other changes in Local Government and that he would encourage all Members to develop their skills either through courses organised by the LGA or internally by the Council itself.

In congratulating Councillor Tuplin on the improvements which had taken place in Member development since 2011, Councillor P D Reeve requested details of the cost of Councillor Ablewhite's attendance at the Leadership Academy, information which the Executive Leader undertook to forward to him.

66. APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM RETURNING OFFICER AND ELECTORAL REGISTRATION OFFICER

Having regard to a report by the Head of Paid Service (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and as a consequence of a recent re-structuring of Senior Management which had resulted in the departure of the Officer with specific responsibility for the statutory roles of Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer, it was moved by the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

that the Head of Legal and Democratic Services be appointed Returning Officer and Electoral Registration Officer on an interim basis from 1st March 2013 until such time as a new Managing Director was appointed and the situation could be reviewed.

67. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

In compliance with the requirements of Section 38 of the Localism Act 2011, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite 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 2013/2014.

The Statement, which is required to be approved by the Council by 31st March 2013 was now produced annually and detailed the Council's policies relating to Officer remuneration.

Having been advised that ongoing projects relating to pay, grading, consultation arrangements and senior management re-structuring could, ultimately impact on the content of the Policy Statement, the

Council noted that it may be necessary to issue a revised statement later in the year.

Having also responded to a question from Councillor D A Giles regarding the level of the District Council's contribution to employee pension entitlements, it was moved by Councillor Ablewhite, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

that the Policy Statement for 2013/2014 be approved.

68. REPRESENTATION OF POLITICAL GROUPS ON DISTRICT COUNCIL PANELS, ETC

A report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reflecting the outcome of a review of the membership of the different political groups on the Council following the resignation of Councillors K J Churchill and R S Farrer from the Conservative Group on 28th January 2013.

Having regard to the principles of proportionality to be applied to the appointment of Panels and in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government Housing Act 1989 and Part II of the Local Government Act 2000, it was

RESOLVED

that the allocation of seats on Panels and Committees to political groups and non-aligned Members be determined as set out in the report now submitted and membership of Panels varied in accordance with the Schedule appended in the Minute Book.

69. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

(a) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 24th January and 14th February 2013.

.....

In connection with Item No. 58, it was noted that the recommendations had been considered previously under Minute No. 64.

.....

In connection with Item No. 59, it was noted that the recommendations had been considered previously under Minute No. 64.

.....

In connection with Item No. 60 and in response to questions and comments from Councillors K J Churchill, D B Dew, P J Downes, R S Farrer, Mrs P J Longford and P D Reeve, Councillor Ablewhite, with the assistance of the Executive Councillor for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt, explained that the sudden shortfall in funding towards a new footbridge at St Neots Railway Station had largely resulted because of delays to the design of the original scheme which, over time, had led to variations in the BCIS index and a reduction in the funding available from the project's Section 106 Agreement. As, in his view, it was essential that the project should proceed, the Cabinet had recommended that the shortfall be met from existing budgets. Subsequent negotiations with Cambridgeshire County Council had suggested that potentially this sum could be reduced significantly.

Further to the suggestion that the developers had appeared to be avoiding their responsibilities in this respect, Councillor Ablewhite indicated that without this contribution the Section 106 Agreement might be jeopardised.

As an urgent item of business, Councillor Ablewhite reported to Council that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) had been consulted and had given permission for the matter to be considered by the Cabinet. Given the benefits to local residents of the proposed scheme and the positive contribution it would make to link the St Neots expansion area with the town centre, Councillor Ablewhite moved and it was duly seconded and

RESOLVED

that a capital contribution of up to £316,069 towards the St Neots Railway Station footbridge project funded by way of a transfer of £290,000 from the capital provision for town centre developments and £26,000 from the Planning Services revenue budget be approved.

[In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 14.5, Councillors K J Churchill and R S Farrer requested that their decision to vote for the Motion be recorded in the Minutes.]

.....

Whereupon, it was further

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 24th

January and 14th February 2013 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor T V Rogers presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 10th January and 7th February 2013.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Reports of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 10th January and 7th February 2013 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor D Harty presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 15th January and 12th February 2013.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 15th January and 12th February 2013 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 8th January and 5th February 2013.

.....

In connection with Item No. 45 and in response to various concerns expressed by Councillor P J Downes regarding the advice service offered by Rural Cambs CAB, the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson, confirmed that Rural Cambs CAB now was located in the Town Hall, Market Square, Huntingdon and in a portakabin located at Tan Yard, St Neots. Councillor Criswell undertook to raise the questioner's concerns in terms of service delivery at a meeting of the Voluntary Sector Working Group which had undertaken to monitor the progress of organisations awarded grant funding.

.....
Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 8th January and 5th February 2013 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 17th December 2012 and 21st January 2013.

.....
Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 17th December 2012 and 21st January 2013 be received and adopted.

(f) Employment Panel

Councillor J D Ablewhite presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 6th February 2013.

.....
In connection with Item No. 24, Councillor Ablewhite invited the Council to endorse the sentiments of the Panel with regard to the two employees who had retired from the local government service.

.....
Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 6th February 2013 be received and adopted.

(g) Senior Officers' Panel

Councillor N J Guyatt presented the Report of the meetings of the Senior Officers' Panel held on 19th December 2012 and 31st January 2013.

.....
Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Senior Officers' Panel held on 19th December 2012 and 31st January 2013 be received and adopted.

70. 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 Mrs M Banerjee to the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson

Having had his attention drawn to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the content of the proposed Business Plan for One Leisure and received a suggestion from the questioner that the Business Plan should not be adopted in its current form, the Executive Councillor explained that all aspects of the One Leisure Service were under review and that the Business Plan would be further developed before re-submission to the Economic Well-Being Panel at a future date.

Question from Councillor P Kadewere to the Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor B S Chapman

Having conveyed to the Executive Councillor his concern that residents in his Ward had received correspondence from registered social landlords (RSLs) and not the District Council regarding impending changes to welfare support, the Executive Councillor confirmed that the District Council was working closely with the RSLs to ensure all residents likely to be affected had been advised how to mitigate the impact of the new housing benefit support schemes. Councillor Chapman added that the District Council would continue to offer advice to anyone affected.

Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt

Referring to the proceedings of the County Council's Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the suggestion that two neighbouring authorities claimed a percentage of funding towards public art from developer contributions, Councillor Guyatt considered that it was appropriate for Cambridge City given its rich heritage to require a contribution from developers towards the arts. However, with the community infrastructure levy now in place and given the projects required to be funded to enable development to proceed, Councillor Guyatt was of the view that, whilst desirable, any contributions from developers should not be directed towards the

arts at the expense of the more critical infrastructure projects required in Huntingdonshire.

Question from Councillor G J Bull to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question relating to the additional sum of £100,000 which had been agreed by the Cabinet for inclusion in the Medium Term Plan to meet the increase in statutory homelessness applications, Councillor Ablewhite suggested that this decision demonstrated the Council's ability to rise to a challenge and positively commit to help vulnerable District residents in difficulty.

Question from Councillor R S Farrer to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a question regarding the timescale for the introduction of the community infrastructure levy and the proportion of funding which will be allocated to the District Council from developer contributions, Councillor Guyatt confirmed that CIL was now operational and to-date the District Council had received the sum of £12,000 in developer contributions. This fund would accelerate in 2014 as proposed new developments get underway. Councillor Guyatt explained that the District Council would receive the total amount due from any proposed development and would distribute funds accordingly to the authority expected to deliver the infrastructure necessary for the development to proceed as for instance – Cambridgeshire County Council in terms of the Huntingdon link road. In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Guyatt added that the District Council was entitled to retain a small percentage of CIL to cover administration expenses.

Question from Councillor R Carter to the Executive Councillor for Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe

In response to a question regarding the benefits to be achieved from the re-scheduling of current waste collection rounds, Councillor Tysoe explained that whilst it would be difficult to predict the exact level of savings which could be achieved until the new rounds were in operation, it was clear that more efficient routing would result in fuel savings. In terms of communications, Councillor Tysoe reported that all residents shortly would receive letters, information and stickers about the changes and benefits to the service and whilst he accepted that transition to a new schedule might present some difficulties, arrangements were in place to ensure these could be responded to. Mention also was made of a joint procurement exercise with four other Districts to purchase specialist refuse collection vehicles and the savings this might also generate for the service.

Question from Councillor D B Dew to the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a question regarding the levels of delivery of affordable housing and shared equity schemes on new housing development, Councillor Guyatt confirmed that the District Council currently was in discussion with Registered Social Landlords on various options to

provide low-cost housing - including shared equity projects.

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

In response to a question regarding the level of contribution expected from the District Council towards improvements to the A14 and whether this would involve the Authority in additional borrowing, Councillor Ablewhite reported that significant negotiations were ongoing with statutory partners both locally and across East Anglia to seek to achieve upgrading of the A14. He added that the District Council had been an active participant in the A14 project since the CHUMMS report in August 2001 and even before that, in the compilation of a report that included the Council's recommendations. The previous scheme was cancelled by Government in 2010 as part of their comprehensive spending review. At that time the Government announced a new A14 study divided into three stages as follows:-

- ◆ Output 1 - to understand the nature, scale and importance of the corridor and to develop a list of prioritised challenges;
- ◆ Output 2 – to generate and sift potential interventions;
- ◆ Output 3 – to develop a multi-modal package of interventions to tackle the prioritised challenges which were affordable, deliverable and value for money.

All are now completed and six highway based options are being taken forward together with a finance option relating to tolling, public transport and rail freight. The Government has indicated that private finance, local tolling and local finance must be part of the funding package.

Current indications are that the Government will fund up to 50% of the capital cost whilst the remainder needed to be secured by these and other means.

There is no clarity on the actual sum that the Government will expect local authorities to meet. Discussions have taken place between various authorities on this and some hypothetical figures have been used to focus debate. The local authority total sum will need to spread over authorities and several Counties and Local Enterprise Partnerships.

The Medium Term Plan includes an item in the risk provision of £200,000 per year from 2016/2017 simply as recognition that the Council regards the A14 improvements scheme as a very high priority and, with this in mind, it is correct to include a planning assumption of a hypothetical number at this stage. There is a great deal of discussion necessary before any agreement can be reached between authorities, Local Enterprise Partnerships and the Government on the final package.

Question from Councillor P D Reeve to the Executive Councillor for Customer Services, Councillor B S Chapman

In response to a question regarding the circumstances of a family in Ramsey and the opportunity for the District Council to make use of

vacant shop premises in the town to address housing issues, Councillor Chapman replied that he would prefer to discuss a personal issue outside the meeting, that new arrivals to the District without a local connection would have no entitlement to housing and that occupation of empty shop premises would trigger a liability for business rates within twelve months. Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources advised the Council that the Treasury Management Strategy and Policy now provided the opportunity for the Council to provide loan finance to local organisations such as Registered Social Landlords if this would assist them in supporting Council services such as meeting the needs of the homeless.

Question from Councillor D A Giles to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question regarding the recent resignation of two Councillors from the Conservative Group, Councillor Ablewhite made it clear that every Member had the opportunity to contribute to the conduct of Council business through a range of processes and that as Executive Leader he was willing and available to listen to the views of all Members.

71. VARIATION TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF THE SENIOR OFFICERS' PANEL AND OTHER PANELS ETC

Further to Minute No. 68 and having regard to the temporary indisposition of Councillor M G Baker, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor W T Clough be appointed to the Senior Officers' Panel in place of Councillor M G Baker;
- (b) that Councillor R S Farrer be appointed to the Development Management Panel in place of Councillor P K Ursell;
- (c) that Councillor K J Churchill be appointed, in his capacity as Conservative (non-aligned) Member, to the Corporate Governance Panel;
- (d) that Councillor K J Churchill be appointed to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) in place of Councillor S Akthar; and
- (e) that Councillor R J West be appointed to the Employment and Licensing and Protection Panels and Licensing Committee in place of Councillor R S Farrer.

The meeting ended at 9.53pm.

Chairman