

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, 26 June 2013.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs B E Boddington – Chairman.

Councillors M G 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,
Mrs L A Duffy, R S Farrer, R Fuller,
D A Giles, J A Gray, S Greenall, N J Guyatt,
A Hansard, G J Harlock, R Harrison,
R B Howe, C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan,
P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic, A J Mackender-
Lawrence, M C Oliver, J W G Pethard,
P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers,
T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, R G Tuplin,
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 J D Ablewhite, S Akthar, K M Baker, W T Clough, D Harty, S M Van De Kerkhove, Mrs P J Longford, P G Mitchell and J P Morris.

14. PRAYER

The Reverend D. Busk, Vicar of Godmanchester and Hilton opened the meeting with prayer.

15. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Filming of meeting

At the request of a member of the public and having regard to new guidelines issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government, the Chairman announced that she had given permission for the meeting to be filmed provided the activity did not impact upon the other members of the public who were present.

(b) New Managing Director

The Chairman welcomed newly appointed Managing Director, Mrs Joanne Lancaster to her first meeting of the Council and Members indicated that they were looking forward to working with her.

(c) Retiring Managing Director – Mr M Sharp

Having informed members that Mr Sharp would officially

retire from the Council's service on 31st July 2013, the Chairman paid tribute to his career both in local government generally and with Huntingdonshire, in particular. Councillor N J Guyatt, Deputy Executive Leader paid his own tribute to Mr Sharp on behalf of current and former Members which was followed by contributions from Councillors I C Bates, M G Baker and D B Dew.

In reply, Mr Sharp thanked the Council for their kind words and commended the positive working relationship he had enjoyed with Members during his career at Huntingdonshire. He reminded the Council that his achievements during this time also were due to the support he had received from a dedicated and talented team of Officers, that he continued to believe fervently in public service and that it had been a privilege to lead the Council as Managing Director and serve the authority over fifteen years.

Whereupon, the Council

RESOLVED

that the appreciation of the Council for the services of Mr M Sharp, Managing Director be placed on record and their best wishes be conveyed to him for a happy and healthy retirement

(d) **Chairman's Events**

The Chairman reported to Council on the various activities that she had undertaken since the last meeting and gave notice of the arrangements being made to mark Armed Forces Day and the Freedom of Huntingdonshire to RAF Wyton on 28th June and 17th August respectively.

(e) **Member Development**

The Chairman of the Members Development Group, Councillor R G Tuplin drew the Council's attention to the annual skills analysis which had been circulated around the Civic Suite and urged Members to complete their forms during the course of the evening.

16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 15th May 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

17. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were received from the Members present.

18. HEADLINE 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 'Green 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 under Minute No 18 and 20 during which time the common law rules of debate be observed by Members and applied by the Chairman.

The Chairman welcomed Sir Graham Bright, Police and Crime Commissioner for Cambridgeshire to the meeting and invited him to address the Council and to open the debate on –

- ◆ his plans for Cambridgeshire as they might impact on Huntingdonshire;
- ◆ how the Police will work in partnership with the District Council to create safer, stronger communities;
- ◆ how the Commissioner will allocate resources to policing in the District; and
- ◆ how the Commissioner plans to engage with the public.

Sir Graham began by suggesting that it was a vital part of his role to engage with the community and that with this in mind he had addressed the County Council and spoken to several other community groups. Since his election, he had established a PCC office and agreed a total budget of £131.579 million. As an organisation, the Police Authority was responsible 2,400 employees and it was his priority to ensure the Chief Constable had sufficient resources to manage the police operation in Cambridgeshire. He explained that whilst he was responsible for holding the Chief Constable to account he had no authority over operational matters. A Police and Crime Plan had been published and was available to view on the website of the Police and Crime Commissioner. This described what the Chief Constable was expected to provide in terms of policing in Cambridgeshire and one of the objectives was to maintain local police performance. He contended that Cambridgeshire Constabulary was a good force, that the County was a safe place to live and that it was part of his challenge to maintain this position. He added that it was also his objective to deliver policing within the available budget and that to continue to do so, as well as improve services, would be a constant challenge.

Mention also was made of his desire to make best use of technology, to introduce 'paperless' working and to increase efficiency by reducing reliance on completion of forms. Sir Graham indicated that he was determined to continue to work with neighbouring forces to provide joint services such as road traffic and fire arms support as a way to maximise resources and make savings. Essex and the Metropolitan Police also had expressed an interest in sharing services. It was also his desire to promote partnership working within Cambridgeshire to promote preventative initiatives to tackle homelessness, anti social behaviour and drug misuse for example. He spoke specifically about encouraging involvement with Neighbourhood Watch Groups and promoting greater use of software to improve communications. Great progress had been made in improving call handling processes such that 95% of emergency calls were answered within 10 seconds in December 2012. Work was

underway to develop an 'App' to enable prompt reporting of crime. The introduction of a proactive approach to protecting young people and positive measures to distract youngsters from congregating on streets after dark to help prevent young people from getting into trouble were described. Specific mention was made of a project in South Cambridgeshire which encouraged youngsters to become involved in community work. Focus would also be placed on tackling hate crime, protecting young people from domestic violence and sex offences for instance as well as the more serious crime prevention.

Sir Graham concluded by describing himself as the 'voice of the people' and whilst not responsible for operational matters it was up to him, working in conjunction with the Chief Constable to hold the police to account for their performance.

The debate opened with a question from Councillor M F Shellens which suggested that Sir Graham had spent the equivalent of three PCSOs on office furniture. Sir Graham denied that this was the case but contended that he was required to set up an office and recruit staff necessary to manage correspondence and respond to enquiries. In terms of community presence, Councillor T V Rogers referred to the absence of a police presence in his village or at meetings of the Parish Council and asked whether it was Sir Graham's intention that this level of support be reinstated. Sir Graham regretted that the cost of this level of support was prohibitive and that, in any event, he would prefer to see constables spend time on local policing and not in parish council meetings. He assured the questioner that the Police Authority was committed to neighbourhood policing and that he was hopeful that a new 'alert' system would provide parishes with all the information they required about policing matters in their areas. Ultimately, he hoped to visit all Parish Councils in Cambridgeshire but it would be impossible to repeat this exercise regularly. He had envisaged that the efforts he had made to make it easier for the public to contact the police had helped, so whilst sympathetic, he preferred Constables to be working on the streets. Councillor Rogers considered that it was important for the police to be seen in villages but he acknowledged that this would not occur unless there was a known hot spot of crime at a particular location. Sir Graham reminded the Council that he had a duty to police the County, that the local commander would deal with specific problems and that regrettably he did not have the resources to patrol every village.

Referring to the use of the former St Ives Police Station building for community purposes and the opportunity that existed to develop similar facilities elsewhere, Councillor D B Dew questioned the ability of the police to adequately respond promptly to issues which might arise in St Ives town if there were also problems in Wisbech on the same evening given the large geographical area that the surveillance van would be expected to cover. Sir Graham suggested that policing Saturday night activities were a priority and that a number of special constables had been recruited to supplement the permanent force for these purposes. He described a project which had operated in conjunction with Sainsbury's supermarkets to encourage the recruitment of special constables trained to deal with those issues likely to arise at weekends. It also was possible to call on neighbouring forces for back up if necessary but this would be an operational decision. In terms of reuse of former police stations, the

authority's estate management function was seeking to maximise, together with neighbouring authorities, use of all property.

Given the low turnout at the PCC elections, Councillor Mrs P A Jordan asked whether Sir Graham considered that he had a mandate to undertake the duties of the Commissioner effectively and in response Sir Graham confirmed that everyone had had the opportunity to vote so he had no concerns in this respect.

Commending the wide range of strategies contained in the Police Plan, Councillor R B Howe asked for Sir Graham's views on the use of Speedwatch given the proliferation of speeding problems in villages and the difficulties these presented for Parish Councils. Sir Graham commented that where operating, Speedwatch appeared to be an effective means of influencing drivers to curb their speed but he admitted that there had to be a balance between the actions that could be taken by the police and a local Speedwatch group in these circumstances.

In terms of the vulnerability of an isolated property to crime, Councillor R J West asked whether Sir Graham had any intention of allocating additional resources to the Rural Crime Group. Sir Graham was of the opinion that the Cambridgeshire force had been successful in tackling rural crime with the help of a dedicated police team and a Farmwatch Group.

Sir Graham was asked to comment on his plans for working with troubled families and in reply he indicated that it was his intention to put in place arrangements through community safety partnerships which would trigger the involvement of relevant agencies in the event of contact from known individuals/families in need of assistance.

Regarding response times to 101 calls, Sir Graham confirmed, following a question from Councillor Mrs M Banerjee that these had improved and that he had particularly insisted that the police should attend domestic burglaries on the day they occur. He indicated that he would focus on victim support as a future target.

It having been suggested that there was a high incidence of knife crime amongst migrant communities, Sir Graham advised that this was a matter for the Border Agency, that he was aware of problems in certain towns and that the force was using trained PCSOs to address these.

As the Neighbourhood Forums had been discontinued, Councillor P Kadewere asked Sir Graham to comment on the way in which the police would consult with the public in the future and whether he was prepared to release funding for this purpose. Sir Graham was aware that the Area Commander was considering ways to consult with the community to overcome the absence of Neighbourhood Forums but that he personally believed in Constables speaking to people whilst out on the beat. However, he would consider the question of funding such meetings should he be approached in the future.

Regarding the appointment of Special Constables, Councillor R Harrison asked if these Officers were eligible to receive the same equipment and training opportunities as ordinary constables. Sir

Graham confirmed that the Cambridgeshire force consisted of up to 350 PCSOs and that each had been equipped to a value of £2500 and been trained in a particular specialism. There was also no barrier to career progression.

Having commended the success of community policing and Speedwatch locally, Councillor P D Reeve asked whether Sir Graham would be open to reducing back office costs by entering a shared services arrangement with other authorities. In reply, Sir Graham confirmed that he would consider every opportunity to reduce costs and undertook to investigate Councillor Reeves' suggestion that Speedwatch was not operating as it could due to 'red tape' issues.

Lastly, Sir Graham confirmed that he was prepared to hold regular public surgeries but he admitted that the response to these had not been great.

The Chairman thanked Sir Graham for his interesting and thorough presentation and for attending the Council meeting.

19. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

In the absence of the questioner, the Chairman invited the Deputy Executive Councillor, Councillor N J Guyatt to respond to the following question –

"Will the Council delay implementation of the green bin tax until further consideration has been given to the concerns of the local electorate and feedback is provided by the District Council to the issues raised, such as those contained in an e-petition on the subject which has been open for signatures for a period of 90 days from 17th June 2013?"

Given the interest in this subject, Councillor Guyatt agreed to respond to those questions which Members intended to raise under Minute No 24 at this point in the meeting.

Councillor Guyatt reported that 1682 householders had already paid the charge for a second green bin and that the necessity for the charge lay with the decision of the Government to reduce funding to local authorities which consequently impacted on the services they could provide.

The District Council had achieved substantial savings already but still was required to make further difficult decisions in this respect. The Deputy Executive Leader reminded the Council that the matter had been discussed by the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel on two occasions. He also pointed out that the provision of second green bins to households was an additional service for which the recipients should pay and that other Councils even charged for the first green bin.

Having indicated his opposition to the original decision, Councillor P D Reeve questioned whether the decision to charge had been successful in reducing the cost of collection and asked where the returned bins were being stored.

As Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe confirmed that the green bins returned was consistent with the number expected and that the financial projections allowed for this level of return when the original scheme was conceived. In terms of their future use, Councillor Tysoe added that the collection of bins avoided the need to purchase new bins as replacements and for new properties, that sufficient space for storage was available and special arrangements would continue for the collection of the wheeled bins of the elderly and vulnerable. A software issue which had initially prevented householders from paying for their second green bin had been overcome.

In response to questions from Councillor M G Baker, Councillor Guyatt confirmed that the District Council had no plans to charge for collection of the first green bin but that he could not guarantee that a different administration would decide differently. He added that it would be impractical to give a discount to households occupied by a single person in view of the scale of the charge.

Having provided Councillor Guyatt with various statistics which suggested that the net gain from the project could amount to approximately £20,000 and in view of its unpopularity with residents, Councillor S Greenall asked whether the Council would reconsider the decision. Councillor Guyatt repeated that the decision had been reconsidered on two occasions already and that he would respond, in writing, to the various assertions after the meeting.

In terms of alternative saving proposals, Councillor P L E Bucknell suggested that he had submitted options for savings but had yet to receive a response and that he had been contacted by 129 residents who were unhappy with the proposal.

In concluding discussion, Councillor Tysoe suggested that 90% of residents were content with one green bin, that the service represented good value for money and that the scheme had been well considered and would be subject to review after one year's operation. In view of the suggestion from Councillor M F Shellens that Customer Services had been advised to refer questions from residents on second green bins to Ward Councillors, both Executive Councillors denied that this was the case but undertook to investigate the matter and respond in writing to the questioner.

20. GREEN PAPER ITEM - HUNTINGDONSHIRE LOCAL PLAN PROCESS TO 2036

By reference to a power point presentation, the Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor N J Guyatt reminded the Council that the National Planning Policy Framework required the authority to identify potential site allocations to meet assessed needs for housing to 2036. Based on population and economic data and after discussion with partners, the Joint Strategic Planning Unit/Cambridgeshire County Council had identified dwelling requirements for all Districts in Cambridgeshire. The analysis had identified a need for 21,000 new dwellings in Huntingdonshire to 2036. Councillor Guyatt explained, however, that it was not just about housing but providing a decent standard of living and employment. He added that the link between job creation and housing to stimulate the local economy was essential. Members were

advised that the District Council had a duty to co operate with its partners in the County to deliver the number of commitments identified through a Memorandum of Co operation.

Regarding the key dates for the delivery of the new Local Plan, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) explained that consultation on the draft Local Plan would close on 26th July. The existing Core Strategy provided for 9000 dwellings to 2026 and it was proposed that the required additional allocations would largely be met through strategic scale expansion at Alconbury Weald, St Neots East and Wyton Airfield with the balance accommodated in other towns and larger villages.

In terms of public engagement, the Planning Service Manager (Policy) explained that sessions had been held for town and parish councils and that there had been a good response to the non statutory consultation stage. It was anticipated that Stage 8 – New Local Plan adoption would be achieved by December 2014.

In the short discussion which followed, matters raised included the process of consultation, the requirement for adequate infrastructure including improvements to 'A'roads and specifically improvements to the A428 and A14.

21. CABINET PROCEDURE RULES - DELEGATION BY THE EXECUTIVE LEADER

In accordance with the Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution and by reference to a report by the Head of Paid Service and Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects), the Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor N J Guyatt presented details of the Cabinet Portfolios for the ensuing year. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be noted.

22. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2013/14

By reference to a report by the Head of Environmental & Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor J W Davies, Chairman of the Licensing & Protection Panel reminded Members that the Food Standards Agency required the Council to prepare a Food Safety Service Plan annually in accordance with an agreed framework. A full copy of the Food Safety Service Plan 2013/14 had been made available in the Members' Room (an Executive Summary of which also is appended in the Minute Book).

Referring to the overall budget for the service, Councillor Davies explained that this was £441,360 for 2013/14 and not 2012/13 as erroneously had been included in the report. Whilst this would be sufficient to meet the demands of the service, Members noted that additional funds might be required in the event of a complex legal case or introduction of central sampling charges. The Council were reminded of the objectives of the Service Plan in terms of identifying resources, establishing a work programme and providing a means by

which to measure and manage performance. Members were advised that there were 1494 food businesses in the District and that the service helped to ensure that the local food economy and businesses remained vibrant in difficult economic times and that public confidence was maintained in the standards of the local food industry.

Regarding performance in 2012/13 and despite involvement in a number of legally and technically complex cases, Councillor Davies reported that the service had ensured that 95.6% of high risk and 64.4% lower risk premises requiring an inspection were inspected within the specified time frame. In total, 1216 inspections, interventions and visits were carried out to food premises as part of programmed activity and in response to complaints, food alerts and service requests. The Service Plan for 2013/14 remained largely unchanged.

In response to questions from Councillors M F Shellens and P D Reeve, Councillor Davies reassured the Council that those inspections which were unable to be undertaken in one year would be covered in the following year, that inspections were prioritised after consultation with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Panel and that whilst there was potential for the service to be shared with another authority it currently was being managed efficiently and cost effectively.

Whereupon, after noting the support for the Plan on the part of the Licensing & Protection Panel, the Council

RESOLVED

that the Food Safety Service Plan 2013/14 be adopted.

23. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

(a) Cabinet

Councillor N J Guyatt, Deputy Executive Leader of the Council and Vice Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Reports of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 16th May and 20th June 2013.

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In connection with Item No 4 and upon being moved by Councillor Guyatt, and seconded by Councillor J A Gray, the recommendation was declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Reports of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 16th May and 20th June 2013 be received and adopted.

(b) Overview & 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 6th June 2013.

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In connection with Item No 3, the Council noted that actual net investment interest amounted to £269,000.

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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 6th June 2013 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor G J Bull presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 11th June 2013.

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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 11th June 2013 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview & 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 4th June 2013.

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As the former Vice Chairman, Councillor R J West was no longer a member of the Panel, Councillor Criswell paid tribute to the contribution Councillor West had made to the work of the Panel over many years and for his influence and input particularly in relation to health matters.

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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 4th June 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 20th May and 17th June 2013.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings held on 20th May and 17th June 2013 be received and adopted.

(f) Employment Panel

Councillor S Cawley presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 19th June 2013.

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In connection with Item No 3 and in response to a question from Councillor S Greenall regarding sickness absence reporting, Councillor Cawley assured Members that training sessions had been provided to managers to help introduce the new sickness absence procedure and that it was the intention to work with all staff to help to reduce sickness levels.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 19th June 2013 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 22nd May 2013.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 22nd May 2013 be received and adopted.

24. ORAL QUESTIONS

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

In response to a question which requested information on the grants payable to those in disadvantaged situations in the District in 2012/13, Councillor Chapman replied that the Council continued to be compassionate in its support of the vulnerable in the community and had made available an additional £1m for disabled facilities grants to enable people to remain in their own homes. Further technical adjustments also had raised additional resources.

Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for Resources, Councillor J A Gray

Regarding the recent announcement of a proposed 10% reduction in government grant to local authorities, Councillor Gray informed the questioner that it was too early to know what the implications might be for the District Council in real terms, that it was the expectation, in any event, that the grant would be reduced by 7% in 2015/16 and that he could be assured that together with the Cabinet, he would examine all available options and appraise Members of any further details as they emerged.

Question from Councillor P D Reeve to the Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor N J Guyatt

Having been asked as to the number of Officers enjoying salaries in excess of £50,000 and over £100,000, Councillor Guyatt replied that although the remuneration of senior management was now published annually via the Pay Policy Statement he did not have the information to hand and would reply to the questioner in writing after the meeting.

25. VARIATION TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS, ETC

Having welcomed Councillor R B Howe to the Cabinet and thanked Councillors D Harty and Mrs D C Reynolds for their contribution to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being), Councillor Guyatt proposed and it was duly seconded and

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor K M Baker be appointed to replace Councillor C R Hyams in the membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being); and
- (b) that Councillor J W G Pethard be appointed to the Cambridgeshire Adults, Well Being and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the place of Councillor R J West.

The meeting ended at 10.10pm.

Chairman