

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, 30 July 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor A J Mackender-Lawrence – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar, M G Baker, K M Baker, Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, G J Bull, R C Carter, S Cawley, B S Chapman, K J Churchill, S J Criswell, I J Curtis, J W Davies, D B Dew, Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs L A Duffy, R S Farrer, M Francis, R Fuller, D A Giles, J A Gray, A Hansard, G J Harlock, R Harrison, D Harty, T Hayward, R B Howe, B Hyland, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic, S M Van De Kerkhove, Mrs R E Mathews, P G Mitchell, J P Morris, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I C Bates, Mrs S Conboy, A J Hardy, Mrs P J Longford, M C Oliver and P K Ursell.

15. PRAYER

The Venerable Hugh McCurdy, Archdeacon of Huntingdon and Wisbech opened the meeting with Prayer.

16. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Chairman's Events

The Chairman presented to Council an account of the activities both he and the Vice Chairman, Councillor Bucknell had attended since taking their roles in June.

The Chairman was particularly delighted to present an award to St Peter's School at the Regional Finals of the Young Enterprise Business Awards at Robinson College, Cambridge. Councillor Mackender Lawrence also indicated how proud he was to raise the flag at a ceremony in Samian Court on 27th June and to lay the District Council's wreath in the Market Square in Huntingdon on 13th July as part of the Sea Sunday Remembrance Service.

Colin Meadowcroft

The Chairman made the Council aware that Colin Meadowcroft would be presiding at the meeting for the last time as he was leaving the District Council after 28 years' service on 31st July.

Councillors paid tribute to Colin's contribution and expertise and the advice he had offered in his role of Monitoring Officer and as the Council's principal legal advisor. Following a round of applause, the Council

RESOLVED

that the best wishes of the Council be extended to Mr C Meadowcroft, Head of Legal & Democratic Services and Monitoring Officer and appreciation for his services to Huntingdonshire over 28 years be placed on record.

17. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 4th June 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

18. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor M F Shellens declared a non statutory disclosable interest in Item No. 24 (b) by virtue of his membership of Cambridgeshire County Council's Pensions Board.

19. EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR PRESENTATIONS

Councillor R B Howe, Executive Councillor for Commercial Activities

The Chairman invited Councillor R B Howe, Executive Councillor for Commercial Activities to address the Council on the principal services within his portfolio responsibilities namely One Leisure, CCTV and the Document Centre. Councillor Howe began by advising the Council that it was his intention to introduce the principles associated with a commercial enterprise into the organisation but still continue to deliver services, to meet needs and benefit stakeholders.

In terms of the One Leisure service, the Council was reminded that there were five leisure centres and one outdoor centre. These had attracted 140,000 members of which 36,000 were regular users. It was the view of the Executive Councillor that these centres were essential in promoting healthy activities to young people and encouraging residents to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Councillor Howe indicated how passionately he believed in these aspirations and how important it was that these centres be protected for young and old to use despite the difficulty in managing and maintaining them efficiently and effectively in the current economic climate. Despite a healthy annual income, Councillor Howe explained that the Centres still operated with a budget deficit and that he was determined to vary the economic model so that the District Council would not have to continue to subsidise the centres in the future. He compared the District Council's operation and profit to that of LA Fitness and indicated how he envisaged the role of Centre Manager would change going forward.

Although a controversial area in the past, Councillor Howe reminded the Council that the authority continued to support the CCTV service which was available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It was used

extensively by the police and was highly valued in town centres. A project to share the service with Cambridge City Council had involved the installation of 160 additional cameras into the Control Room at Eastfield House and whilst early days, work was continuing to ensure the shared service succeeded such that it could be extended to other Councils. He also envisaged that the service might be offered to schools, building sites, commercial premises etc as a way of covering its steep operating costs.

Lastly, Councillor Howe described his plans for the Document Centre. It was his intention to expand the service by making it available to other councils. This would improve the recovery of costs and operating expenses currently met by this authority.

Questions to Councillor Howe were then invited. Councillor S M Van De Kerkhove raised a question about cross border visitors (from Bedfordshire principally) to One Leisure, St Neots and the possibility of making an extra charge for use of facilities by non Huntingdonshire residents. In reply, Councillor Howe indicated that a data base was available which could report how many users of One Leisure, St Neots came to the Centre from Bedfordshire and that he was able to provide this information to the questioner after the meeting. In response to a question from Councillor P D Reeve, Councillor Howe indicated that One Leisure at Ramsey would continue to operate as a separate centre. In terms of staffing and in response to a question from Councillor T F Hayward, Councillor Howe accepted that there had been a number of changes in staffing which may have impacted on morale but that he was hopeful that the new Head of Service would bring a new spirit to the service which ultimately would result in happy and contented staff. Referring to the smaller centres and in response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens, Councillor Howe made it clear that provided these centres were able to demonstrate that they continued to work efficiently for the benefit of their local community they would not be required to compete with the larger centres.

Attention was drawn by Councillor M F Shellens to the Council's decision to employ agency staff to cover the loss of lifeguards at Huntingdon Leisure Centre. Councillor Howe explained that lifeguards had received an increase in pay during the recent pay review but fitness and other instructors had had pay reduced. This had resulted in a reduction in resources which had led to the cancellation of some classes at Sawtry. It was his expectation that, in future, leisure centre staff would be multi skilled and sufficiently flexible to respond to shortfalls in staff and classes in other centres.

Councillor Howe confirmed in response to questions from Councillor Mrs L Duffy that should the extension of the CCTV service to other users generate commercial benefits, he would, after consultation, consider whether these savings might advantage the town councils. Councillor Howe added that he would give as early notice as possible of CCTV costs to the town councils for budget purposes. On another subject, Councillor Mrs Duffy asked why only 25% of One Leisure members appeared to be using the facilities regularly and Councillor Howe accepted that this was an issue that required further investigation through comparisons with LA Fitness and other authority centres. Councillor Mrs Duffy suggested that it may be a question of

improved marketing and transport to centres and asked whether the prospect of a community bus had been considered to take users to the Ramsey Centre which was located some distance out of town. Councillor Howe confirmed that marketing of the One Leisure brand would become the responsibility of the Centre Manager who would be encouraged to use resources to best generate interest locally.

Returning to the question of instructors at One Leisure, Sawtry, Councillor Howe acknowledged the importance of swimming for children and suggested that swimming lessons would resume when the Centre had a full complement of staff.

Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources

As the Executive Councillor had spoken on several occasions recently on the budget process, Councillor Gray suggested that he would use the opportunity to give an overview on budget matters and the direction of travel. He explained that his portfolio broadly covered management of the Council's estate and property, financial resources and setting the budget. In terms of the Council's estate, Councillor Gray reminded Members that he was undertaking a review of the Council's commercial estate, that this yielded an annual income of £1.9m and that the 'Facing the Future' exercise had endorsed the principle of managing the property such that it would continue to provide income to offset the level of Council tax. The outcome of the review of commercial estates was due to be published shortly. All other property falls within the Council's operational estate and included, for example, Eastfield House, Pathfinder House, car parks, land and buildings etc with an estimated value of approximately £38m.

Regarding the direction of travel, Councillor Gray reminded the Council that it had recently approved a strategy for treasury management. In terms of the budget, work also had commenced on a base budget review. Although the format had yet to be finalised, he described a new process whereby Heads of Service would be required to appear before a 'star chamber' to bid for the level of budget they required to fund their services in the forthcoming financial year. Heads of Service would be subject to challenge and the budget would evolve through this process. Councillor Gray confirmed that the Overview & Scrutiny Panel still would have a part to play in this process.

The Executive Councillor indicated that it was his objective to produce a balanced budget without reliance on reserves and government grant. He was aware that the outcome of the general election in May 2015 may have an impact on the level of government funding so considered that it was in the Council's interest to develop a strategy which reduced any reliance on the government.

In terms of Council tax, Councillor Gray announced that there would be no increase in tax levels in 2015/16 and that he was optimistic that there would be no increase until 2020. Although the budget was being prepared on this basis it depended upon continuation of the Council's existing approach to customer service and value for money.

In response to a question from Councillor P D Reeve regarding the

potential for use of Council buildings for bed and breakfast accommodation, Councillor Gray indicated that whilst he had instructed the Estates Officer to find a suitable property, this had prompted a local RSG to consider purchasing property for this purpose in Huntingdon at no cost to the Council. Councillor Gray pointed out that whilst this approach would not solve all problems, it might prompt partners to consider options. On the same theme, Councillor J P Morris asked whether the Council had any plans to increase the supply of affordable housing to rent and purchase. In his capacity as Executive Councillor for Planning & Housing Strategy, Councillor D B Dew admitted that although this was a huge challenge in the District, the Council would seek to encourage developers and social landlords to provide social housing and particularly shared equity properties in the new local plan period to 2036.

In answer to a question from Councillor R S Farrer, Councillor Gray confirmed that it was not the Council's intention to build Council houses.

In commending the review of the base budget and having expressed an interest in the 'star chamber' approach, Councillor Mrs L Duffy requested that free car parking in Ramsey be retained. Councillor Gray acknowledged that this was an important issue for residents and would form part of the review of the Council's operational estate.

Councillor M F Shellens observed that the timescale for the introduction of base budget was extremely tight. He also made comments on the excellent level of customer services that continued to be provided, the need to encourage provision of one and two bedroomed units to release larger properties for families and the progress of the 'Making Assets Count' project. In reply, Councillor Gray confirmed that 'MAC' work was continuing although delivery was difficult outside the District and he would welcome the contribution of both the County and town and parish councils and other partners in taking this initiative forward in a more positive way. He also was confident that the move to base budgeting would be successful.

Councillor R Harrison reported that the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well Being) would consider an update on 'Facing the Future' at their September meeting and that he was optimistic that when all new Corporate Directors and Heads of Service were in place the options would begin to move forward more positively.

Councillor K J Churchill welcomed the general direction of Councillor Gray's address and the underlying objective – to make the Council an efficient and effective organisation, providing excellent value for money services for all residents. Councillor Gray thanked all Members for their support.

Questions to Cabinet Members

In response to a question from Councillor P Kadewere in respect of the tragic drowning of a young person in the river at Hartford, the Executive Leader gave an assurance to the family and the community that the District Council would work with the relevant agencies, regardless of where responsibilities lay, to meet the wishes of the bereaved family in terms of the erection of warning signs or other

preventative measures on the riverbank at Hartford.

Referring to a recent court case involving Councillor R Harrison and in response to a question from Councillor D A Giles, the Executive Leader was of the opinion that the case had been a civil matter dealt with appropriately by the Court. If the case had involved a breach of the District Council's code of conduct he would have referred the matter to the Monitoring Officer for investigation. Whilst he was of the view that the allegations had been politically motivated, Councillor Ablewhite reminded the Council that he had made a statement to the local press at the time and did not wish to add to this. Councillor K J Churchill also concurred with the view that the case had been a civil matter and had been dealt with accordingly.

In response to questions from Councillors M G Baker and P D Reeve, the Executive Leader agreed that any restructuring of an organisation would cause uncertainty amongst staff, that it was natural process for employees to change, that in his recent discussions with staff, morale appeared to be improving and that every opportunity would be taken to share the skills and expertise of Council employees.

Lastly, in response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens, the Executive Leader confirmed that Waitrose had decided to withdraw from the unit which they had been expected to take up in the new Huntingdon development but it was understood that a prestigious organisation was to take their place and that this would be confirmed in due course. Current works involved the removal of a gas main which had resulted in significant ground works.

20. STRATEGIC SHARED SERVICES PARTNERSHIP WITH SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE

The Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite confirmed that the District Council had agreed to form a strategic alliance with South Cambridgeshire District Council. Councillor Ablewhite made it clear that it was not the intention to form a unitary authority but to consider services which both authorities could share. The Council was advised that work was underway to examine the business case for sharing the building control, legal and IMD services. Councillor Ablewhite added that whilst South Cambridgeshire had given the partnership its whole hearted support it would not deter Huntingdonshire from working with other partners to seek to deliver services in an efficient and cost effective way.

In response to the announcement, Councillor M F Shellens expressed concern at the potential difficulty in the future should the District Council wish to withdraw from the partnership arrangements. Councillor Ablewhite replied by stating that the District Council had entered into the partnership positively would agree contracts that would permit the Council to withdraw should it transpire that new services were not cost effective or as efficient as desired.

Councillor R S Farrer expressed his disappointment with the decision to pursue a shared building control service as he was of the opinion that this would not be in the best interests of the Council or the public.

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 Legal & Democratic Services, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite presented details of the Cabinet Portfolios for the ensuing year. Councillor Ablewhite suggested that the portfolios would continue to evolve and develop as the year ensued. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the report now submitted be noted.

22. APPOINTMENT OF MONITORING AND SECTION 151 OFFICERS

Having regard to a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the legislative duty placed on the Council to appoint a Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer and as the designations had been held by the former Assistant Director, Finance & Resources and the Head of Legal & Democratic Services who was shortly to be leaving the Council's service, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Julie Slatter, the newly appointed Corporate Director (Services) be designated the District Council's Monitoring Officer with effect from 1st September 2014;
- (b) that the interim appointment by the Managing Director of the Head of Resources as the Council's Section 151 Officer with effect from 1st April be confirmed and made permanent also with effect from 1st September 2014; and
- (c) that the Democratic Services Manager be appointed Monitoring Officer for a temporary period commencing 1st August 2014 until such time as the new Corporate Director takes office which it is anticipated will be 1st September 2014.

23. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2014/15

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 2014/15 had been made available in the Members' Room (an Executive Summary of which also is appended in the Minute Book).

Councillor Davies explained that the Council had to demonstrate how it proposed to fulfil the duty placed upon it to deliver official food controls, national priorities and standards in the District. The Service

Plan sets out how these arrangements have been made, how the enforcement function will be delivered, describes the resources required to deliver it and reviews the previous years' performance.

The Council noted that the overall budget for the service represented an increase of 1.7% over the previous financial year. Workloads within the Commercial Team also had been adjusted to provide resources for food safety and hygiene. Although anticipated that the budget would be sufficient to meet the demands of the service, the Council acknowledged that additional funds might be necessary in the event of a complex investigation or legal case or the introduction of central sampling charges.

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 2014/15 be adopted.

24. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES

(a) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Reports of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 21st May, 4th and 19th June, 10th and 17th July 2014.

.....

In connection with Item No. 1 and upon being moved by Councillor Ablewhite, and seconded by Councillor J A Gray, the recommendation was declared to be CARRIED.

.....

In connection with Item No. 2 and in response to a question from Councillor K J Churchill, the Executive Leader confirmed that, in his view, it was appropriate that the Cabinet, rather than the Council, had agreed changes to the provision of IT to Members.

.....

In connection with Item No. 15 and in response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens, the Executive Leader was of the opinion that it would be in order for a report on the operation of the Cambridgeshire Home Improvement Strategy beyond 2015 to be submitted to the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Panel at the appropriate time.

.....

In connection with Item No. 16 and in response to surprise expressed by Councillor J P Morris that the comments of the Cabinet in relation to the Cambridgeshire Transport Strategy

related only to the car and not to the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and young children en route to school given that 50% of all journeys were less than a distance of 3 miles, the Executive Leader agreed that whilst the future framework for transport in the County should be sustainable, the County Council should not lose sight of the need for the continued use of a car in a rural area.

.....

In connection with Item No. 19 and having complimented the document 'A Tree Strategy for Huntingdonshire', Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Operations and the Environment confirmed that it was the intention to engage Parish Councils in future work on trees in towns and villages, that he would ask the Arboricultural Officer to update Councillor T F Hayward on the position with tree safety surveys, guidance upon which had been requested by Buckden Parish Council. A comment from Councillor M F Shellens regarding the marketability of the 'Tree Strategy' document was noted.

.....

In connection with Item No. 20 and in response to a question from Councillor R S Farrer, the Executive Leader advised that it was anticipated that work on the Community Building at Loves Farm. St Neots would commence by the end of the year.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Reports of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 21st May, 4th and 19th June, 10th and 17th July 2014 be received and adopted.

(b) Employment Panel

Councillor S Cawley presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 1st July 2014.

.....

Upon being put to the vote, the recommendations contained in Item No. 1 were declared to be CARRIED.

.....

In connection with Item No. 4, Councillor Cawley invited the Council to endorse the sentiments of the Panel with regard to Mr D Hinks, Ms J Parsons, Ms M Reeve, Mr M Roberts and Mr R Bays who had recently retired from the local

government service.

.....

In connection with Item No. 8, Councillor Cawley undertook to respond, in writing, to a question from Councillor K J Churchill on the level of expenditure on consultants, hired and temporary staff in in 2012/13 in comparison with 2013/14.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 1st July 2014 be received and adopted.

(c) Licensing and Protection Panel

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 24th June 2014.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 24th June 2014 be received and adopted.

(d) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor G J Harlock presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 23rd July 2014.

.....

After discussion and having been put to a vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 1 was declared to be CARRIED.

.....

After discussion and having been put to a vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 2 was declared to be CARRIED.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 23rd July 2014 be received and adopted.

(e) Development Management Panel

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 19th May, 16th June and 21st July 2014.

.....

In connection with Item No. 3 and in response to a question from Councillor R S Farrer, Councillor Mrs Boddington reassured the questioner that, following the recent appointment of Team Managers, there would be increased resources to enable the Development Management Service to operate to a higher capacity.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 19th May, 16th June and 21st July 2014 be received and adopted.

(f) Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 10th June and 8th July 2014.

.....

In connection with Item No. 1, Councillor Criswell undertook to respond in writing to a question received from Councillor T F Hayward regarding the reasons why Rural CAB had failed to meet its agreed performance targets.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 10th June and 8th July 2014 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor G J Bull presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

held on 17th June and 15th July 2014.

.....

In connection with Item No 8, Councillor Bull invited Councillor D B Dew, in his capacity as Executive Councillor for Planning & Housing Strategy, to respond to a question from Councillor T F Hayward regarding the inclusion within the District Council's response (to consultation on the Long Term Transport Strategy) of the importance of planned improvements to the A1. Although outside this process, Councillor Dew assured Members that the District Council was continuing to lobby the County and other agencies for improvements to the A1 and A428 and on the potential for duelling of the A428.

.....

In connection with Item No. 10, Councillor Bull reassured the questioner, Councillor R S Farrer, that the prospect of shared services would continue to evolve and that the Environmental Well Being Panel would continue to keep those services within their remit under review.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 17th June and 15th July 2014 be received and adopted.

(h) Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Councillor R Harrison presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 6th May, 12th June and 10th July 2014.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Reports of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 6th May, 12th June and 10th July 2014 be received and adopted.

(i) Standards Committee

Councillor A Hansard presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 26th June 2014.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 26th June 2014 be received and adopted.

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

On the recommendation of Councillor R G Tuplin, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor T F Hayward be appointed to the membership of the Standards Committee in place of Councillor S M Van De Kerkhove.

The meeting concluded at 9.50 pm

Chairman