

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 29 July 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor P L E Bucknell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, K M Baker, Mrs B E Boddington, D Brown, E R Butler, R C Carter, S Cawley, B S Chapman, S J Criswell, Mrs A D Curtis, J W Davies, D B Dew, Mrs A Dickinson, Mrs L A Duffy, R S Farrer, M Francis, R Fuller, I D Gardener, L George, D A Giles, A Hansard, R Harrison, D Harty, T Hayward, R B Howe, P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic, Mrs R E Mathews, J P Morris, M C Oliver, J M Palmer, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, K D Wainwright, R J West and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors T D Alban, I C Bates, G J Bull, K J Churchill, Mrs S Conboy, J A Gray, A J Hardy, B Hyland, Mrs P A Jordan, S M Van De Kerkhove and D J Mead.

14. PRAYER

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

15. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman presented to Council an account of the activities both he and the Vice-Chairman, Councillor West had attended since the last meeting. The Chairman was particularly delighted to confirm that they had fulfilled every event that they had been invited to and thanked Members and Officers for their attendance at the Armed Forces Day. Members were also advised of attendance at forthcoming events, including the Queens Award for Industry at Anglian Water on 24th September 2015.

16. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 20th May 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, subject to the inclusion of Councillors D Brown, Mrs A D Curtis and J M Palmer in the list of attendees.

17. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations of interests were received.

18. PRESENTATION BY THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND

The Council received a presentation from Professor C Mellors, Lead Commissioner and Richard Buck, Review Manager of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on a review of the Council's electoral arrangements. Members were advised of their primary objective to work with local authorities to assist them with delivering effective and convenient local government. The last review was conducted some 13 years previously and since that time electoral imbalances had emerged in certain wards of the District.

The Council was acquainted with details of the electoral review by way of an examination of the Council's electoral arrangements and would be looking at the total number of members to be elected to the Council, the number and names of the wards and the boundaries of the wards. Members were advised of the review process, including the various stages and timetable for implementation. The preliminary stage would be addressing the council size followed by proposals for new ward boundaries, ensuring that each Councillor represented a similar number of electors, reflecting the interests and identities of local communities and ensuring effective and convenient local government in accordance with their statutory criteria.

Members were advised that as the Council currently elected by thirds there would be an assumption of a clear pattern of three member wards and should Members want to move away from this pattern there would need to be evidence to support such a proposal.

Councillor S Criswell suggested that multi-member wards often confused the electorate as there was uncertainty as to who to contact for the respective ward. This view was shared by Councillor D A Giles and in response Professor Mellors explained that some local authorities had moved to whole Council elections with uniform single members wards.

The Executive Leader reported to the Council of the recent meetings that had been held with the LGBCE and explained that he was keen to work with them to their timescales but was disappointed that contact had only been made at the latter part of the preliminary period unlike neighbouring authorities also undertaking a review. In response Professor Mellors reassured Members that the decision to be taken at the next Council meeting on Council size was still within the appropriate timescale and it was not necessary to submit a lengthy argument to support any proposals.

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington referred to the large rural size of her ward and questioned whether this would be taken into account in the warding patterns. In response, Professor Mellors explained that this did not form part of the criteria and was based upon the size of the electorate. He also explained that it was not possible create a difference between urban and rural areas.

In relation to the evidence to support the decision on Council size, Councillor M F Shellens commented that there was little support for a decrease in the number of Councillors with the continuing pressures

on the Council's budget and more demands on Members. Councillor Shellens also referred to the future growth in the District and the potential for the variance in the ratio of electors to councillors in some wards to become obsolete soon after the conclusion of the review. Professor Mellors explained that the 10% variance rule could be extended to some degree to allow for such instances in certain wards. In concluding Professor Mellors advised Members of the consultative exercise that would follow the decision on Council size and urged Members to use their knowledge base to participate in shaping the future warding patterns.

19. STATE OF THE DISTRICT 2015

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 12, the Chairman invited the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite to address the Council on the State of the District. In support of his presentation, a summary of the Annual Report 2014/15 and salient facts had been laid on the table (a copy of which is reproduced in the Minute Book).

Councillor Ablewhite reminded Members of the continuing challenge facing local government with reductions in budgets and the difficulties with delivering services. The Council had reacted well to these difficulties and had reviewed service delivery by identifying efficiency savings for the Council's residents and customers.

Councillor Ablewhite added that the Medium Term Financial Strategy had been developed to reduce reliance on Central Government funding, whilst minimising the impact on residents. Councillor Ablewhite proceeded to remind Members of the savings achieved to date through the Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) processes, creating reserves to be invested in a Commercial Investment Strategy fund to generate a source of income for future years.

The Council's attention was also drawn to the successful securing of grant funding of £500k as part of the Transformation Challenge Award working with partners for the shared services projects being undertaken with South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council.

Looking forward, the Council were advised of future developments involving the empowerment of managers and utilising business intelligence and information technology to ensure budgets are being met. Members further were acquainted with proposals to ensure One Leisure makes a surplus in the future and the capital costs are covered by the end of this financial year. (A copy of Councillor Ablewhite's full address is reproduced in the Minute Book.)

The Leader of the Principal Opposition, Councillor Ms L A Duffy was invited to respond. Councillor Ms Duffy commended the Council on how well it was working and moving forward, including cross party working. She welcomed the continuing strive to maintain a zero rise in Council Tax and the impact of ZBB. Councillor Ms Duffy praised Mrs J Lancaster, Managing Director and her Officers for their professional nature of improving and maintaining staff. She proceeded to encourage Members to attend training sessions and commended Mr C Mason on the recent training on the budget.

Whilst welcoming the need for further housing development in the District, Councillor Ms Duffy expressed concern at the impact of such developments in the rural areas but felt that there needed to be a balance with the requirement for more affordable housing.

Councillor R G Tuplin concurred with the sentiments raised by Councillor Ms Duffy and the positive working relationship that currently existed within the Council amongst Members.

Councillor M F Shellens suggested that attention needed to be focussed on those residents with limited wealth, particularly the younger generation in the District and supported the comments in relation to the requirement for more affordable housing.

In congratulating the Executive Leader on the contents of the Annual Report, Councillor P Kadewere highlighted his concerns with the welfare reform and the impact on some of our communities and indicated his desire to assist with improving the situation for those affected.

In response to the comments from Members, Councillor Ablewhite welcomed the collaborative working amongst the Council and shared the same concerns regarding the vulnerable in the District and explained that they continued to be a priority and would be addressed through regular communication to focus on the areas that needed assistance. In response to the developments in rural areas, Councillor Ablewhite explained that the District was a high growth area and many of the allocated housing sites were on Brownfield land, minimising the impact on such rural locations.

In concluding, Councillor Ablewhite indicated his aspiration to achieve further funding to deliver projects to benefit the residents in the District through collaborative working amongst strategic partner agencies.

20. EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR PRESENTATIONS

(a) Councillor R C Carter, Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment

Councillor R C Carter, Executive Councillor for Operations and Environment addressed the Council on the Operations Review. A copy of Councillor Carter's PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

Members were acquainted with the background to the review of the Operations Division and advised that details had been previously presented to a Special Meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) on 16th June 2015. The Council were informed of the concerns that had been expressed from the Corporate Management Team and Members regarding the pace of change and delivery in the Division and the lack performance monitoring data available. In noting the important role of Overview and Scrutiny in the monitoring of performance, Members were advised that a programme of reports had been scheduled for future meetings of the Panel and a further update on the

restructuring would be presented to their meeting in September 2015.

The focus of future developments had been highlighted to the Council with an emphasis on customer service and delivering value for money. Councillor Carter explained that although there was a strong core of committed staff, the Division lacked leadership and vision. He proceeded to explain that the staffing structure in the Division was outdated and the service had been reactive rather than proactive, with no service improvement plans to take the Division forward. Members also noted further findings from the Review, which included a desire to address lack of political awareness amongst key managers and tackling the unacceptable levels of sickness absence, resulting in improved productivity and a decreasing reliance on agency workers.

The proposed new operating model was presented to the Council by Mr A Merrick, Interim Head of Operations. The principles of the new operating model were highlighted to Members, which included the integration of the grounds maintenance and street cleansing teams, the identification of clearer team leader roles to monitor productivity and work schedules and creation of a new team to tackle non-routine works such as fly tipping and graffiti removal.

In response to a question from Councillor B S Chapman on problems he had been experiencing with the maintenance of verges in Loves Farm, St Neots following the transfer of responsibility to Cambridgeshire County Council (CCC), Councillor Carter requested that he be provided with further detail in order that specific areas can be added to the weed spraying programme.

Councillor P Kadewere highlighted problems he had been experiencing with the lack of maintenance of the bridges over Coneygear Road, Huntingdon, whereby Councillor Carter undertook to arrange a visit with Councillor Kadewere to investigate this issue further.

Councillor P D Reeve raised a question on the feasibility of working with other authorities to share the costs and queried the working arrangement with CCC in the maintenance arrangements. In response Councillor Carter explained that work was being undertaken with Town and Parish Councils to identify responsibility for grounds maintenance.

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being), Councillor T D Sanderson, reported on the presentation at their Panel in June 2015 indicated his support for the proposals. In response to his comment on the ability to feedback to residents' progress on a complaint or service request, Councillor Carter explained that all Members issues were now being logged to ensure progress can be fed back to the originator.

(b) Questions to Other Members of the Cabinet

In response to a question from Councillor T Hayward on the misinformation that had been presented to Highways England on the Borrow Pits around Brampton, the Executive Leader undertook to follow up the matter outside of the meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor J White on the future of the RAF bases at Alconbury and Molesworth, the Executive Leader updated Members on the progress at both bases and had been advised that the American Forces would not be vacating any time before 2023. The Ministry of Defence was undertaking fundamental review of its estates and the Executive Councillor reported that one of the forces had already indicated an interest in RAF Molesworth. It was anticipated that the review would be completed in February 2016.

In response to a question from Councillor D A Giles on car parking charges, Councillor R B Howe reported that there were no plans for an increase in car parking charges or applying a charge for Sunday parking.

In response to a question from Councillor B S Chapman on the timescale for preparation of a Development Plan for St Neots, Councillor D B Dew undertook to establish the period for completion.

Arising from a question from Councillor P D Reeve on a strategy for gypsy and traveller sites in the District, Councillor Dew explained that further details would emerge as part of production of the new Local Plan.

21. SERVICE PLAN FOR FOOD LAW ENFORCEMENT 2015/16

By reference to a report by the Head of Community to which was appended the Service Plan for Food Law Enforcement 2015/16 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor R Fuller, Chairman of the Licensing & Protection Panel reminded Members that the Food Standards Agency required the Council to prepare a Food Enforcement Service Plan annually in accordance with an agreed framework.

Councillor Fuller 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.

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 2015/16 be adopted.

22. STATUTORY DISMISSAL PROCEDURES FOR HEADS OF PAID SERVICE, MONITORING OFFICERS AND THE RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER

The Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite presented a report on changes to the statutory disciplinary and dismissal procedures (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) detailing arrangements necessary for an amendment to the Council's Constitution to reflect the new regulations and to incorporate the requirements of the new Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.

The Regulations amend the statutory disciplinary and dismissal procedures of English Local Authorities' Heads of Paid Service, Monitoring Officers and Chief Financial Officers and replace the statutory Designated Independent Person (DIP) process, outlined in the current Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001.

The Regulations state that before an Authority considers whether to dismiss an officer, it must convene a Panel made up of Councillors and at least two Independent Persons.

Having confirmed the support of the Employment Panel and the Corporate Governance Panel, it was moved, seconded and

RESOLVED

that District Council's Constitution be amended to reflect the new regulations and to incorporate the requirements of the new Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015 as attached to the Officer's report.

23. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES

(a) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor M Francis presented the Report of the meetings of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 3rd June and 15th July 2015.

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In connection with Item No. 1 and upon being moved by Councillor Francis, and seconded by Councillor G J Bull, the recommendation was declared to be CARRIED.
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In connection with Item No. 2, Councillor M F Shellens moved and was duly seconded the inclusion of the following recommendation –

that the Executive Leader and Executive Councillor be kept informed of the negotiation process for the disposals and acquisitions and the relevant Ward Councillor be informed prior to the sale.

Subject to the inclusion of the additional recommendation outlined above, it was duly moved by Councillor Francis and seconded by Councillor G J Bull and the recommendations were declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 3rd June and 15th July 2015 be received and adopted.

(b) 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 20th May, 18th June and 16th July 2014.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Reports of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 20th May, 18th June and 16th July 2014 be received and adopted.

(c) Licensing and Protection Panel

Councillor R Fuller presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 23rd June 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 23rd June 2015 be received and adopted.

(d) Licensing Committee

Councillor R Fuller presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 23rd June 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 23rd June 2015 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 27th May, 15th June and 20th July 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 27th May, 15th June and 20th July 2015 be received and adopted.

(f) Employment Panel

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 17th June 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 17th June 2015 be received and adopted.

(g) 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 2nd June and 7th July 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 2nd June and 7th July 2015 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor T D Sanderson presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 9th June, 16th June and 14th July 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 9th June, 16th June and 14th July 2015 be received and adopted.

(i) Overview & Scrutiny (Economic Well-Being)

Councillor D Harty presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 4th June and 9th July 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 4th June and 9th July 2015 be received and adopted.

(j) Standards Committee

Councillor A Hansard presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 25th June 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 25th June 2015 be received and adopted.

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

Arising from the vacancy that still existed on the Development Plan Policy Advisory Group, the Council

RESOLVED

that Councillor R S Farrer be appointed to the membership of the Development Plan Policy Advisory Group.

The meeting ended at 9.42pm.

Chairman