

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held at Performing Arts Centre, Hinchingsbrooke School, Brampton Road, Huntingdon on Wednesday, 18 February 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Fell - Chairman

Councillors Mrs M Banjeree, I C Bates,
Mrs B E Boddington, P J Brant, E R Butler,
Mrs J Chandler, R L Clarke, W T Clough,
J W Davies, P J Downes, A H Duberly,
J A P Eddy, Miss N C Elliot, J E Garner,
Mrs S A Giles, Mrs C A Godley,
Mrs K P Gregory, N J Guyatt, A Hansard,
D Harty, D P Holley, A B Hulme,
Mrs P J Longford, C W Looker,
Mrs S A Menczer, P G Mitchell,
J C Mugglestone, R Powell, M G Rainer,
Mrs D C Reynolds, K Reynolds, T V Rogers,
J M Sadler, T D Sanderson, L M Simpson,
J M Souter, P A Swales, J Taylor, R G Tuplin,
P K Ursell, Mrs S J Vanbergen,
Mrs N F Wagstaffe and J S Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors M G Baker, R E Barnes, D B Dew, D A Giles, M F Newman, R P Rhodes, J G Rignall and B F C Wallis.

PRAYER

The Venerable John Beer, Archdeacon of Huntingdon, opened the meeting with prayer.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The Chairman announced that a seminar for Members on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment would be held on 23rd March 2004 and that further details on the arrangements for the evening would follow shortly.

55. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19th January 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

56. ORAL QUESTIONS

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules (Section 8.3) of the Council's Constitution, the Chairman proceeded to conduct a period for oral questions addressed to Executive Councillors and Panel Chairmen as follows:-

Question from Councillor J M Souter to the Leader of the Council, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a series of questions about a proposed post of Overview and Scrutiny Adviser not being included in the Medium Term Plan 2004-2009, the value of scrutiny in the decision making processes of the Council and the attendance of Executive Councillors at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, the Leader replied that he agreed with the importance of Executive Councillors attending meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels when invited to do so, that the overview and scrutiny process was a vital part of the democratic procedures of the Council and that, given the Council's budgetary commitments and the support already provided to the scrutiny function, it had been decided not to fund a post of Overview and Scrutiny Adviser.

Question from Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds to the Leader of the Council, D P Holley

In response to a question as to the existence of studies on public support for Regional Assemblies, the Leader replied that the Local Government Association had commissioned independent surveys, the results of which were available on the Association's website.

Question from Councillor P J Downes to the Leader of the Council, D P Holley

In response to a question regarding consultation by the Electoral Commission on the frequency of local government elections, the Leader replied that the Elections Panel would consider the issue at their next meeting and report to Council accordingly.

Question from Councillor R G Tuplin to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a question requesting details of the cost to the Council thus far of the decision to refuse planning permission for development on Alconbury Airfield, Councillor Guyatt estimated that these had exceeded £2m but that he would confirm the precise figure in writing to the questioner. In terms of the conditions which had been attached to the consent granted by the Secretary of State on appeal, Councillor Guyatt suggested that these were of greater stringency than could have been applied by the District Council.

Question from Councillor A Hansard to the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question about a recently publicised homelessness initiative by Cambridge City Council to distribute travel warrants to the homeless to encourage them to leave the city, Councillor Bates reported that he was not aware that this had had any impact on the District Council's housing register but that he would confirm his understanding and notify Members accordingly.

Question from Councillor W T Clough to the Leader of the Council, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a question regarding progress of the Member led review of the District Council's base budget approved by the Council at their last meeting, the Leader explained that this could not commence until determination of the Council tax level and budget for 2004/2005 later in the meeting.

Question from Councillor J W Davies to the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding flood prevention works in the Hemingfords and similar work in St Ives, Councillor Bates explained that the Environment Agency had given a presentation to the Parishes of Hemingford Abbots, Hemingford Grey and Fenstanton and that he could not foresee any reason why this could not be extended to St Ives Town Council.

Question from Councillor Mrs M Banerjee to the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding replacement arrangements for Local Authority Social Housing Grant which had been discontinued by the Government in 2003, Councillor Bates replied that the District Council's submission for funding for social housing development to the East of England Regional Housing Board had been unsuccessful and that the Council would continue to work with registered social landlords locally to endeavour to secure affordable housing on new development sites.

Question from Councillor C W Looker to the Leader, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a question seeking clarification of the Council's position in respect of the balancing of funding consultation paper issued by the Government, the Leader explained that the Cabinet favoured the retention of a national property based tax with transitional benefits that did not penalise low income households or those with personal savings, that local authorities should be permitted to set their own parameters in their own localities and that sufficient funding should be made available by the Government to meet the cost of those functions allocated to local authorities that are subject to central direction.

Question from Councillor M G Rainer to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor M J Guyatt

In response to a question, Councillor Guyatt acknowledged the extension by the Government of the housing/transport corridor from Stansted to Peterborough and the potential implications that the announcement would have for the District.

Question from Councillor A B Hulme to the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a suggestion that the newly appointed Police

Community Support Officers were using their own mobile phones for communication purposes, Councillor Bates replied that there would be an opportunity to raise issues of concern regarding the operation of the PCSOs at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) in March and that although he was not aware that Officers were using personal phones during the course of their duties he would investigate the matter and advise Members accordingly.

57. BUDGET AND 2004 - 2009 MEDIUM TERM PLAN

(Members declared personal interests as follows –

Councillors I C Bates, R L Clarke, P J Downes, J A P Eddy, Mrs S A Giles and A Hansard in their capacity as Members of Cambridgeshire County Council;

Councillors C W Looker and T V Rogers as Chairman and Vice Chairman respectively of the Huntingdonshire Citizens Advice Bureaux;

Councillor Mrs S A Menczer as the Council's representative on the Advisory and Information Counselling Service for Huntingdonshire – Management Committee;

Councillor Mrs N F Wagstaffe as the Council's representative on the Cambridgeshire Age Concern Liaison Committee; and

Councillor J E Garner as a Member of CARESCO

In conjunction with a report by the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and Item No. 102 of the Report of the Cabinet, Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance addressed the Council on the 2004/5 budget and Medium Term Plan drawing attention to an amendment to the recommendation which, for clarity, had been reproduced and circulated at the meeting (a copy of which also is appended in the Minute Book).

Members were reminded of the decisions that they had previously taken approved in respect of the Council's Financial Strategy and draft Budget 2004-2009 at their meetings in September and December 2003 respectively (Minute Nos 39 and 47 refers) and were informed of recent developments affecting schemes in the Medium Term Plan. In respect of the letter, particular attention was drawn to the following –

- ◆ the award of a recycling grant of £963,000;
- ◆ a reduction in the retrenchment costs from £42,000 to £24,000 per annum following negotiations with Councils in the Supporting People Partnership;
- ◆ the Cabinet's decision to defer the introduction of a proposed Car Parking Strategy; and
- ◆ the requirement to meet the applicants' costs in relation to the

planning appeal at Alconbury Airfield.

In addition, Members were made aware of a 3% increase in expenditure in 2003/2004 due to the requirement for emergency repairs to Pathfinder House. Councillor Rogers also reported on the proposed Prudential Indicators, the implications for the Authority should the Secretary of State choose to “cap” the District Council’s expenditure and the recommendations of the Cabinet in terms of the Medium Term Plan, Council tax level and Prudential Indicators.

On behalf of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor Downes acknowledged the contribution of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels to the budget making process and contended that a number of those items which had been deleted from the Medium Term Plan could be reinstated should the Council pursue the lowest cost option in terms of the establishment of a Customer Contact Centre using Cambridgeshire Direct. Following submissions from Councillors Mrs Menczer, Souter, Rainer and Looker in relation to those schemes which they contended could be achieved if additional funds were released by pursuing an alternative option for Customer First, it was moved by Councillor Downes and duly seconded that the following words be added to the fourth bullet point of recommendation 6 contained in the report by the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology as follows -

‘and to the following amendments to the schemes listed in Annex C:-

- (1) in scheme 429 & (441) Grant Aid to Voluntary Organisations listed on page 24, the deletion of the number ‘40’ in years 2004/05 to 2008/09 inclusive in the columns headed Net Revenue Impact and the insertion of the number ‘55’;
- (2) in scheme 372 Youth Participation Project listed on page 24, the deletion of the number ‘0’ in years 2005/06 to 2008/09 inclusive in the columns headed Net Revenue Impact and the insertion of the number ‘35’;
- (3) in scheme 200/B District Council Elections listed on page 26, the deletion of the number 90 in year 2004/05 in the columns headed Net Revenue Impact and the insertion of the number ‘100’;
- (4) in the scheme Customer First listed on page 27, the deletion of the numbers ‘729, 764, 826 and 827’ from year 2005/06 onwards in the columns headed net revenue impact and the insertion of the numbers ‘637, 672, 734 and 735’ and the deletion of the number ‘1,180’ in year 2004/05 of columns headed Net Capital and the insertion of the number ‘980’
- (5) the insertion of the following words immediately before the totals on page 28 after the line ‘other’ and numbers in the Net Revenue Impact columns –

‘484 Pavement resurfacing 0, 50, 50, 50, 50, 50

454 Overview and Scrutiny Advisor 0, 0, 40, 35, 35, 35’

- (6) the deletion of the numbers '4,429, 5,910, 7,491, 8,623, 8,793' in the line headed New Proposed Plan on page 28 in the columns headed Net Revenue Impact and the insertion of the numbers '4,504, 5,958, 7,534, 8,666, 8,836'
- (7) the deletion of the number '11,812' in the line headed New Proposed Plan on page 28 in the columns headed Net Capital and the insertion of the number '11,612'
- (8) consequential amendments to the numbers contained in Annex D.'

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be LOST.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that a net revenue budget of £18.095m and a capital budget of £11.812m for 2004/05 be approved;
- (b) that revenue reserves of £2.803m be made available for use in 2004/05;
- (c) that a Council tax increase of £12 on a Band D property in 2004/05 be approved;
- (d) that subject to resolutions (a) and (h) in Item No 47 of the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 10th December 2003, the Medium Term Plan for 2005-2009 be approved; and
- (e) that the Prudential Indicators as set out in Appendix D to the report now submitted be approved.

58. COUNCIL TAX 2004/05

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to allow consideration of the following item as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 100B(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in view of the requirement to determine the Council Tax for 2004/5 in light of late information forthcoming from the precepting authorities.)

In accordance with Section 30(2) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and with reference to a report by the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology which had been circulated at the meeting (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor T V Rogers proposed the determination of levels of Council Tax for 2004/05 for the various parts of the Huntingdonshire District.

On being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the following amounts be calculated by the Council for 2004/05 in accordance with Sections 32 to 36 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992 (the Act):-

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- (i) the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32(2) (a) to (e) of the Act
Gross revenue expenditure including benefits and Parish Precepts **54,994,212**
- (ii) the aggregate of the amounts which the Council estimates for the items set out in Section 32 (3) (a) to (c) of the Act
Revenue income including reimbursement of benefits and use of reserves **38,152,853**
- (iii) the amount by which the aggregate at (b) (i) above exceeds the aggregate at (b) (ii) above in accordance with Section 32 (4) of the Act
Net expenditure (item i minus item ii) **16,841,359**
- (iv) the aggregate of the amounts payable into the General Fund for the items set out in Section 33 (1) of the Act
Government Support **8,730,716**
- (v) the aggregate of the amounts payable from the General Fund for the items set out in Section 33 (3) of the Act
Collection Fund deficit **13,866**
- (vi) the basic amount of Council Tax for 2004/05 in accordance with Section 33 (1)
District plus average Parish/Town Council Tax **144.70**
per band D Property
- (vii) the aggregate of special items referred to in Section 34 (1)
Total Town and Parish Council precepts **2,816,182**
- (viii) the basic amount of Council Tax for 2004/05 for those parts of the District to which no special item relates
District Council Tax per band D property **94.54**
- (ix) the basic amounts of Council Tax for 2004/05 for those parts of the District to which one or more special items relate in accordance with Section 34 (3) of the Act are shown by adding the Huntingdonshire District Council amount to the appropriate Parish Council amount in column "band D" set out in table 1 hereto
- (x) the amounts to be taken into account for 2004/05 in

respect of categories of dwellings listed in the different valuation bands in accordance with Section 36 (1) of the Act are shown by adding the Huntingdonshire District Council amount to the appropriate Parish Council amount for each of the valuation bands in the columns "bands A to H" set out in table 1 hereto;

- (b) that the amounts of precept issued to the Council by Cambridgeshire County Council, Cambridgeshire Police Authority and the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority for each of the categories of dwellings listed in different valuation bands in accordance with Section 40 of the Act shown in lines 1 to 3 of table 1 hereto be noted; and
- (c) that, having regard to the calculations above, the Council, in accordance with Section 30 (2) of the Local Government and Finance Act 1992, hereby sets the following amounts as the amounts of Council Tax for 2004/05 for each of the categories of dwelling shown in table 2 hereto.

59. ADJOURNMENT

At 4.02pm, it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned.

Upon resumption at 4.15pm .

60. CABINET

Councillor D P Holley, Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 4th December 2003 and 8th and 29th January 2004.

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In connection with Item No 102, it was noted that the recommendations had previously been considered under Minute Nos 57 and 58 ante.

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In connection with Item No 106 and in response to questions from Councillors Looker and Mrs Wagstaffe, the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor Bates replied that as St Neots Town Council had assumed responsibility for the maintenance and cleansing of the public conveniences in that town, the Public Conveniences Advisory Group had taken the view that the opportunity to do likewise should also be offered to the other Town Councils in the District and that the Executive Councillor for Service Delivery would look into the possibility of an earlier opening of the public conveniences in Ramsey on market day.

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In connection with Item No 112 and in response to a question by Councillor Downes, the Leader confirmed that the “changes” and not “charges” in the last line of the paragraph would take effect from 1st April 2004.

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In connection with Item No 114 and in response to a question by Councillor Powell, the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor Guyatt confirmed that the charging proposals for market town car parks would not be implemented until the results of the survey of Council Tax payers on the delivery of Council services was known.

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(Councillor I C Bates, R L Clarke, P J Downes, J A P Eddy and A Hansard declared a personal interest in the following item in their capacity as Members of Cambridgeshire County Council).

In connection with Item No 122 and in response to a question by Councillor Downes, the Leader reminded the Council, by reference to extracts from a letter from the Secretary of State, of the recommendations of the Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi Modal Study and the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor Guyatt explained that discussions were on-going with the County Council to overcome major issues of concern to the District Council in respect of the development of the Cambridgeshire Guided Bus scheme.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 4th December 2003 and 8th and 29th January 2004 be received and adopted.

61. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (PLANNING AND FINANCE)

Councillor P A Swales presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) held on 9th December 2003 and 13th January 2004.

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Further to Minute No 56, the Chairman announced that the Panel would be considering issues relating to the Police Community Support Officers at their next meeting to be held on 9th March 2004 at the Countryside Centre, Hinchbrook Country Park.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Planning and Finance) held on 9th December 2003 and 13th January 2004 be received and adopted.

62. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL (SERVICE DELIVERY AND RESOURCES)

Councillor K Reynolds presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 2nd December 2003 and 6th January and 3rd February 2004.

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In connection with Item No 31 (c) and in response to questions from Councillors Looker, Mrs Chandler, Mrs Wagstaffe and Mrs Banerjee, the Chairman agreed that the Panel would re-examine the role of the Leisure Centre Management Committees as a future study area vis a vis their relationship with the District Council.

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In connection with Item No 31 (d) the Chairman drew the Council's attention to the success of the meeting of the Panel which had been held at Warboys Parish Centre.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 2nd December 2003 and 6th January and 3rd February 2004 be received and adopted.

63. DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL

(The Chairman announced the he proposed to allow consideration of the report of the meeting held on 10th February 2004 as a matter of urgency in accordance with Section 1000(4)(b) of the Local Government Act 1972 in view of the requirement for Council to consider the recommendation of a departure from the Local Plan.)

Councillor P G Mitchell presented the Report of the Meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 15th December 2003 and 19th January and 10th February 2004.

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In connection with Item No 30 and in response to a question by Councillor Garner, the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor Guyatt reminded Members that the Council and not the former Planning Committee had taken the decision to refuse planning permission for the development of the airfield at Alconbury and that

the conditions attached to the consent now granted by the Secretary of State were more stringent than any the District Council might have imposed including one which required the construction and operation of railway links between the airfield and the East Coast Main Line before occupation of the first building on site.

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(Councillors Mrs M Banerjee, J E Garner and Mrs D C Reynolds declared a personal interest in the following item in their capacity as representatives of the District Council on the Board of the Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership).

In connection with Item No 33 and having acknowledged receipt of a petition containing approximately 260 signatures objecting to the development, the Vice Chairman responded to questions by Councillors Looker, Simpson, Sadler, Sanderson and Mrs Menczer by explaining that the high quality design of the development of 30 dwellings on land north of the Lord Protector, Butts Grove Way, Huntingdon had taken into account lighting and security issues, that double glazing would mitigate any noise nuisance, that a new park would be provided at Coneygear Road to overcome the loss of open space and that increased parking provision would assist with the parking problems experienced on Byron Close. The Vice Chairman assured the Council that the proposed development should improve the surface water drainage on site and that he would discuss with the Development Control Manager the possibility of consultation with young people on the choice of equipment to be placed on the new play area.

On the same subject and further to the recommendations of the Panel, the Leader proposed that after consultation with the Executive Councillors for Planning Strategy and Resources, Welfare and Information Technology and the Ward Councillors representing Huntingdon West, the Head of Planning Services be requested to consider the use of funds raised from the sale of the land to address the concerns of local residents in respect of the condition of pavements, car parking and landscaping in the vicinity of the development and the sound proofing of properties adjacent to the Lord Protector public house.

Whereupon, on being put to the vote, the recommendations contained in Item No 33 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 Development Control Panel held on 15th December 2003, 19th January and 10th February 2004 be received and adopted.

64. EMPLOYMENT PANEL

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 2nd February 2004.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the Meeting of the Employment Panel held on 2nd February 2004 be received and adopted.

65. ELECTIONS PANEL

Councillor I C Bates presented the Report of the meeting of the Elections Panel held on 19th January 2004.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Elections Panel held on 19th January 2004 be received and adopted.

66. STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Councillor P J Brant presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 17th December 2003.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 17th December 2003 be received and adopted.

67. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972: SECTION 85

The Chief Executive reported that there were no absences of Members from meetings for consideration in accordance with Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting concluded at 5.15 pm.

Chairman