

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 7 April 2004.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Fell - Chairman

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banjeree, R E Barnes, 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, D B Dew, P J Downes, J A P Eddy, J E Garner, D A Giles, Mrs C A Godley, Mrs K P Gregory, N J Guyatt, 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, M F Newman, M G Rainer, Mrs D C Reynolds, R P Rhodes, J G Rignall, 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, B F C Wallis and J S Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors A Barnes, Miss N C Elliott, Mrs S A Giles, A Hansard, R Powell, K Reynolds, T V Rogers and J M Sadler

PRAYER

The Reverend R Darmody, Team Rector of Ramsey opened the meeting with prayer.

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The Chairman thanked all Members and staff for their contribution to the District Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the result of which would be announced in June 2004.

68. MINUTES

Subject to the replacement of the word "Modial" with the word "Modal" in paragraph 7 of Minute No. 60, the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 18th February 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(NB It was noted that, having left the meeting early, Councillor Mrs S A Giles had not been present during the discussion of the report of the Development Control Panel and therefore her personal interest as a representative of the District Council on the Board of Huntingdonshire Housing Partnership had not been recorded.)

69. 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 Mrs M Banerjee to the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding the future funding of affordable housing, Councillor Bates announced that following a joint bid for resources by the District Council and registered social landlords, the Government had awarded a sum of £6.1 million towards affordable housing schemes in the District over the next two years. He added that this award would not affect any future opportunities for the provision of affordable housing in the District via Section 106 Agreements.

Question from Councillor M G Rainer to the Executive Councillor for Resources, Welfare and IT, Councillor L M Simpson

In response to a question regarding the level of District Council expenditure on Microsoft software and licences during the last financial year and over recent years, Councillor Simpson undertook to respond to the questioner in writing.

Question from Councillor R E Barnes to the Executive Councillor for Service Delivery, Councillor R L Clarke

In response to a question regarding the outcome of consultation with Town and Parish Councils on the provision of public conveniences in their communities, Councillor Clarke explained that this had been deferred pending the outcome of the public consultation exercise on service and council tax levels to be undertaken later in the year.

Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Executive Councillor for Resources, Welfare and IT, Councillor L M Simpson

In response to a question regarding the activities planned for the visit of representatives from Marburg-Biedenkopf to Huntingdonshire in September, Councillor Simpson explained that a programme for the twinning visit would be devised with the Executive Councillor following the local elections on June 10th.

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

In response to a question regarding the measures in place to secure the safety of Members, Officers and visitors to Pathfinder House following a recent violent incident involving damage to the building, the Leader replied that whilst every precaution was taken, Pathfinder House was a public building and it was impossible to plan for every eventuality.

Question from Councillor D A Giles to the Leader of the Council, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a question regarding the selection and attendance of Members at a recent meeting arranged by the Team undertaking the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, the Leader was of the view that the number of Members present would not reflect adversely on the

Team's assessment, given the conflicting demands of Members and the opportunity for Members to submit comments to them via e-mail. In addition, the Leader reported that the initial feedback had been positive and the Team had applauded the level of commitment shown by Members and Officers.

Question from Councillor J S Watt to the Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding possible hardship caused by the reduction in grant assistance for adaptations to the homes of disabled persons, Councillor Bates replied that the Government had capped the grant budget at the previous year's level of £332,000 for statutory improvements to enable the elderly and disabled to continue to live in their own homes. Councillor Bates acknowledged the significance of the situation and added that a report would be submitted to the Cabinet shortly on the implications.

Question from Councillor J Taylor to the Leader, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a question regarding the cost of recent changes to the District Council's corporate identity/colour with particular reference to District-Wide, security and business cards and the Council's livery, the Leader emphasised that items had been replaced only when necessary and that he would reply to the Councillor in writing on the detailed cost after the meeting.

Question from Councillor P G Mitchell to the Leader, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a question regarding the costs associated with the change in refuse collection arrangements from the use of black bags to wheeled bins, the level of grant received from central Government and the potential for a reduction in landfill, the Leader explained that much of the information requested was available within the previous Medium Term Plan programme but that he would undertake to forward details to the questioner after the meeting.

Question from Councillor J M Souter to the Executive Councillor for Leisure, Councillor Mrs J Chandler

In response to a question requesting details of the level of non-Huntingdonshire residents using the District's Leisure Centres and the possibility of establishing a differential scale of charges for residents and non-residents, Councillor Mrs Chandler indicated that surveys of usage were undertaken by the Centres but that the question of differential charging had not been discussed previously. She added that such information that was available would be forwarded to the questioner.

Question from Councillor P J Downes 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 in December, the Leader explained that initial consideration had been given to the process to be adopted for the review and that once agreed with the Chief Officers' Management Team, discussions as to how to proceed would ensue with the Executive Councillor for Finance, the Chairmen of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the questioner.

**Question from Councillor D Harty to the Leader of the Council,
Councillor D P Holley**

In response to a question regarding the operation of the mobile CCTV unit, the Leader explained that, directed by the Police, the unit would be present in locations where there currently was no camera provision in the District, particularly villages and the outskirts of towns where anti-social behaviour was occurring. It would also be used to monitor events and demonstrations. The question of the unit's effectiveness would be reviewed at the end of the summer and any concerns that Members might have relating to its use should be directed towards the Director of Operational Services.

70. GROWING SUCCESS: A CORPORATE PLAN

Following an introduction by the Leader of the Council, Councillor D P Holley, the Council considered a report by the Chief Officers' Management Team (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the adoption of a replacement Corporate Plan.

In commending the document to Members, Councillor Holley explained that the aims and outcomes contained in the proposed Plan would contribute to corporate and service strategies and service plans and provide the framework within which progress on the achievement of the Council's priorities would be monitored. After questioning the process by which the seventeen medium term objectives had been subsumed into six priorities, Members acknowledged the involvement they would have in the development of detailed targets and baselines as part of the comprehensive performance management framework. It was therefore

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Plan: Growing Success be adopted and the process for the development of baselines and targets noted.

71. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN 2004

The Leader, Councillor D P Holley, introduced a report by the Head of Policy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding arrangements for the publication of the Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2003/04.

It was explained that the requirements for publication of the statutory performance plan had been amended in 2002 to allow accurate information relating to the end of the financial year to be included in the Plan. Members noted that it would not be possible to submit the Plan for approval by the Council prior to the publication deadline of 30th June 2004. However, as copies of the draft Plan would be submitted to both the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and the Cabinet in June and circulated to all Members of the Council, it was

RESOLVED

that the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader of the Council, be authorised to approve for publication the Best

72. ACORN COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRE, SAPLEY SQUARE

(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 need for an early decision on the Council's participation in the project.)

(Councillor D A Giles declared a personal interest in the following item in view of his employers' client relationship with the Huntingdonshire Primary Care Trust, remained in the meeting but did not participate in the discussion nor vote thereon.)

Referring to a report by the Chief Officers' Management Team (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Leader updated Members on the current position with regard to the development of the Acorn Community Health Centre at Sapley Square, Huntingdon.

The Council were advised that since an earlier decision to develop and fund the proposed Centre (Minute No. 84 refers), representatives of the Doctors' Practice had received an alternative offer of funding and had decided to proceed with the development of the scheme without the involvement of the District Council. More recently, however, the Primary Care Trust had indicated their preference for the District Council to lead and fund the project. It was envisaged that the Council as developers would, lease the building to the PCT who would in turn, grant a sub-lease to the Doctors' Practice.

Having been advised of the implications of the District Council's renewed involvement in the project, assured that a full risk assessment would be undertaken to safeguard the Council's interests and having been reminded of the importance of the scheme to the improvement of health care on Oxmoor, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Council's willingness to fund and/or develop the proposed new health centre in the light of the changes outlined and subject to the conditions highlighted in paragraph 4.7 of the report now submitted be confirmed; and
- (b) that the Cabinet be authorised to determine whether the procurement which has taken place or which is underway is sufficiently robust for the Council to take over the resulting contracts and/or ongoing processes.

73. CABINET

Councillor D P Holley, Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 12th February and 4th and 25th March 2004.

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On being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 129

was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 135 and in response to a question by Councillor P J Downes regarding the District Council's submission to a Local Government Association consultation paper on the Balance of Funding, the Leader reaffirmed his view that the administration and expense involved in changing the current system of local government finance would be difficult to justify and would not necessarily result in any reduction in costs, that the Director of Central Services had conveyed the District Council's views to the Association and that he would send a copy of the submission to the questioner.

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(Councillor L M Simpson declared a personal interest in the following item as an employee of Cambridgeshire Constabulary.)

In connection with Item No. 145 and in response to questions from Councillors R E Barnes, B F C Wallis and J S Watt, the Leader replied that the withdrawal of Traffic Wardens in St. Neots was coincidental to the deployment of Police Community Support Officers in the District, that he was opposed to any suggestion that the PCSOs should undertake traffic duties and that in reinforcing his views at a forthcoming meeting of the steering group with the Police he would also mention the need for a PSCO presence in Yaxley.

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(Councillors I C Bates, R L Clarke, P J Downes and J A P Eddy declared a personal interest in the following item by virtue of their membership of Cambridgeshire County Council).

In connection with Item No. 147 and in response to questions from Councillors P J Downes and J M Souter regarding their disappointment at the Cabinet's decision not to object to the Transport and Works Act (TWA) Order application by the County Council relating to the Cambridgeshire Guided Bus, the Leader replied that the Cabinet had received no evidence on which they could base an objection to the TWA. The Leader reiterated that no alternative had been presented for consideration and that without good public transport improvements, it was possible that the upgrading of the A14 would not proceed.

In response to further questions from Councillors Rainer, Looker and Simpson. Councillor Guyatt explained that the rail option had not presented a comprehensive solution and that if the guided bus were to be delayed this could affect the timing of the A14 improvements.

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In connection with Item No. 148 and in response to a question by Councillor M G Baker, the Leader endorsed the observations of the questioner in terms of the benefits which would result from the establishment of a permissive cycleway linking the settlements of Easton and Ellington.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 12th February and 4th and 25th March 2004 be received and adopted.

74. ADJOURNMENT

At 4.06pm it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned.

Upon resumption at 4.25pm.

75. 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 10th February and 9th March 2004.

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In connection with Item Nos. 57 and 58, the Chairman announced that further training for Members on local government finance had been arranged in October 2004, details of which would be circulated in due course.

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In connection with Item No. 65 and in response to a question by Councillor M G Baker, the Chairman acknowledged that the contents of a DEFRA consultation paper had concurred with the views previously expressed by the Panel on the use of mechanically propelled vehicles on rights of way.

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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 10th February and 9th March 2004 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor Mrs M Banerjee presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery and Resources) held on 3rd February and 2nd March 2004.

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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 3rd February and 2nd March 2004 be received and adopted.

77. DEVELOPMENT CONTROL PANEL

Councillor J G Rignall presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 23rd February and 15th March 2004.

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(Councillors E R Butler and J A P Eddy declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the following Item and left the meeting for the duration of the discussion and voting thereon.)

On being put to the vote, the recommendations contained in Item No. 34 were declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 23rd February and 15th March 2004 be received and adopted.

78. EMPLOYMENT PANEL

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 16th March 2004.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 16th March 2004 be received and adopted.

79. LICENSING AND PROTECTION PANEL

Councillor R E Barnes presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 17th February 2004.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 17th February 2004 be received and adopted.

80. STANDARDS COMMITTEE

Councillor P J Brant presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 24th March 2004.

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In connection with Item No. 16, it was moved by Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds and duly seconded that recommendation (a) be referred back to the Committee for further consideration. On being put to the vote the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

On the same subject, it was moved by Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds and duly seconded that the following words be inserted after the words "review of" in the text of recommendation (f) – "the feasibility of named substitutes and". On being put to the vote the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

On the same subject and consequent to the proposed amendment to recommendation (f) it was moved by the Leader, Councillor D P Holley and duly seconded that the words "the foregoing" be inserted after the word "in" in the second line and the letters (a) – (k) in the third line of recommendation (i) be deleted. On being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

Whereupon and being put to the vote the recommendations contained in paragraphs (a) as amended, (b), (c), (e), (f) as amended, (g), (i), (j) and (l) as amended, were declared to be CARRIED and the recommendations contained in paragraphs (d), (h) and (k) were declared to be LOST.

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Whereupon, It was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 24th March 2004 be received and adopted.

81. STANDING ORDER 9: MOTIONS ON NOTICE

It was moved by the Leader, Councillor D P Holley and duly seconded –

"that this Council deplores any inappropriate use by a Councillor of computer equipment provided by the Council for the sending of e-mails involving the use of pseudonyms for the purpose of anonymity and any such conduct be reported to the Standards Board for England as a breach of the Members' Code of Conduct."

The following amendment to the Motion was moved by Councillor C W Looker and duly seconded –

“that the words after the word “that” in the first line to the word “computer” in the second line be deleted and the words “the Standards Committee be requested to consider what action might be taken to prevent the use by Councillors of pseudonyms, for the purpose of anonymity, whilst accessing internet services with” be inserted; and

that all of the words after the word “Council” in the second line be deleted.”

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared to be LOST. On being put to the vote the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

82. 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 5.59 pm.

Chairman