

MINUTES of the meeting of the HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Wednesday 10th December 2003.

PRESENT: Councillor J A P Eddy, Vice-Chairman in the Chair

Councillors M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, R E Barnes, I C Bates, Mrs B E Boddington, E R Butler, Mrs J Chandler, R L Clarke, J W Davies, D B Dew, P J Downes, A H Duberly, Miss N C Elliott, J E Garner, D A Giles, Mrs S A Giles, Mrs C A Godley, Mrs K P Gregory, N J Guyatt, A Hansard, D Harty, D P Holley, C W Looker, Mrs P J Longford, Mrs S A Menczer, J C Mugglestone, P G Mitchell, M F Newman, R Powell, M G Rainer, Mrs D C Reynolds, K Reynolds, J G Rignall, 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, B F C Wallis and J S Watt.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors P J Brant, W T Clough, J D Fell, A B Hulme and R P Rhodes.

41. PRAYER

The Reverend Andrew Milton, Team Rector for Huntingdon opened the meeting with prayer.

42. CHAIRMANS ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Councillors J D Fell and Mrs K P Gregory

The Council welcomed Councillor Mrs K P Gregory to the meeting following her recent period of ill health and extended their best wishes for a successful recovery from surgery to the Chairman, Councillor J D Fell.

(b) National Land and Property Gazetteer

The Chairman announced that the Council had received a national award from the Improvement and Development Agency for its work in implementing the Local Land and Property Gazetteer. In displaying the "Exemplar" award to the Council, Councillor L M Simpson, the Executive Councillor for Resources, Welfare and Information Technology extended his congratulations and thanks to the Officers involved in the project for their hard work.

43. PETITIONS

The Chairman invited Dr Angela Owen-Smith to address the meeting and to present a petition on behalf of the Hartford Conservation Group regarding their concerns in connection with the route proposed by the County Council for the Rapid Transit Guided Bus between St. Ives and Huntingdon.

On behalf of the petitioners Mrs Owen-Smith confirmed that it was their intention also to present the petition to the County Council under their Constitution and that the Hartford Conservation Group was seeking to achieve a detailed evaluation of the Guided Bus proposals.

RESOLVED

that the petition be referred for consideration to the Cabinet.

44. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 24th September 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. 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 D A Giles to the Executive Councillor for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers

In response to a question regarding the level of expenditure incurred by the District Council when placing advertisements and distributing leaflets in the local press in the financial year 2002/03, and having established that the question was intended to relate to local newspapers in Huntingdonshire only, Councillor Rogers explained that the information requested involved considerable research which he would request appropriate Officers to undertake and forward to the questioner.

Question from Councillor R Powell to the Leader of the Council, Councillor D P Holley

In response to a question regarding the balance of representation on Town Centre Management Committees throughout the District, the Leader replied that the composition of the Management Committees generally reflected the requirements of the town in question and was determined by the District and Town Councils, other local organisations and traders and that if the questioner had a particular concern about any of the Town Centre initiatives Councillor Powell should submit these in writing to him.

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

In response to a question regarding the activities of the Eastern Region General Assembly, the Leader replied that having only attended one meeting of the Assembly his experience to date suggested that it would be of little direct benefit to the residents of Huntingdonshire.

Question from Councillor P J Downes to the Executive Director for Finance, Councillor T V Rogers

In response to a question regarding the Council's lack of comment on a Government consultation exercise on the balance of funding between central/local government and information as to the Council's position on the matter, Councillor Rogers replied that he was personally unaware of the consultation paper, although he had been disappointed at the proposed Revenue Support Grant for 2003/04. A written response on the Council's position would be provided to Councillor Downes.

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

In response to a question by Councillor Souter as to his perception of the political emphasis and value to the Council of the Leader's regular column in the Hunts Post newspaper, Councillor Holley explained that his article was designed to highlight local and national issues affecting the operations of the Council and particularly those pressures imposed on local authorities by the Government from which no direct benefits were derived.

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

In response to a question regarding the use of Motions On Notice under the Council's Procedure Rules to draw attention to controls and processes imposed on local authorities by central Government such as the Comprehensive Performance Assessment the Leader replied that whilst agreeing with the questioner as to the benefits to be derived from the CPA he would adopt this approach only if he felt that it would achieve practical results.

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

In response to a question regarding progress in implementation of the green travel plan approved by the Council, Councillor Guyatt indicated that this was affected by the impact on employees contracts of employment. The Leader also announced that he would investigate the current situation and respond to the questioner in due course.

Question from Councillor Mrs S Vanbergen to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a question regarding the date on which it was anticipated that the Government would publish the outcome of the Inspector's inquiry following the appeal against development at Alconbury Airfield and the SERAS (South East and East of England Regional Air Services) report, Councillor Guyatt replied that he expected announcements by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister before the end of December.

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

In response to a question regarding the proposal by the Public Conveniences Advisory Group to terminate the contracts for the automatic public conveniences in villages in the District, Councillor Bates assured the Council that those Parish Councils affected by the proposal would be consulted and given the opportunity to consider alternative provision.

Question from Councillor B F C Wallis to the Executive Director for Housing Strategy, Councillor I C Bates

In response to a question regarding the opportunity for Members in whose Wards flooding took place to participate in various forums established by the District Council on the subject, Councillor Bates explained the reasons for the creation of the groups and the level of involvement of parish council representatives.

46. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Further to Minute No. 13 of the meeting held on 14th May 2003, the Leader addressed the Council on a report by the Chief Executive (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising the outcome of a review by the Independent Advisory Panel which had been reconvened to consider the scheme of allowances payable to District Councillors under the Local Authorities (Members Allowances) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2003. A copy of the report by the Independent Advisory Panel had been circulated separately to all Members.

Following discussion on the appropriateness of the introduction of pension entitlements for Councillors it was moved by the Leader, duly seconded and

RESOLVED

- (a) that the Chief Executive be authorised to prepare a new scheme of Members Allowances to come into effect on 1st January 2004 to incorporate the following:-
 - ◆ the payment of a basic allowance of £3,500 per annum to all District Councillors;

- ◆ the payment of special responsibility allowances in accordance with the figures contained in the third column of the Appendix to the Chief Executive's report now submitted;
 - ◆ the introduction of a co-opted Member's allowance of £200 per annum for persons co-opted to Committees of the Council and for Parish Council representatives of the Standards Committee, together with the payment of dependant carers, travelling and subsistence allowances to co-optees;
 - ◆ the continuation of that part of the existing scheme relating to the payment of dependant carers allowance;
 - ◆ the continuation of the use of the Cambridgeshire salary as indicated in the "New Earnings Survey" published by the Office of National Statistics as an automatic index mechanism to enable the Members Allowances Scheme to be adjusted, as necessary, to reflect inflation until 31st December 2007;
 - ◆ the payment of travelling and subsistence allowances for the purposes specified in the Regulations in line with the National Joint Council casual users mileage and subsistence rates for local government employees and the reimbursement of reasonable actual expenditure incurred by a Member for duties undertaken outside the District;
 - ◆ the delegation of authority to the Executive Director of Central Services (or in his absence, the Head of Administration) to determine the reasonableness of claims by Members referred to above;
 - ◆ the delegation of authority to the Standards Committee to determine whether to withhold the basic allowance, special responsibility allowance and travel and subsistence allowances of a Member or co-opted Member suspended or partially suspended under Part III of the Local Government Act 2000 for the period for which and the responsibilities or duties from which s/he is suspended or partially suspended;
- (b) that Members be not entitled to join the Local Government Pension Scheme; and
- (c) that, upon the coming into effect of the above Members' Allowances Scheme with effect from 1st January 2004, the existing scheme be revoked.

47. BUDGET AND 2004 – 2009 MEDIUM TERM PLAN UPDATE

By reference to a report by the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology and to documentation appended to the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet (copies of which are appended in the Minute Book) Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance

addressed the Council on the background to and recent developments affecting the preparations of the Medium Term Plan for 2004 – 2009 and draft budget for 2004/2005.

Members were reminded that the Overview and Scrutiny Panels had been presented with an opportunity to discuss the draft budget and Medium Term Plan in detail and, in thanking the Panels for their contributions, the Executive Councillor reported upon the comments made by each Panel. Particular attention also was drawn to three items of expenditure which had given rise to recent concern. In this connection, the Executive Councillor indicated that he was pleased to report that negotiations with Northampton MRF had resulted in a reduction in recycling gate fees proposed for payment to Peterborough Waste Recycling with effect from April 2004. Members were alerted to the potential cost of urgent repairs to Pathfinder House and to the uncertainty in the funding of the Acorn Centre development in Huntingdon, although it was at this stage anticipated that the latter would be cost neutral. Councillor Rogers underlined the difficulties which the Council would face as a result of an anticipated shortfall of £310,000 in the expected level of revenue support grant for the financial year 2004/05 and proposed that the Council should draw their concerns in this respect to the attention of the Secretary of State.

The Leader of the Council, then moved the following recommendations of the Cabinet in respect of the Medium Term Plan and draft budget which were duly seconded –

- “(i) that scheme ref. no. 346 – Business Support and Local Economy Partnerships (reduction) – in the sum of £4,000 for each of the years 2004/05 – 2008/09 be removed from Annex B4 “Potential deletions and reductions to base budget/approved MTP”;
- (ii) that a review of District Council services, (statutory and non-statutory), their priorities and levels of provision, be commissioned with a view to the outcomes being available within a timeframe that will enable them to be considered at the outset of deliberations on the budget and MTP for 2005/06;
- (iii) that, within the timeframe referred to in (ii) above, a review of the District Council’s base budget, to include fees and charges but not to exclude any potential restructuring of existing arrangements for the delivery of services, be undertaken with the target of identifying an overall saving of at least 2% in net expenditure;
- (iv) that Council Tax levels for 2004/05 be increased by an amount at least equivalent to the shortfall in Government grant previously anticipated and that now expected;
- (v) that specific prior approval be sought and obtained from the Employment Panel before recruiting to any new District Council posts;

- (vi) specific prior approval be sought and obtained from the Employment Panel before recruiting to fill vacancies in any existing posts graded 1 – 9;
- (vii) that the relevant Directors, after consultation with the Chairman of the Employment Panel be authorised to approve recruitment to fill vacancies in any existing posts graded 10 – 17; and
- (viii) that, having regard to the implications for future spending and Council Tax levels, Directors review with appropriate Executive Councillors the need for schemes/projects included in the MTP but not yet started and that specific priority approval be sought and obtained from the Cabinet before such schemes/projects are implemented.”

Councillor Downes moved the following amendment to paragraph (iii) of the Motion which was duly seconded –

that after the word “a” in the first line the following words be inserted “Scrutiny Member-led” so that paragraph (iii) would read –

- “(iii) that, within the timeframe referred to in (ii) above, a Scrutiny Member-led review of the District Council’s base budget, to include fees and charges but not to exclude any potential restructuring of existing arrangements for the delivery of services, be undertaken with a target of identifying an overall saving of at least 2% in net expenditure”.

Following discussion on the amendment and upon being put to the vote, the amendment was declared to be LOST.

It was therefore moved by Councillor Downes and duly seconded that the words “Member-led” be inserted after the word “a” in the first line of paragraph (iii) of the substantive Motion so that the paragraph would read as follows:-

- “(iii) that, within the timeframe referred to in (ii) above, a Member-led review of the District Council’s base budget, to include fees and charges but not to exclude any potential restructuring of existing arrangements for the delivery of services, be undertaken with a target of identifying an overall saving of at least 2% in net expenditure;”.

The proposed amendment having been accepted by Councillor Holley as mover of the Motion, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that scheme ref. no. 346 – business support and local economy partnerships (reduction) – in the sum of £4,000 for each of the years 2004/05 – 2008/09 be removed from Annex B4 “Potential deletions and reductions to base budget/approved MTP”;

- (b) that a review of District Council services (statutory and non-statutory), their priorities and level of provision, be commissioned with a view to the outcomes being available within a timeframe that will enable them to be considered at the outset of deliberations on the budget and MTP for 2005/06;
- (c) that, within the timeframe referred to in (b) above, a Member-led review of the District Council's base budget, to include fees and charges but not to exclude any potential restructuring of existing arrangements for the delivery of services, be undertaken with a target of identifying an overall saving of at least 2% in net expenditure;
- (d) that Council Tax levels for 2004/05 be increased by an amount at least equivalent to the shortfall in Government grant previously anticipated and that now expected;
- (e) that specific prior approval be sought and obtained from the Employment Panel before recruiting to any new District Council posts;
- (f) that specific prior approval be sought and obtained from the Employment Panel before recruiting to fill vacancies in any existing posts graded 1 – 9;
- (g) that the relevant Directors, after consultation with the Chairman of the Employment Panel be authorised to approve recruitment to fill vacancies in any existing posts graded 10 – 17; and
- (h) that, having regard to the implications for future spending and Council Tax levels, Directors review with appropriate Executive Councillors the need for schemes/projects to be included in the MTP but not yet started and that specific prior approval be sought and obtained from the Cabinet before such schemes/projects are implemented.

(In accordance with paragraph 14.5 of the Council Procedure Rules, D A Giles requested that it be recorded that he had voted against part (d) of the Motion).

48. ADJOURNMENT

At 3.55 pm, it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned. Upon resumption at 4.10pm.

49. REPORTS BY THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

(a) Cabinet

Councillor D P Holley, Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 2nd and 23rd October and 13th November 2003.

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On being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No.72 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No.73 and in response to questions by Councillors D A Giles and Reynolds, the Leader referred to the circumstances in which Pathfinder House had been acquired by the Council, the efforts of the District Council Headquarters and other Accommodation Members Advisory Group to identify accommodation needs for the future and the measures that had been taken to secure the building in the short term.

Whereupon, on being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No.73 was declared to be CARRIED.

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It was noted that the recommendation contained in Item No.74 of the report previously had been approved by the Council in Minute No.47 ante.

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(Councillor L M Simpson declared a personal and private interest in connection with Item No.76 Police Community Support Officers – Memorandum of Understanding and left the meeting for the duration of the discussion thereon.)

On the same subject and in response to questions from Councillor Looker and Souter, the Leader confirmed that, owing to the good working relationship that existed between the Council and the Police, Police Community Support Officers had been recruited and had commenced employment prior to a memorandum of understanding on their role and funding being formally completed. The Council had been fully aware of the implications involved and the benefits of the initiative already had begun to be demonstrated. The Leader expressed his satisfaction that the Council would achieve good value for money from the scheme.

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In connection with Item No.84, and in response to comments by Councillors Baker and Mugglestone, Councillor N J Guyatt, the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, confirmed that a reply had yet to be received from the Department for Transport, Go-East and the Highways Agency to the concerns expressed by the Council over the decision to defer junction improvements for the A14 between Thrapston and Brampton.

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In connection with Item No.87, the Leader informed the Council that the outcome of the Alconbury Inquiry was anticipated the following day.

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In connection with Item No.88 and in response to questions by Councillors R E Barnes and Powell, Councillor I C Bates, Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, provided details of the temporary housing accommodation provided by the Council and the likely level of provision in the future.

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In connection with Item No.90 and in response to a question by Councillor Wallis, Councillor I C Bates, Deputy Leader and Executive Councillor for Housing Strategy, replied that following a proposed increase in the gate fee at the Peterborough Materials Recycling Facility, alternative arrangements had been made for the processing of recyclable materials collected in the District.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 2nd and 23rd October and 13th November 2003 be received and adopted.

(b) **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 14th October and 11th and 27th November 2003.

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In connection with Item No.31 and in response to a question by Councillor C W Looker, Councillor Swales replied that he

supported the introduction of Police Community Support Officers.

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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 14th October and 11th and 27th November 2003 be received and adopted.

(c) **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 7th October and 4th and 20th November 2003.

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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 7th October and 4th and 20th November 2003 be received and adopted.

(d) **Development Control Panel**

Councillor J G Rignall presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 15th September, 20th October and 17th November 2003.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 15th September, 20th October and 17th November 2003 be received and adopted.

(e) **Employment Panel**

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 24th November 2003.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 24th November 2003 be received and adopted.

(f) **Licensing and Protection Panel**

Councillor J M Sadler presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 15th October 2003.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 15th October 2003 be received and adopted.

(g) **Elections Panel**

Councillor I C Bates presented the Report of the meeting of the Elections Panel held on 14th October 2003.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 2 was declared to be CARRIED

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In connection with Item No.3 and in response to a question by Councillor Downes, the Deputy Leader undertook to provide him with details of the Review of Parliamentary Constituencies in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough after the meeting. The Chief Executive also announced that the Eastern Region would not be conducting the European election in June 2004 solely by postal votes.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that subject to the foregoing paragraphs the Report of the meeting of the Elections Panel held on 14th October 2003 be received and adopted.

50. STANDING ORDER 9: MOTIONS ON NOTICE

(a) It was moved by Councillor P J Downes and duly seconded -

“that in the interest of public safety, this Council

- (i) welcomes the provision of the Fireworks Act 2003;
- (ii) urges the Government to specify and implement the Regulations without delay; and
- (iii) calls on the Cambridgeshire County Council and the Cambridgeshire Constabulary to ensure that the Regulations when implemented, are strictly enforced”.

An amendment to the Motion was moved by Councillor K Reynolds and duly seconded that:

The following words be added to the Motion

“(iv) calls on Government to give a firm commitment to providing the necessary resources so that the forthcoming Regulations can be implemented and monitored without an adverse effect on the enforcing authorities.”

As the mover of the Motion, Councillor Downes indicated that he was prepared to accept the amendment.

Whereupon on being put to the vote, the Motion, as amended, was declared to be CARRIED.

(b) It was moved by Councillor P J Downes and duly seconded -

“that this Council urges the Government to pursue more urgently the reform of local taxation so that the level of tax levied on individuals is more directly related to the ability to pay”.

An amendment to the Motion was moved by the Leader, Councillor Holley and duly seconded, that

- ◆ “after the word “to” in the first line of the Motion, the words “review the duties, functions and powers of local government with a view to giving real autonomy to local people by removing all centralised control; and” be inserted;
- ◆ the word “more” be deleted from the first line of the Motion;
- ◆ in the second line of the Motion the word “taxation” be deleted and the words “Government funding” be inserted;

- ◆ in the second line of the Motion the words “levied on” be deleted and the words “continues to reflect” be inserted;
- ◆ in the third line of the Motion the words “individuals is more directly related to” be deleted;
- ◆ after the word “ability” in the third line of the Motion the words “of people” be inserted;
- ◆ in the third line of the Motion after the word “pay” the words “and the funding itself is distributed to local authorities in a fair, open and understandable manner” be inserted;

so that the Motion as amended would read –

“this Council urges the Government to –

- ◆ review the duties, functions and powers of local government with a view to giving real autonomy to local people by removing all centralised control; and
- ◆ pursue urgently the reform of local government funding so that the level of tax continues to reflect the ability of people to pay and the funding itself is distributed to local authorities in a fair, open and understandable manner.”

On being put to the vote, the amendment was declared to be CARRIED

Whereupon, on being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED.

51. 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 5.30pm.

Chairman