

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Council Chamber, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 1 February 2007.

PRESENT: Councillor I C Bates – Chairman.

Councillors P L E Bucknell, Mrs J Chandler, N J Guyatt, A Hansard, Mrs P J Longford, Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers and L M Simpson.

142. MINUTES

Subject to the deletion of Councillor N J Guyatt's name in the list of those present and his inclusion in the list of apologies, the Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 11th January 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

143. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

144. FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2008-2012 AND BUDGET 2007/08

Further to Minute No. 06/109 and by way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with a number of variations to assumptions made previously for the purpose of preparing the draft financial strategy, Medium Term Plan (MTP), the budget and associated level of Council Tax for 2007/08, together with the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny (Corporate & Strategic Framework) thereon.

In reviewing the issues involved, Members were advised of a recent decision by the Government to restrict the funding of housing improvement grants from the revenue budget and expressed their concern as to the likely impact this would place on District Council budgets for the foreseeable future.

Reference having been made to the outcome of consultation with the business community on expenditure proposals and in noting amendments to the housing benefits figures summarised in the capital budget table on page 6, the Cabinet

RECOMMENDED

- (a) that the proposed budget, Medium Term Plan and financial strategy appended to the report now submitted be approved; and

- (b) that a Council Tax increase of 4.99%, representing a level of £109.91 for Band D properties, be approved for 2007/2008.

145. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2007/08

With the assistance of a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) and having considered a proposed Treasury Management Strategy 2007/08, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the Council be invited to approve the 2007/08 Treasury Management Strategy as appended to the report now submitted.

146. QUARTERLY SUMMARY OF DEBTS WRITTEN-OFF

The Cabinet received and noted a report by the Head of Revenue Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) summarising debts which had been written off during October – December 2006 as irrecoverable.

147. ENVIRONMENT STRATEGY

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Technical Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a draft copy of a suggested Environment Strategy for Huntingdonshire designed to identify areas of action to create more sustainable communities to reduce adverse environmental impacts and to ensure the continuation of a good quality of life in the District.

Having considered the development of the strategy through a comprehensive consultation process to include the involvement of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) and in noting that appropriate governance arrangements would need to be established to ensure the planning, implementation, review and reporting of the strategy's delivery, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the draft environment strategy as submitted be approved for consultation with Members, external organisations, partners and businesses;
- (b) that the intention to seek approval for a public consultation draft in April 2007 be noted;
- (c) that the Head of Technical Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Environment, be authorised to publish a leaflet on the development of the Environment Strategy;
- (d) that an Environment Strategy Members' Working Group comprising the Leader of the Council and

Councillors M G Baker, D B Dew, J A Gray, R G Tuplin and the relevant Executive Councillor in relation to the matter to be discussed, be established to assist with the development and delivery of the strategy; and

- (e) that responsibility for matters associated with the Environment Strategy be reserved to the Leader.

148. NEIGHBOURHOOD MANAGEMENT

Further to Minute No. 06/71 and by way of a report by the Community Development Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were updated on progress with the introduction of neighbourhood management initiatives in Eynesbury and Huntingdon North (Oxmoor).

In considering a proposal to extend the approach to the market town of Ramsey, Executive Councillors expressed concern about the long term implications of the initiative in terms of cost, governance arrangements, partnership working and accountability. Having been acquainted with the key priorities for the localities identified by significant service providers, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the area of Ramsey be developed as a neighbourhood management initiative;
- (b) that the progress of the approach be noted and the management model appended to the report now submitted recommended to the Huntingdonshire Strategic Partnership Board at its meeting on 14th February 2007; and
- (c) that a further report be submitted to a future meeting of the Cabinet outlining the longer term implications of the initiative.

149. CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

(a) Memorandum of Understanding

By way of a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the background to a memorandum of understanding for the Cambridge Choice-Based Lettings Scheme. Having noted details of the District Council's involvement and the allocation of the funding involved, it was

RESOLVED

that the Director of Central Services be authorised to complete the Memorandum of Understanding for the Cambridge Choice-Based Lettings Scheme on behalf of the Council.

(b) Consultation Lettings Policy

Further to Minute No. 06/91 and by way of a report by the Head of Housing Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were invited to consider the content of a draft consultation document on a new lettings policy for Huntingdonshire as part of the wider Cambridge Sub-Regional Choice Based lettings scheme.

Having been reminded of the background to the policy, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the draft Huntingdonshire District Council Lettings Policy document be approved as a basis for consultation.

150. ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION ACT 2006 - RELEASE OF FUNDING

By way of a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered a request for the release of funding for the acquisition of the computer hardware and software equipment required in order to discharge new duties to verify information submitted by postal voters, thereby reducing the risk of personation at elections.

While expressing concern about the broad order cost for the maintenance of the software equipment and the implications of funding the changes, particularly given the restraints on service budgets, the Cabinet recognised that few, if any, alternative courses were available in which to put into place the necessary arrangements for the discharge of this new legislative requirement before the forthcoming District and Town/Parish Council elections in May 2007 and, accordingly, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that a budget transfer of £8,000 in 2007/08 be approved and appropriate financial provision made in subsequent years in respect of the cost of changes to the electoral process as outlined in the report now submitted; and
- (b) that further enquiries be made into the ongoing software maintenance costs and appropriate representations made to the Local Government Association and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives.

