
Cabinet

Report of the meetings held 22nd February,
15th March and 5th April 2007

Matters for Information

104. GENDER EQUALITY SCHEME

The Cabinet has endorsed the contents of a draft Gender Equality Scheme, together with an associated action plan. The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 (as amended) places a duty on public bodies to promote gender equality with effect from 6th April 2007. The scheme will integrate with the Council's current Race and Disability and Equality Schemes.

105. EXPANSION OF CUSTOMER SERVICES IN ST. IVES AND ST. NEOTS

The Cabinet has approved proposals to re-model the cash offices in St. Ives and St. Neots as Customer Service Centres. The proposals will expand the range of services provided at these offices and is in accordance with the Council's policy to promote the development of sustainable communities.

106. CASH PAYMENTS

The Cabinet has approved proposals to move cash payments away from the District Council's Cash Offices to alternative payment providers. As a result, customers will be able to make cash payments using a payment card, at various retail outlets across Cambridgeshire including local post offices and garages. The proposals will not only improve security at the cash offices but will enhance services to customers by enabling payments to be made closer to their homes. Members have been advised that the cost of the proposals will be met from within existing budgets.

107. EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN – PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE DRAFT PROVISION OF THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY AND STAGEMENT OF REASONS

The Cabinet has considered the Secretary of State's proposed changes to the draft provision of the regional spatial strategy for the East of England and statement of reasons. In discussing the conclusions emerging from the paper, the Cabinet has expressed apprehension with regard to the delivery of the proposals to achieve sustainable development and were of the opinion that a regional

aspiration of 35% of affordable housing provision for the District would not be sufficient. In terms of the infrastructure, Members voiced concern over the lack of improvements given the proposed increase in new housing, the District's demographic profile and the existing infrastructure deficit in the eastern region. Attention also was drawn to the continued importation of waste by road to Cambridgeshire landfill sites from the London area and the need to introduce measures to minimise and manage this waste.

The Cabinet therefore has requested the Director of Operational Services, after consultation with the Leader and Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, to reflect these concerns in the District Council's response to the Secretary of State.

108. REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION

As part of the biennial review of the Council's Constitution by the Corporate Governance Panel, the Cabinet has reiterated their view that substitution arrangements for meetings should not become part of the Council's Constitution.

109. TREASURY MANAGEMENT INVESTMENT PERFORMANCE

The Cabinet has noted the performance of the District Council's Fund Managers for the period 1st October - 31st December 2006.

110. LAND AT BURY ROAD INDUSTRIAL ESTATE, RAMSEY

The Cabinet has approved terms for the full and final settlement of a claim against the Council by the purchaser of the freehold reversion of land at Bury Road, Ramsey.

111. CORPORATE EQUALITY POLICY AND ACTION PLAN

The Cabinet has endorsed the contents of a suggested draft Corporate Equality Policy which is a requirement of Level 2 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. This is a standard against which the Council is judged by the Audit Commission in terms of meeting statutory equality and diversity responsibilities and is regarded as a statutory performance indicator. The policy will gradually be updated to reflect the activities that the Council needs to undertake to gain Level 3 of the standard and is supported by a seven page action plan which lists the targets and resources required as part of the attainment process.

112. REQUEST FOR THE RELEASE OF FUNDS

The Cabinet has approved the release of appropriate funding for the Council's contribution towards the commissioning of an assessment of housing needs in the Cambridge sub region. The assessment is a Government requirement and will be used to inform and support the Council's housing strategy and planning policies.

The Cabinet also has agreed to release appropriate funding for the installation of broadband for Members and for the award of disabled facilities grants and discretionary housing repair loans/grants. Disabled facilities grants enable elderly and disabled people to live independently and therefore contribute towards the quality of life for vulnerable people. With regard to repair loans/grants, these are made according to a tightly-defined criteria based on the urgency of the repair and the ability of the owner to finance. The Council's policy is to issue interest free loans to eligible owner occupiers whereby a charge is placed on their property and the loan is repaid when the property is sold. Grants are given in exceptional circumstances if there is inadequate equity in the property to support the charge.

**113. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT SCHEME:
UPDATE/INTERIM PLANNING POLICY STATEMENT**

The Cabinet has reviewed the Council's overall current planning policy position in light of advice received from Go-East and the Planning Inspectorate. The Council submitted its Core Strategy in April 2006 but the planned examination into its soundness was subsequently postponed in September 2006 by the Planning Inspectorate in order that the Council could consider submitting additional supporting information regarding the spatial elements of the proposed strategy. The Council has now been recommended by Go-East to revise the Local Development Scheme and change the Core Strategy to reflect current guidance.

As a result, the Cabinet has approved for submission to the Secretary of State the contents of a revised Local Development Scheme, incorporating a robust timetable for the delivery of the resubmitted Core Strategy and Development Control Policy Documents and has authorised the Head of Planning Services to request the withdrawal of the previously submitted Core Strategy Development Plan document. In recognising the need to provide for effective continuity of the development control function whilst the documents are re-submitted, the Cabinet, in conjunction with the Development Control Panel, has considered the content of an Interim Planning Policy Statement. A separate report on the subject appears elsewhere on the agenda for the Council to consider.

**114. USE OF COMPULSORY PURCHASE ORDERS TO ACQUIRE
RESIDENTIAL PROPERTY**

The Cabinet has approved the use of compulsory purchase powers to acquire long term vacant residential properties where there appears to be no other prospect of them being brought back into residential use. Having stressed that the process should only be used where there is a compelling case in the public interest and in considering the recommended procedure to be followed, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Operational Services to appoint the appropriate Officers to exercise and complete the CPO procedure. In so doing, the Cabinet has requested the submission of further reports, as necessary, addressing those properties considered suitable for compulsory purchase, the case for compulsory purchase, a

statement of reasons and a draft CPO. The Head of Housing Services has been requested by the Cabinet to seek a developer prepared to take over any property acquired by CPO from the Council at the established market value and to transfer ownership on those terms. Finally, the Cabinet has approved the use of the Repairs Assistance budget to fund the cost of a CPO procedure, estimated at £21,600 per property, subject to a maximum of two acquisitions per annum.

115. CAR PARKING STRATEGY FOR THE MARKET TOWNS

The Cabinet has reviewed the initial findings of consultants engaged by the Council to undertake a review of the current car parking strategy. In discussing the key recommendations made by the consultants, the Cabinet recognised that certain issues should be investigated further to alleviate parking problems in town centres including the viability of Park & Ride schemes, better signage and the management of disabled parking. In that respect, the Cabinet has requested that a formal car parking strategy and action plan be developed for their consideration and a Members' Car Parking Working Group comprising five Conservative, one Liberal Democrat and one Independent Member will be established for the strategy's development.

116. HEALTH ACT 2006: SMOKING

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the requirements of the Health Act 2006 in terms of prohibiting smoking in public places and the consequential enforcement and other implications for Council services. From the 1st July 2007, the Act will prohibit smoking in virtually all enclosed public and work places in England. To ensure the successful implementation of the legislation a comprehensive programme of education and an enforcement framework will be required along with authorised Officers to undertake the enforcement duties. In that respect, the Cabinet has authorised the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services and the Director of Operational Services to appoint suitably qualified Officers and after consultation with the relevant Executive Councillor to institute legal proceedings for contravention of the Act.

The Cabinet has welcomed funding amounting to £80,431 from the Department of Health for undertaking enforcement in the first year. However having expressed concern about funding thereafter, Executive Councillors have requested that appropriate representations regarding the potential financial impact of implementing this legislation in the longer term be made to the Local Government Association and the Members of Parliament for the Huntingdon and North West Cambridgeshire constituencies. A further report will be considered by the Cabinet in January 2008 on progress in implementing and enforcing the relevant legislative and regulatory requirements.

117. SALE OF COUNCIL OWNED LAND

The Cabinet has approved the disposal of Council-owned land at Priory Park, St Neots, Stukeley Road, Huntingdon and at Westwood Road, St Ives. Executive Councillors have requested that the Director of Central Services consult them on the terms for the sale of the land at Priory Park and Westwood Road.

I C Bates
Chairman