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## **Cabinet**

### **Report of the meetings held on 13th December 2007 and 31st January 2008**

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#### **Matters for Decision**

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**61. FINANCIAL STRATEGY, MEDIUM TERM PLAN 2009 - 2013 AND BUDGET 2008/09**

The Cabinet has considered the content of the 2008/09 draft budget, the Medium Term Plan for the period 2009 - 2013 and the level of Council Tax for the following year. An amended version of the financial report considered by the Cabinet at their meeting held on the 31st January 2008 is included on the Agenda at Item No. 4.

In noting the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) on this matter, the outcome of consultation with the business community on expenditure proposals and having considered the desirability or otherwise of reducing the level of general contingency fund in the budget given that there has been no call on it for 3 years, the Cabinet

#### **RECOMMEND**

- (a) that, subject to further consideration being given by the Director of Commerce and Technology in conjunction with the Executive Councillor for Finance to a possible reduction in the level of the general contingency fund, the proposed Budget, Medium Term Plan and Financial Strategy appended to the Agenda at Item No. 4 be approved; and**
- (b) that a Council Tax increase of 4.99% (£5.48), representing a level of £115.39 for Band D properties, be approved for 2008/09.**

**62. TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2008/09**

Reproduced as Appendix A is a proposed Treasury Management Strategy for 2008/09. The strategy, which complies with the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's Code of Practice, has clear objectives for the management of the Council's borrowing and investments. Having been satisfied that the strategy meets the requirements of the Code of Practice and Government guidance, the Cabinet

## **RECOMMEND**

**that the 2008/09 Treasury Management Strategy be approved.**

### **63. ON-LINE PETITIONS: PROCEDURAL IMPLICATIONS**

By way of a report by the Head of Administration (attached as Appendix B) the Cabinet has been advised of the outcome of a review by a Working Group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) on ways of promoting and communicating the work of the Council's Scrutiny Panels and the use of information technology. Having noted the Working Group's recommendations with regard to "blogs", on-line forms, on-line petitions and other means of external communications, the Cabinet has –

- ◆ suggested that Councillors be encouraged to make use of the personal website facility on the Council's website as a means of communicating with Ward residents and the availability of a "blog" facility should they wish to use it;
- ◆ agreed not to host on-line forums because of the substantial resource implications involved and requested Officers to look into cost-effective ways of increasing opportunities for meaningful interaction through the Council's website;
- ◆ requested that on-line petition facilities be introduced using the Modern.Gov software system when this becomes available;
- ◆ supported the processing of on-line petitions under the existing constitutional arrangements, subject to a maximum of three petitions being presented at any meeting;
- ◆ endorsed the arrangements for on-line petitions whereby in the event of an on-line petition not having the requisite number of signatories or the organiser not being prepared to present it to Council, the petition be submitted for consideration to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel, subject to the petition containing the names and addresses of at least 10 persons who live, work or own property in the District;
- ◆ requested the Corporate Governance Panel to consider amending the vexatious complainants procedure in the event of an excessive number of petitions being organised by one individual.

In so doing, the Cabinet

## **RECOMMEND**

**that the necessary constitutional changes be approved.**

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## Matters for Information

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### 64. MEDIUM TERM PLAN – REQUESTS FOR THE RELEASE OF FUNDS

The Cabinet has agreed to release appropriate funding from the Medium Term Plan for the following schemes and projects:-

- ◆ resurfacing of the synthetic pitch at St. Neots Leisure Centre;
- ◆ repairs to the pool roof at Huntingdon Leisure Centre;
- ◆ replacement of the dry-side boiler plant and accessibility improvements at St. Neots Leisure Centre; and
- ◆ the award of disabled facilities grants.

With regard to the schemes relating to Huntingdon and St. Neots Leisure Centres, the County Council has agreed to make a contribution of 26.15% towards all agreed schemes within the Centres' condition survey as part of a dual-use agreement for the Centres.

### 65. TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Cabinet has reviewed the respective levels of performance achieved during the quarter 1st July to 30th September 2007 by the external Fund Manager in the matter of investment of the Council's capital receipts. At the same time and whilst discussing the provisional 2008/2011 revenue support grant settlement announced by the Government and the implications for the authority, the Cabinet has reiterated the need for Executive Councillors and Heads of Service to review critically all budgets and Medium Term Plan schemes.

### 66. ANIMAL WELFARE ACT 2006

The Cabinet has been acquainted with the new powers and duties created by the Animal Welfare Act 2006. Whilst the Act introduces a range of powers designed to enable local authority inspectors to carry out their existing duties more effectively, Executive Councillors have expressed concern that no direct additional funding is likely to be made available by the Government to assist in its implementation, particularly given the recent transfer of responsibility for dealing with stray dogs from the police to local authorities.

In adopting the powers set out in the Act, the Cabinet has authorised the Director of Operational Services and the Head of Environmental and Community Health Services to appoint Officers as inspectors and to initiate legal proceedings. The Cabinet also has agreed to give appointed Officers authority to exercise all powers set out in the Act in the course of their duties.

**67. HUNTINGDON CONSERVATION AREA**

Having been acquainted with the responses received from the consultation exercise on the Character Statement and Boundary Review for the Huntingdon Conservation Area, the Cabinet has agreed to adopt the documents for use as material considerations in planning decisions to ensure that the character and appearance of the area is not diminished. The Cabinet also has authorised the Head of Planning Services, after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy, Environment and Transport to make any minor consequential amendment to the text and illustrations as necessary.

**68. RISK REGISTER**

Following its identification as high risk in the Council's Risk Action Plan, the Cabinet has been made aware of the serious implications of any potential delay in the construction of the new A14 on the long term economic, environmental and social development of the District. In so doing, Executive Councillors have acknowledged the need to continue to lobby for a start on the scheme.

**69. FINANCIAL MONITORING – REVENUE BUDGET**

The Cabinet has noted the expected revenue budget variations already identified in the current year. With regard to the total amount of debts written-off in the year for Council Tax and National Non Domestic Rates, the Cabinet has been reminded of the decision by the Government to introduce charges for empty properties from 1st April 2008 and has requested that a breakdown of the costs outstanding from empty property rating be included within future reports.

**70. MONITORING OF THE CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2007/08**

The Cabinet has been acquainted with variations in the capital programme in the current year. In so doing, the Cabinet has approved a transfer of £65,000 from capital to revenue in respect of the Document Centre business systems development.

**71. CAR PARKING STRATEGY – PROPOSED ACTION PLAN**

Further to Item No. 50 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 5th December 2007, the Cabinet has approved the content of a Car Parking Strategy Action Plan for Huntingdonshire with sets out the short and long term proposals for car parking in the District up to 2011.

The Plan has been the subject of a consultation exercise carried out by the Car Parking Working Party during November and December 2007 following which the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) considered the document at their meeting on 15th January 2008 (details of which are contained in Item No. 33 of their Report). In discussing the Panel's recommendations, Executive Councillors have expressed their support for a reduction of 25% in the cost of a

car parking Season Ticket for cars with CO<sup>2</sup> emissions of 120g/km or less being of the opinion that this represents a fair and equitable discount. With regard to the Panel's view that any surplus income generated by increased car parking should be ring-fenced to provide integrated, sustainable and accessible transport, the Cabinet has stressed that this would be inappropriate. Having thanked the Car Parking Working Group and the Overview and Scrutiny Panel for their input in the development of the Action Plan, the Cabinet has -

- ◆ endorsed the contents of the Car Parking Strategy Action Plan for Huntingdonshire;
- ◆ requested that steps be taken to amend the current Off-Street Parking Places Order to reflect the changes proposed in the Action Plan and their implementation with effect from 1st June 2008;
- ◆ approved the proposed car parking charges outlined as the first option in Annex D to the report; and
- ◆ endorsed a review of the arrangements following a period of 12 months with effect from the introduction of the revised charges.

Subsequently the Cabinet's decision regarding this matter has been called in by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and will be discussed at a special meeting of the Panel on 20th February 2008.

## **72. CHARTER FOR QUALITY OF GROWTH IN CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

The Cabinet has approved the publication of a Quality Charter for Growth produced by Cambridgeshire Horizons in partnership with representatives from the public, private and voluntary sectors. The aim of the Charter is to achieve higher standards for new housing development planned for the Cambridge Sun Region and it will be used to secure investment commitments from Government agencies and assist communications with existing communities and developers.

## **73. ST NEOTS OUTDOOR POOL**

*(The following report was considered as a confidential item under paragraphs 3 & 5 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)*

The Cabinet has authorised the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Leader of the Council, to approve terms for the disposal of the site of the former St Neots outdoor pool site by the St Neots Swimming Pool Trust. The outdoor pool had been operating at a loss for many years and, subject to the consent of the Charity Commission, the Trust wish to dispose of the site and reinvest the proceeds of the sale in an alternative recreational facility to serve St Neots.

I C Bates  
Chairman