

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, 24 September 2008.

PRESENT: Councillor J W Davies – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, M G Baker,
K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, J T Bell,
Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell,
K J Churchill, W T Clough, Mrs K E Cooper,
S J Criswell, P H Dakers, Mrs J A Dew,
D B Dew, P J Downes, J J Dutton,
R W J Eaton, R S Farrer, J E Garner,
P M D Godfrey, P Godley, J A Gray,
A Hansard, D Harty, C R Hyams,
Mrs P A Jordan, Ms S Kemp, L W McGuire,
M F Newman, R Powell, D J Priestman,
Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers,
T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, L M Simpson,
C J Stephens, P A Swales, Ms M J Thomas,
G S E Thorpe, R G Tuplin, P R Ward,
J S Watt and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors I C Bates, E R Butler, A N Gilbert, P G Mitchell, I R Muir, J M Sadler and P K Ursell.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D L Hall

34. PRAYER

The Reverend J Pullen, Vicar of St Ives opened the meeting with prayer.

35. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Former Councillor Mrs R L Mills

Councillors M F Newman and P L E Bucknell paid tribute to former Councillor Mrs Ruth Mills who had died recently. Mrs Mills had served as a District Councillor for the former Warboys Ward for 23 years and also as Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Council. Members observed a minute's silence in her memory.

(b) Anglia in Bloom

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman congratulated those staff in the Operations Division involved in the success, District wide, of various entries throughout Huntingdonshire in the 2008 Anglia in Bloom competition.

(c) British Bird Watching Fair

The Chairman further congratulated staff in Countryside Services and the Friends of Paxton Pits volunteers for their achievement in receiving the “Best Stand”, “Best Tourism” and “Best in Show” awards at the British Bird Watching Fair at Rutland Water in August.

(d) Councillors versus Officers Cricket Match

The Chairman congratulated all those who had contributed to the success of the Councillors versus Officers cricket match held at St Ivo Outdoor Centre in the summer and presented the Chief Executive with a memento in recognition of the victory achieved by the Officers’ team.

(e) Civic Reception

The Chairman reminded Members that his reception would be held at the Burgess Hall, St Ivo Leisure Centre on Friday, 31st October 2008.

36. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 25th June 2008 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

37. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

38. ANNUAL STATE OF THE DISTRICT ADDRESS

In the absence of the Leader and in accordance with paragraph 12 of the Council’s Procedure Rules, the Deputy Leader, Councillor L M Simpson, led the Cabinet in addressing the meeting on the State of the District.

Councillors L M Simpson, D B Dew, A Hansard, T V Rogers, C R Hyams, P L E Bucknell and Mrs D C Reynolds each highlighted to the Council the nature of their various portfolios and the key issues which had emerged during the previous year and those where attention was currently focused. Councillor K J Churchill, Special Adviser to the Cabinet, advised the Council of the progress of the review of the democratic structure which he was currently leading.

In response, Councillor P J Downes, Leader of the Liberal Democratic Group welcomed the variation in format which had enabled Executive Councillors to address the Council and looked forward to the continuation of the practice in future. Although he felt that the District Council had much to be proud of, Councillor Downes drew attention to several areas where he considered that performance might be improved, including consultation on the Huntingdon West Action Plan, the proposed redevelopment of the Huntingdonshire Regional College, progress on implementation of the Environment Strategy and communication with the electorate.

Councillor J E Garner voiced his frustration at the lack of interest shown by the public in local politics, the limitations placed on local administration by the Government and the perception that the District Council was not listening to local residents. He also expressed his concerns regarding the sustainability of rural communities given the absence of rural transport and closure of post offices.

Both Councillors D Harty and J A Gray gave examples where the District was working successfully in partnership with the County Council in improving services and engagement, with particular mention being made to the recent introduction of e-petitions. In accepting that the District Council could improve the way in which it communicated with the public, Councillor Gray believed that Councillors worked hard at being advocates for their wards, were appreciated by town and parish councils and were committed to improving the District for future generations.

39. ADJOURNMENT

At 3.54 pm it was

RESOLVED

that the meeting stand adjourned.

Upon resumption at 4.10 pm.

40. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

The Executive Councillor for Resources and Policy, Councillor A Hansard, presented a report by the Head of Administration (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a proposal to vary that part of the current Members' Allowances Scheme which related to travel (motor car) allowances to introduce mileage rates based on vehicle emissions.

Members were informed that the recommendation originally had arisen during a review of the Council's travel plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) and had subsequently been endorsed by the Corporate Governance Panel. Councillor Hansard added that Regulations required that any new proposal to vary a Members' Allowances Scheme should be considered by the Council's Independent Remuneration Panel, the approval of which had now been obtained.

Having regard also to the principles embodied in the recently published Environment Strategy, the Council

RESOLVED

- (a) that an alternative form of mileage allowance be introduced for Members of the Council as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report now submitted based upon vehicle exhaust emissions;
- (b) that the new mileage allowance be optional for existing Members but compulsory for newly elected Members

with effect from 1st October 2008; and

- (c) that the necessary changes be made to the Members' Allowances Scheme.

41. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES

(a) Cabinet

Councillor L M Simpson, Deputy Leader and Vice-Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 26th June, 17th July and 4th September 2008.

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Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment presented the report and recommendations referred to in Item No. 21. In response to questions from Councillors W T Clough and G S E Thorpe, Councillor Rogers replied that the Council was able to project its financial forecast for the next 15 years by drawing on Government advice and by estimating Council Tax and reserve levels over that period. He added that revenue reserves would exceed the recommended minimal level of £3 million due to the receipt of grants but that these would not necessarily recur on an annual basis.

On the same subject, Councillor P L E Bucknell reported that the District Council had allocated 23,000 bus passes to date but that the precise additional cost implications associated with concessionary fares still was not available.

On the same subject and having offered his compliments to the staff of the Financial Services Division on the format and the content of the report, Councillor P J Downes questioned whether it was appropriate to anticipate the changes that might occur in local government finance if there were to be a change of Government in 2010. Whilst, there had been little indication thus far of the direction of policies under an alternative administration, Councillor Rogers replied that the Council would be advised accordingly as policy changes emerged.

The Council, having noted the contributions made to the process by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels and by the Executive Councillor, on being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 21 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 22, Councillor A Hansard, Executive Councillor for Policy and Resources, presented the Huntingdonshire Sustainable Community Strategy, adding that the Strategy had been subject to rigorous consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels, partners and stakeholders.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes on the mechanism to be established for delivery of the strategic themes, the Executive Councillor replied that the Strategy would be subject to quarterly and annual reviews and that he would reply to the questioner in greater detail after the meeting.

On the same subject, the Executive Councillor noted the suggestion made by Councillor J E Garner that the Strategy also should focus attention on the rural communities. Whereupon, on being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 22 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 25 and having been reminded by Councillor Mrs M Banerjee of the difficulties currently experienced by vulnerable, old and disabled people in the District as a result of delays to occupational therapy assessments, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, acknowledged that the issue would be investigated by a group appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) which was to commence its study in October.

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In connection with Item No. 28 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, replied that it was his understanding that sufficient funding now had been made available to enable an accident safety scheme to improve the junction of the A141 and Kings Ripton Road in Huntingdon to proceed in the New Year.

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In connection with Item No. 29 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, replied that he too had welcomed the suggestion of a County-wide forum to investigate the issue of heavy goods vehicle parking on the trunk road network throughout the District and that he was hopeful of some progress in developing suitable HGV sites for parking in the short rather than the longer term.

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In connection with Item No. 30 and in response to a question from Councillor W T Clough, Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Finance and Environment, confirmed that a total net saving of £2.5 million had been achieved in 2007/08 compared with the original revenue budget.

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In connection with Item No. 33 and in response to a question

from Councillor W T Clough, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, reported that the Director of Commerce and Technology currently was negotiating with three providers in respect of the project to raise sponsorship and advertising revenues from the Council's website and that he would hope to be in a position to report on progress in the near future.

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In connection with Item No. 34 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, undertook to investigate the questioner's assertion that the town Councils in the District had supported the introduction of a Parish Charter in Huntingdonshire.

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In connection with Item No. 35 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, assured the Councillor that he would consider the possibility should opportunities arise, of sub-letting space within the shortly to be completed new headquarters buildings.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor J S Watt, Councillor Simpson undertook to advise the questioner, in writing, of the precise changes to the layout of the ground floor of the new building.

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In connection with Item No. 39 and in response to questions from Councillors K Churchill and J E Garner, the Deputy Leader, Councillor Simpson, noted the support indicated for the process to identify the need for sports provision in St Neots and the views expressed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) in terms of the provision of facilities for minor sports such as hockey.

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In connection with Item No. 40 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor K Churchill, Special Adviser to the Cabinet, reported that the Working Group appointed to review the Council's democratic structure would consider performance management and the preparation of job descriptions for Members.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 26th June, 17th July and 4th September 2008 be received and adopted.

(b) Standards Committee

Mr D L Hall presented the Report of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 3rd July and 11th September 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 7 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes asking for further details of the code of conduct case involving a District Councillor considered by the Referrals (Assessment) Sub Committee, Mr Hall replied that given the confidential nature of all cases he would wish to seek legal advice before releasing further details into the public domain and would prefer to write to the questioner with an answer after the meeting.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Standards Committee held on 3rd July and 11th September 2008 be received and adopted.

(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework)

Councillor J A Gray presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) held on 2nd September 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Corporate and Strategic Framework) held on 2nd September 2008 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support)

Councillor J A Gray presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 8th July and 9th September 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 13 and further to the question asked earlier in the meeting by Councillor G S E Thorpe, Councillor Gray reported that some towns in the District had

not expressed any wish to take responsibility for additional functions and that whilst he sympathised that an individual town might wish to accept devolved responsibilities, the District Council had to ensure that such a decision would provide value for money for all residents.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Gray added that in his view, the town and parish Councils in Huntingdonshire had not demonstrated a clear willingness to proceed with a Parish Charter and that the Panel's overriding concern was to secure the best interests of all District residents and not exclusively those living in the market towns.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Support) held on 8th July and 9th September 2008 be received and adopted.

(e) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) held on 1st July and 2nd September 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Service Delivery) held on 1st July and 2nd September 2008 be received and adopted.

(f) Development Control Panel

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 14th July, 18th August and 15th September 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 11 and in response to a question from Councillor G S E Thorpe regarding the action to be taken to protect the health and safety of Panel Members in view of an incident at a recent meeting, Councillor Mrs Boddington replied that the matter had been discussed by the Safety Advisory Group and that protocols to ensure the health and safety of Members during meetings and when

undertaking site visits were in the course of preparation.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Control Panel held on 14th July, 18th August and 15th September 2008 be received and adopted.

(g) Licensing and Protection Panel

Councillor J T Bell presented the Report of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 18th June 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing and Protection Panel held on 18th June 2008 be received and adopted.

(h) Licensing Committee

Councillor J T Bell presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee on held 18th June 2008.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 18th June 2008 be received and adopted.

(i) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor C J Stephens presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 24th June 2008.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 1 was declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 24th June 2008 be received and adopted.

(j) Employment Panel

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington presented the Report of the Employment Panel held on 16th September 2008.

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In connection with Item No 8 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes regarding the employment of external consultants to manage the recruitment process for the post of Corporate Director, Central Services, Councillor Mrs Boddington replied that she would respond to the questioner after the meeting

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 16th September 2008 be received and adopted.

(k) Elections Panel

Councillor D Harty presented the Report of the Elections Panel held on 27th August 2008.

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In connection with Item No. 1, Councillor Harty encouraged all Members of the Council to respond to an invitation for comments on the possibility of changes to electoral arrangements in Huntingdonshire. It was confirmed that wider consultation on any proposed new arrangements would follow.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Elections Panel held on 27th August 2008 be received and adopted.

42. ORAL QUESTIONS

In accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules (paragraph 8.3 of

the Council's Constitution), the Chairman proceeded to conduct a period of oral questions addressed to Executive Councillors and Panel Chairmen as follows:-

Question from Councillor M G Baker to the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, Councillor C R Hyams

In response to a question regarding the possibility of encouraging business users to recycle more to avoid such waste being taken to landfill, Councillor Hyams undertook to reply in detail to the questioner and to all Members of the Council

Question from Councillor R Powell to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

In response to a question regarding changes to a bus route in Ramsey and the impact on elderly people, Councillor Bucknell admitted that he was aware that Stagecoach had reviewed their services in the Fens in the interests of efficiency but if the questioner was able to provide details of the service to which he had referred, Councillor Bucknell offered to pursue the issue raised with bus company.

Question from Councillor T D Sanderson to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

In response to a question requesting an update on the likely date for the publication of a revised Huntingdon and Godmanchester Market Town Strategy and on the progress of improvements to footpaths at Ullswater, Stukeley Meadows and Grammar School Walk, Huntingdon, Councillor Bucknell replied that he would respond to the questioner in writing after the meeting.

Question from Councillor S J Criswell to the Executive Councillor for Operational and Countryside Services, Councillor C R Hyams

In response to a question regarding the destination of recycling material collected by the Council, Councillor Hyams gave his assurance that all material collected for dry recycling was managed by a recycling facility at Milton Keynes with whom the Council had a long term contract. A clear audit trail existed to demonstrate that the resulting material was sold in the UK and to overseas markets and that nothing was shipped abroad to landfill.

The Executive Councillor took the opportunity to report that 56% of the domestic waste collected by the District Council in 2008/9 would be recycled.

Question from Councillor P H Dakers to the Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Councillor for Customer Services and Information & Technology, Councillor L M Simpson

In response to a question regarding Member attendance at Council meetings, Councillor Simpson undertook to discuss the matter with the questioner after the meeting.

Question from Councillor J A Gray to the Executive Councillor for Planning Strategy and Transport, Councillor P L E Bucknell

In response to a question regarding environmental improvement schemes in the market towns and rural centres, Councillor Bucknell confirmed that whilst limited funds were available for such works, schemes would continue to progress where the greatest need had been identified.

43. 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 5.24 pm.

Chairman