

## HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in the Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 29 June 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor J J Dutton – Chairman.

Councillors S Akthar, M G Baker,  
Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates, P L E Bucknell,  
E R Butler, S Cawley, B S Chapman,  
K J Churchill, W T Clough, S J Criswell, I J Curtis,  
J W Davies, Mrs J A Dew, D B Dew, P J Downes,  
P M D Godfrey, P Godley, J A Gray, S Greenall,  
N J Guyatt, A Hansard, G J Harlock, R B Howe,  
A R Jennings, Mrs P A Jordan,  
S M Van De Kerkhove, A J Mackender-  
Lawrence, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds,  
T V Rogers, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens,  
P A Swales, R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, P R Ward,  
J S Watt, R J West and A H Williams.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors J D Ablewhite, Mrs B E Boddington, G J Bull, R S Farrer, C R Hyams, Mrs P J Longford, P G Mitchell and P K Ursell.

### 14. PRAYER

The Reverend A Milton, Team Rector of Huntingdon opened the meeting with prayer.

### 15. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

#### (a) Mrs Joan Fell

The Chairman reported that, he had, on behalf of the Council, conveyed condolences to former Councillor J D Fell on the recent death of his wife Joan. It was noted that details of the memorial service would be circulated when available.

#### (b) Green Heart Awards

The Council commended those individuals, businesses and community groups who had been honoured at the second Great Heart Community Award Ceremony held at the Corn Exchange, St Ives on 4th June 2011 for their contribution and dedication to the environment.

#### (c) Chairman's Events

The Chairman reported that it had been his pleasure to raise a special flag to start Armed Forces Week at a ceremony held on 20th June 2011 which had been attended by the Deputy Lord Lieutenant, High Sherriff and other

distinguished guests. The Chairman thanked those Members and Officers who had attended.

In terms of future plans, the Chairman announced his intention to host a charity hot buffet lunch at the 'Darjeeling' Restaurant in Huntingdon on 10th July and a Cabaret evening at Wood Green Animal Shelter on 7th October and he encouraged Members to join him at both events.

**(d) Mr D Monks**

The Council was advised that the meeting would be the last occasion at which David Monks would formally be the Chief Executive before his retirement on 31st August 2011. The Chairman extended his appreciation for the contribution made to the Council by Mr Monks and extended the Council's best wishes to him for a happy and healthy retirement.

On a personal note, the Chairman expressed his grateful thanks to Mr Monks for the guidance he had received from him both as a Councillor and latterly as Chairman of the Council.

Councillors I C Bates, P J Downes, N J Guyatt and P D Reeve also paid tribute to Mr Monks and wished to endorse the Council's good wishes to him for a happy and healthy retirement.

**16. MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Annual and Special meetings of the Council held on 18th May 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**17. MEMBERS' INTERESTS**

None were received.

**18. CABINET PROCEDURE RULES - DELEGATION BY THE EXECUTIVE LEADER**

In accordance with the Procedure Rules contained in the Council's Constitution and by reference to a report by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Deputy Executive Leader, Councillor N J Guyatt presented the Cabinet Portfolios for the ensuing Municipal Year.

Councillor Guyatt also took the opportunity to address the Council, in general terms, about the Council's 'direction of travel' envisaged by both himself and the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite. He looked forward to Members working together to achieve the Council's goals and was hopeful that future discussions would not just focus upon the reduction of services or balancing the budget but consider the long term objective of providing good services of benefit to all those living in the District. Councillor Guyatt envisaged that the journey towards this objective would be an inclusive process and he

invited all Members to contribute towards it. Whilst accepting that the Council could not operate as a business, Councillor Guyatt indicated his wish for it to adopt best business practice. He explained that already there had been changes to the senior officer structure which would take immediate effect. Two Managing Directors had been appointed and they, together with Heads of Service, would now form a Senior Management Group. The concept of three service directorates would discontinue.

Executive Councillors would operate across services to find solutions to problems. In terms of the budgetary situation, it was the objective to reduce the cost of operating the business rather than reduce the services which were provided. Serious consideration would be given to discontinuing certain functions which whilst laudable, contributed no long term benefit to the District.

Consideration also would be given to outsourcing rather than sharing services if it could be established that another provider was better able to deliver services and could demonstrate 'best value' for Huntingdonshire residents.

It was the objective to develop the role of scrutiny and the expectation that Members of the three Panels would assume the critical role of scrutinising, not only the work of the Cabinet, but other service issues as evidenced by the current review of One Leisure finance. Furthermore, there would be regular meetings between the Cabinet and the Chairmen of the Overview & Scrutiny Panels.

Councillor Guyatt also underlined the importance of the work of the ward Councillor in taking forward the localism agenda and although he thought that this concept had already been working to some degree in Huntingdonshire referring to the 'Planning For Real' exercise, the Council would need to await the publication of Government Guidance in this respect before developing the Council's future approach to the initiative.

Mention also was made of the 'local enterprise partnership' and the opportunity this presented to receive Government funding which could be critical for the future economy of the District, County and neighbouring authorities.

Councillor Guyatt concluded by indicating his expectation that the localism agenda might enable the Council to generate benefit for Huntingdonshire residents at a time when public services were under threat.

In the questions that followed, Councillor P D Reeve endorsed the proposed direction of travel indicated by the Deputy Executive Leader and welcomed the steps being taken to 'reinvigorate' the Council. However, he expressed disappointment that the Council's financial position had prompted action which, in his opinion, should have taken earlier. The Leader of the Principal Opposition Group, Councillor P J Downes also welcomed the content of the Deputy Leader's address and indicated the willingness of his Group to contribute to both scrutiny and discussions on service and business issues. He reminded the Council that it had always been the view of his Group that the former airfield at Alconbury should be used for mixed

development including housing and employment although he recognised that the progress of any future development, in the short term, would be subject to government support of the enterprise zone at Alconbury.

Councillor Mrs Banerjee remarked how crucial improvements were to the road infrastructure and, in particular, to the A14 if there was to be continuing growth in the District. This assertion was accepted by Councillor Guyatt who recognised that improvements to the A14 were critical, not only to Huntingdonshire, but to neighbouring counties but he was reluctant to link the question of an enterprise zone to the need for improvements to the A14.

Referring to the Overview & Scrutiny process, Councillor S M Van De Kerkhove asked whether the Cabinet would look more favourably on the advice or recommendations of the Scrutiny Panels. Although there could be occasions when the Cabinet might not agree with the views of the Panels, Councillor Guyatt gave an assurance that they would be taken into account in decision making.

In closing, Councillor Guyatt noted a suggestion from Councillor M F Shellens that housing development at Alconbury should ease the pressures on development elsewhere and obviate the need to use vital green spaces in urban areas for housing schemes.

## **19. FOOD SAFETY SERVICE PLAN 2011-12**

By reference to a report by the Head of Environmental & Community Health Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor K J Churchill, Chairman of the Licensing & Protection Panel reminded the Council that the Food Standards Agency required the Council to prepare a Food Safety Service Plan annually in accordance with an agreed framework. A full copy of the Food Safety Service Plan 2011/12 had been made available in the Members Room (an Executive Summary of which also is appended to the Minutes).

Members were reminded of the objectives of the Service Plan in terms of identifying resources, establishing a work programme and providing a means by which to measure and manage performance.

As a Food Authority, the District Council was responsible for enforcing specific food safety legislation. Close links with the Sustainable Community Strategy and the National Health Improvement Agenda also enabled the Council to contribute positively to local food business and to the protection of the community by maintaining the standards of the food industry.

In terms of specific performance, Councillor Churchill reported that the service had inspected 95.6% of high risk and 78% of low risk premises, a total of 1685 inspections and visits to food premises as part of programmed activities and in response to complaints and food alerts. Councillor Churchill added that Huntingdonshire Scores on the Doors Food Hygiene Rating Scheme (SOTD) continued to prove very popular with businesses and consumers and had attracted 100,000 searches on the website since its introduction in October 2008.

Particular mention was made by Councillor Churchill to the support and training provided to local butchers and meat producers in compliance with the Pennington Report 2009 and the extent of the resources required to support the annual Secret Garden Party which involved the inspection of 100 food vendors, food and water sampling and site infrastructure inspection. The service also recommended appropriate enforcement action in 47 cases where businesses had failed to comply with the law or presented a serious threat to public health.

In 2011/12 Councillor Churchill advised Members that despite reduced resources, the service would continue to explore use of alternative enforcement strategies and interventions for low risk businesses allowing attention to be directed towards inspecting high risk premises and providing education and guidance.

In response to concern expressed by Councillor M F Shellens at the level of inspections being undertaken, Councillor Churchill indicated that whilst inspections of 'high risk' premises would continue he anticipated that this might not necessarily be the case for those premises considered to be 'low risk'.

Following a question from Councillor P M D Godfrey regarding the ability of the Council to impose a charge to offset the resources required to support the Secret Garden Party, Councillor Churchill was of the opinion that specific charges could not be imposed but that he would look into the matter and advise the questioner after the meeting.

Whereupon, after noting the support for the Plan on the part of the Licensing & Protection Panel, the Council

**RESOLVED**

that the Food Safety Service Plan 2011/12 be adopted.

**20. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES**

**(a) Cabinet**

Councillor N J Guyatt, Deputy Executive Leader and Vice Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 21st April, 19th May and 23rd June 2011.

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In connection with Item No 3 and in response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens regarding the resources used to fund homelessness prevention initiatives, Councillor T V Rogers, Executive Councillor for Resources & Customer Services replied that the Council had set aside provision of £61,000 in the MTP for homelessness in 2011/12 but that currently the majority of funding came from the Government's homelessness grant which, although awarded for the purpose of homelessness, was not ring fenced.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor P D Reeve regarding the operation of the Home Link Scheme, accommodation managed by Housing Associations and the availability of 3/4 bed roomed properties, Councillor Guyatt, as Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning & Housing undertook to respond to the questioner in writing but commented that the Council would seek to deliver, where possible, 4/5 bed roomed affordable homes on new development sites.

On the same subject and in response to a further question from Councillor Shellens regarding changes to the housing benefit system and how these might impact upon the Homelessness Strategy, Councillor Rogers replied that it was difficult to anticipate what might be proposed by the Government in this respect but that relevant Heads of Service would seek to formulate a strategy to overcome any issues which might arise.

Accordingly, upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No 3 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No 4, Councillor P L E Bucknell was hopeful that any future consultation on planning traveller sites would be better received by the community.

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In connection with Item No 11, Councillor P J Downes referred to the valuable contribution made by the Overview & Scrutiny Panels to the items reported by the Cabinet and commented that he had encouraged his colleagues at Cambridgeshire County Council to adopt the same approach towards Scrutiny.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 21st April, 19th May and 23rd June 2011 be received and adopted.

**(b) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)**

Councillor D M Tysoe presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 9th June 2011.

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In connection with Item No 6 and in response to a question

from Councillor M F Shellens, Councillor Tysoe replied that he was confident that the proposed study on the condition and maintenance of the A14 viaduct in Huntingdon would take into account the arrangements which would need to be put in place to overcome any future potential closure of that section of the A14.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 9th June 2011 be received and adopted.

**(c) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)**

Councillor P M D Godfrey presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 14th June 2011.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 14th June 2011 be received and adopted.

**(d) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)**

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 7th June 2011.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 7th June 2011 be received and noted.

**(e) Development Management Panel**

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 23rd May and 20th June 2011.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 23rd May and 20th June 2011 be received and adopted.

**(f) Licensing and Protection Panel**

Councillor K J Churchill presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing & Protection Panel held on 9th June 2011.

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In connection with Item No 1, it was noted that the Food Service Plan had previously been considered by the Council under Minute No 19.

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In connection with Item No 7 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Churchill confirmed that although the District Council rigorously enforced the Sunbeds (Regulation) Act 2010 to prohibit businesses from allowing persons under 18 to use sun bed facilities, until regulated by Government, the Council was unable to extend this restriction further.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Licensing & Protection Panel held on 9th June 2011 be received and adopted.

**(g) Employment Panel**

Councillor P A Swales presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 15th June 2011.

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Referring to Item No 3, Councillor Swales invited the Council to endorse the sentiments of the Panel with regard to the 44 employees who had retired from the local government service.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 15th June 2011 be received and adopted.

**(h) Senior Officers' Panel**

Councillor N J Guyatt presented the Report of the meetings of the Senior Officers' Panel held on 14th April, 31st May, 2nd and 16th June 2011.

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In connection with Item No 1 and in response to a question from Councillor I C Bates, Councillor Guyatt confirmed that the performance of the two posts of Managing Directors would be reviewed by the Executive Leader in October.

Whereupon, on being put to the vote the recommendations contained in Item No 1 were declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Senior Officers' Panel held on 14th April, 31st May and 2nd and 16th June 2011 be received and adopted.

**21. ORAL QUESTIONS**

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rules (paragraph 8.3 of the Rules), the Chairman proceeded to conduct a period of oral questions addressed to Executive Councillors and Panel Chairmen as follows:-

**Question from Councillor J S Watt to the Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning & Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt**

In response to a question requesting information on the number of claims from the public, for damages or injury, dealt with by Cambridgeshire County Council arising from defects on the highway, Councillor Guyatt explained that this enquiry should be referred to the appropriate Portfolio Holder and Cabinet Member at the County Council.

**Question from Councillor P D Reeve to the Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning & Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt**

In response to a question regarding proposed changes to local business rates and the suggestion that this might lead to an increase in development applications for retail areas, Councillor Guyatt replied that it was premature to predict the impact of the proposals but that it

would be interesting to establish which authority would be made responsible for collection and how funds collected would be allocated.

**Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for Resources & Customer Services, Councillor T V Rogers**

In response to a question from Councillor R J West, Councillor T V Rogers indicated that he would be pleased to convey the questioner's congratulations to staff in Customer Services for having recently been awarded an accreditation for Customer Service Excellence.

**Question from Councillor I C Bates to the Executive Councillor for Resources & Customer Services, Councillor T V Rogers**

In response to a question regarding an industrial dispute, Councillor Rogers replied that he was not aware that any District Council employees were intending to participate in the planned industrial action regarding the Government's proposals on pensions for teaching staff.

The meeting ended at 8.33pm.

Chairman