

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, 14 December 2011.

PRESENT: Councillor J J Dutton – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar,
M G Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, I C Bates,
Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, G J Bull,
E R Butler, S Cawley, B S Chapman,
K J Churchill, S J Criswell, I J Curtis,
J W Davies, Mrs J A Dew, D B Dew,
P J Downes, R S Farrer, P M D Godfrey,
P Godley, J A Gray, S Greenall, N J Guyatt,
A Hansard, G J Harlock, R Harrison, D Harty,
R B Howe, C R Hyams, A R Jennings,
Mrs P A Jordan, Mrs P J Longford,
P G Mitchell, 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 K Ursell, 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 K M Baker, W T Clough, S M Van De Kerkhove and A J Mackender-Lawrence.

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr D L Hall.

42. PRAYER

The Reverend P Swindells opened the meeting with Prayer.

43. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) St. Ives Leisure Centre

On behalf of the Council, the Chairman commended the actions of the One Leisure Team at St. Ives Leisure Centre for their swift and professional action in responding to a life-threatening emergency at the Centre on 15th November 2011.

The Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson endorsed the Chairman's remarks and added that the calmness and quick thinking displayed by the Team had undoubtedly saved a life.

(b) Chairman's Events

The Chairman thanked all those who had attended his Civic Carol Service which had taken place the previous evening

and reminded Members of the arrangements being made for the Holocaust Service which would be held on 24th January 2012 in St. Mary's Church, Huntingdon.

44. MINUTES

Subject to some amplification of the text at the top of Page 6 of the Minutes as described in an email distributed to all Members in advance of the meeting, the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 2nd November 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

45. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor P J Downes declared a personal interest in Minute No. 47 given the potential for consideration of grant funding to the voluntary sector under this item and his family relationship with an employee of the Citizens' Advice Bureau.

46. SIX MONTHS REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE AND THE VISION FOR THE NEXT EIGHTEEN MONTHS - A COUNCIL DISCUSSION

The Chairman reminded Members of the decision by the Council to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) to enable headline debates and "White Paper" proposals to be discussed by Members in an open manner. The Council therefore

RESOLVED

that Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) be suspended for the duration of the discussion on Minute No. 46 during which time the common law rules of debate be observed by Members and applied by the Chairman.

The Chairman invited Councillor J D Ablewhite as Executive Leader of the Council to lead the presentation by Cabinet Members. Councillor Ablewhite indicated that each of the Executive Councillors would highlight the achievements in their respective portfolio areas over the last six months before he would conclude the address with an indication of the Cabinet's priorities for the year ahead.

In terms of his overall approach, Councillor Ablewhite reminded the Council that he had appointed a smaller Cabinet with Portfolios based on cross-cutting issues. It also had been the Cabinet's principal priority to produce a balanced budget. Mention also was made of the recent re-structuring of senior management and the development of a positive working relationship with representatives of the Employees' Side which had assisted pay negotiations in 2011 and would facilitate progress of the pay review in the New Year. In recognising that the uncertainty of the last few months may have unsettled staff, Councillor Ablewhite was hopeful that improved communications would ensure that both Members and staff would be better informed of issues affecting the Council. Councillor Ablewhite continued by making reference to the Council's engagement with both the voluntary sector and town and parish Councils and that he had particularly focussed on facilitating growth in the local economy as a member of the Greater Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Partnership and the

Local Enterprise Partnership and by influencing decision making on the Enterprise Zone for Alconbury.

As Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, and in his role as lead Member for localism, Councillor N J Guyatt reminded Members that the Council's work in the regeneration of Oxmoor was ahead of its time and indicative of the approach envisaged by the Localism Act. By way of further examples, he also referred to the ongoing study into the operation of the Neighbourhood Forums, being undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) and proposals to develop pilot meetings perhaps involving Yaxley, Eynesbury and Ramsey which would offer those communities the opportunity to discuss environmental, economic and social issues. Mention also was made of the Council's plans for a Huntingdonshire Conference to seek to energise the Strategic Partnership, revitalise the Council's relationships with its partners and inform a new Corporate Plan.

In terms of planning, Members were informed of the Council's commitment to joint working arrangements with District authorities in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough City to seek to address the significant infrastructure deficit. It was also his expectation that the Council would be required to review its core strategy in the light of the Government's new National Planning Policy Framework. Other issues currently under consideration by the Cabinet included the introduction of CIL from 1st April 2012. Councillor Guyatt commended the joint approach towards the delivery of the new Development Brief for RAF Brampton which had involved local Members and interest groups and ultimately resulted in a Brief acceptable to all parties. He was hopeful that, increasingly, this approach could be used in the conduct of the planning process and indicate the way in which the District Council intended to practice localism. In this connection, Councillor Guyatt announced his intention to offer training to all Town and Parish Councils on CIL and the new Planning Strategy.

Regarding the Council's Housing Strategy, Councillor Guyatt suggested that he would be meeting with all registered social landlords (RSLs) in the District to seek to find innovative ways to achieve funding to provide new housing. He was hopeful of encouraging RSL's to consider under-occupancy of their stock to try and accommodate families who needed larger homes. Lastly, Councillor Guyatt made reference to the disabled facility grants and underlined the Cabinet's continued commitment to meet demand for such grants in the future.

As Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson described in detail the efforts being made by the One Leisure Team towards achieving a break-even position in terms of income and expenditure at Leisure Centres by 2014/2015. He was pleased to add that the Centres currently attracted 1.8m visitors plus school use and that workloads undertaken by those employees who had taken advantage of the voluntary redundancy scheme had been absorbed without adversely impacting upon the service. Councillor Sanderson reminded the Council of recent developments at the Centres including the new 3G pitch and changing rooms at St. Ivo Outdoor Centre which had been officially

opened by Howard Webb and was funded with the assistance of grant aid from the Football Foundation.

Councillor Sanderson confirmed that funding to enable the CCTV service to continue had been retained in the budget but that discussions still were being held with partners to find a way of securing a contribution towards its cost. He also confirmed the Council's commitment to the voluntary sector and the inclusion of the £175,000 in the budget for the purpose.

Given the number of changes to the management of health activities locally, Councillor Sanderson reported that he had recently had a positive meeting with Circle, shortly to be responsible for the management of Hinchingsbrooke Hospital and looked forward to establishing a future working partnership with that organisation and building links with the NHS Local Commissioning Groups.

In conclusion, Councillor Sanderson was pleased to report that the Food Safety Agency had granted funding to assist the migration by 1st April 2012 of the current Scores on the Doors Scheme to the National Food Hygiene Rating Scheme established by the Agency.

Councillor B S Chapman, Executive Councillor for Customer Services opened his report by informing the Council that 85% of visitors had been seen within 10 minutes of their arrival at Customer Services. Of these, 97.2% had indicated that they were satisfied with the service that they had received. Despite fewer advisers in the Call Centre, satisfaction with responses to calls was still high although waiting times had been extended. Councillor Chapman acknowledged that impending changes in the systems for revenues and benefits would have an impact on Customer Services.

In terms of the Call Centre, Councillor Chapman suggested that consideration might be given to the possible relocation of the service to District Council accommodation and that a decision could be made in this respect early in the New Year.

Members were made aware of the development of the "My Huntingdonshire" website which would enable users to access all information relevant to the post code registered. Councillor Chapman also presented information on the Virtualisation Project and made reference to the number of successful prosecutions achieved by the Benefits Fraud Section.

In terms of homelessness, Councillor Chapman reported on the increased number seeking housing advice which had increased from 877 in 2010 to 1,220 in 2011. Concluding his address, Councillor Chapman referred generally to difficulties in the Housing Sector and his expectation that tough challenges in this respect lay ahead.

Having recently assumed responsibility for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe indicated his intention to give a broad view of the services which fell within the portfolio. Councillor Tysoe began by reminding Members of the Council's recent excellent record for waste recycling and how, partnership with RECAP, would enable the Authority to do even better. He gave notice of an upcoming project which would seek to achieve further savings by optimising the routes

taken by vehicle rounds. Members were reminded of the aspirations of the Green House Project and advised that currently work was progressing in response to the Government's Green Deal. In terms of carbon cost savings, Councillor Tysoe reported that the Council was well on its way to achieving its fuel and carbon targets and was hopeful that the installation of solar panels at Eastfield House would accelerate this progress. In closing, Councillor Tysoe made reference to other environmental initiatives in which he had become involved and these were notably – flood prevention works at Alconbury, a heating scheme in St. Neots and projects associated with Chequers Court, the ring road and railway station in Huntingdon.

Mindful of his presentation on the draft budget later in the meeting, Councillor J A Gray, as Executive Councillor for Resources, spoke briefly about the progress of his portfolio since he had assumed responsibility for it from Councillor T V Rogers. Whilst significant steps had been taken to enable the Council to achieve a balanced budget, he urged Members not to become complacent because steps still would be required to address the deficit of £2.5m that remained.

Notwithstanding the budgetary position, Councillor Gray intimated that it was an exciting time for local government finance given the indication from Government that it was to devolve increased powers in respect of Council Tax and housing benefits. Councillor Gray drew attention to the importance, in current times, of the project "Making Assets Count" which was designed to make maximum use of public sector assets and in this respect he added that consideration was being given to more intensive use of Eastfield and Pathfinder House about which he hoped to make an announcement shortly.

On the conclusion of the presentations by the Executive Councillors, the Executive Leader, Councillor Ablewhite began to describe his view of the "direction of travel" and priorities of the Council over the next 12 months.

He envisaged four key building blocks –

- ◆ to seek further efficiency savings and increase income to protect valued services;
- ◆ to continue to build constructive relationships with public sector partners, town and parish councils, the business community, voluntary sector and the Council's key resource – its employees;
- ◆ to promote and enable sustainable growth whilst maintaining the qualities of the District; and
- ◆ to address disadvantage in all its forms – by meeting housing needs, enabling access to services and by providing work experience and training opportunities for young people.

He added that work on a new Corporate Plan would commence in the New Year and be informed by the Huntingdonshire Conference referred to by Councillor Guyatt. To conclude, Councillor Ablewhite directed the Council towards a power point presentation which illustrated the priorities towards which the Managing Directors would be working in 2012.

In the debate that followed, Councillor S J Criswell commended the

Cabinet for their presentation and urged them to consider how to find a way to allow the CCTV service to continue given its value to the community in preventing crime and anti-social behaviour. In addition, and whilst he recognised the need for savings to be made, he encouraged the Cabinet to support the conclusions of the Scrutiny Working Group which was considering the Voluntary Sector and reminded the Council that services provided by volunteers, in many cases, might otherwise fall upon the District Council. Councillor Criswell also welcomed the Cabinet's commitment to the continuation of disabled facilities grants.

In response to points raised by Councillor C R Hyams, the Executive Leader, Councillor Ablewhite reaffirmed his commitment both to negotiations with partners, including the Police, to seek to secure the continuation of the CCTV service and to ensure that the District Council had first nomination rights to new and vacant homes to ensure "Local Homes for Local People". Councillor R J West concurred with the views of the Executive Leader in terms of the valuable contribution made by Council employees and whilst mindful of the requirement for efficiency savings, urged him to do his utmost to maintain the excellent standards of service provided by staff.

In welcoming the information conveyed to the Council, Councillor P G Mitchell asked how this could be communicated to residents given the discontinuation of the District Wide magazine. The Executive Leader, Councillor Ablewhite informed the Council that a new Corporate Office had been created and that it would be their role, commencing in January 2012, to communicate both to employees, Members and district residents.

Councillor P J Downes, Leader of the Opposition commended the presentation but suggested that, in future, questions should follow each address by Executive Councillors. In particular, he welcomed the information conveyed on the Local Enterprise Zone, the Huntingdonshire Conference and the approach to future development briefs. He also welcomed the good working relationship between the Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Panels. However, Councillor Downes expressed regret that the remainder of the LPSA funding had been directed, without consultation, towards broadband facilities in Cambridgeshire. In response, Councillor Ablewhite clarified that although it had been the decision of Cambridgeshire County Council to direct LPSA monies to broadband, the District Council had negotiated a payment of £100,000 which had been used to off-set any expenditure which might have been incurred by Groups in pursuing community projects.

In response to other questions asked by Councillor Downes, Councillor T D Sanderson commented that he looked forward to the outcome of the Scrutiny Study on the Voluntary Sector but notwithstanding their conclusions, recognised the contribution made by the Citizens' Advice Bureau and other Groups.

Councillor D M Tysoe admitted that the reduction in tariffs for solar panels had taken him by surprise but that he was of the opinion that the District Council's scheme still was viable. Concerns expressed in respect of changes to the benefits systems and homelessness and the impact these would have on the Council were shared by

Councillor Chapman.

Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds referred to the new working relationship established with Circle implied by the Executive Councillor, T D Sanderson and requested that he raise the issue of the closure of Acer Ward at any future meeting he might have and encourage re-opening of the Ward to save patients and their families from travelling to Cambridge or Peterborough. Councillor Sanderson undertook to pass on the questioner's concerns.

Regarding the Council's budget and whilst applauding the progress which had been made, Councillor S Greenall was of the view that further reductions might be achieved and referred to the work that a Scrutiny Study Group was undertaking on the document centre. Councillor Greenall also made reference to the costs incurred in employing temporary staff and suggested that the budget head needed to be reviewed urgently given that a high proportion of the £369,000 budget had already been spent. In thanking the Councillor for his assistance, Councillor Ablewhite accepted that the employment of temporary staff was an issue which required to be looked into.

Councillor P D Reeve congratulated the Leader on the presentation by the Cabinet and referring specifically to the issue of homelessness endorsed the approach being taken towards securing appropriately sized accommodation for families. As relevant Executive Councillor, Councillor N J Guyatt confirmed that the District Council would continue to work in partnership with the RSLs to meet housing demand in required locations. On a similar subject, Councillor P M D Godfrey expressed concern regarding the Council's ability to deliver affordable homes in the light of new planning guidance. It was explained that Government Inspector's would have a greater role to play in this respect.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs M Banerjee which suggested that the Council meeting should have a greater involvement in the regular audit of accounts, Councillor J A Gray was of the view that, as the Council would continue to receive excellent financial presentations, he would not wish to place a further demand on resources by producing additional detailed information which, in his view, was not essential.

Councillor Ablewhite thanked the Council for their contribution to the discussion and for their support in his first few months as Executive Leader.

47. DRAFT BUDGET 2012/13 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN

By reference to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources presented the draft Budget 2012/13 and Medium Term Plan 2013 - 2017. Councillor Gray paid tribute to his predecessor, Councillor T V Rogers who had previously held the portfolio with distinction. The Executive Councillor took the opportunity to remind Members that the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) also had contributed to discussions on the draft Budget.

Further to Minute No 46, Councillor Gray reminded the Council of the significance progress which had been made towards achieving a balanced budget whilst at the same time protecting valuable services, by re-instating a proportion of the grant allocated to the voluntary sector, by retaining CCTV through discussion with other partners, by enabling people to continue to live in their own homes through a commitment to disabled facilities grants and by further investment in high quality leisure facilities. Notwithstanding these achievements, Councillor Gray reminded Members of the range of economic risks and uncertainties which would make decision-making very complex in the year ahead. In this light, the Council was reminded of the Government's decision to offer a one year reward grant equivalent to a 2.5% increase to an authority that chose not to raise its council tax level in 2012/13.

Councillor Gray re-affirmed his continued commitment to maintaining a financially healthy authority and a balanced budget so that the Council could continue to provide the public services expected of it.

Having carefully reviewed the contents of the report, Councillor Gray commended the recommendation of the Cabinet on the draft Budget 2012/13 and Medium Term Plan 2013 - 2017. The recommendation was duly seconded by Councillor J D Ablewhite.

In the debate that followed, and in response to a question by Councillor I C Bates, Councillor Gray confirmed that it was not the Council's intention to ring-fence the New Homes Bonus for use by a particular community but to use it as a source of funding to benefit the District as a whole.

Having thanked Councillor Gray for his kind words, Councillor Rogers questioned how the Cabinet would determine its priorities in the face of the challenges which lay ahead. Councillor Gray suggested that further acceptable savings had been identified and that he looked forward to discussing these options with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being).

Having asked the Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt, to reply in writing to a question from Councillor M F Shellens relating to the average cost of dealing with a family presenting themselves as homeless, the extent of the homelessness budget and the number of homeless families able to be accommodated by the District, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the draft Budget and Medium Term Plan, appended to the report of the Head of Financial Services, be approved as the basis for the development of the Budget for 2012/13 and revised Medium Term Plan 2013 - 2017;
- (b) that the proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant be not accepted and no tax increase be agreed which would require the holding of a referendum; and

- (c) that the Council place on record its gratitude for the contribution made to the draft budget process and report by Councillors J A Gray and T V Rogers and Officers in the Financial Services Division.

48. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES

(a) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 17th November and 8th December 2011.

.....

Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No 34 was declared to be CARRIED.

.....

In connection with Item No 41, it was noted that the recommendation had been considered previously under Minute No 47.

.....

In connection with Item No 45 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes, Councillor Ablewhite thanked those Members and Officers who had contributed to the completion of the Urban Design Framework for RAF Brampton.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 17th November and 8th December 2011 be received and adopted.

(b) Standards Committee

Mr D L Hall presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 1st December 2011.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 1st December 2011 be received and adopted.

(c) Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Councillor T V Rogers presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 3rd November and 1st December 2011.

.....

In connection with Item No 31 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes regarding the pressure on resources in planning services to respond to applications for development in the Alconbury Enterprise Zone, the Executive Leader, Councillor Ablewhite acknowledged that the implications of this additional workload had been identified and would remain under review. Councillor Rogers added that the situation also would continue to be monitored by the Panel.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 3rd November and 1st December 2011 be received and adopted.

(d) Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being)

Councillor P M D Godfrey presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 1st November and 8th December 2011.

.....

Councillor Godfrey expressed his gratitude to the Members of the Panel for their contribution over the year and particularly thanked the Independent co opted Members on the Panel for their valuable input.

.....

In connection with Item No 28, Councillor R J West thanked Councillor Godfrey for the opportunity offered to both Councillor Mrs B E Boddington and himself to address the Panel on issues relating to Loves Farm, St Neots. In response, Councillor Godfrey was hopeful that the Working Group appointed to examine Members' concerns could provide advice that would prove helpful to the planning process in the future.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well - Being) held on 1st November and 8th December 2011 be received and adopted.

(e) Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being)

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 1st November and 6th December 2011.

.....

In connection with Item No 33 and in response to a question from Councillor P L E Bucknell, Councillor Criswell suggested that it was premature to comment on the approach likely to be taken by the Police Commissioner towards community engagement. In terms of the current review of Neighbourhood Forums, the police had indicated a willingness to continue their involvement in community decision making through any model agreed by the District Council.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 1st November and 6th December 2011 be received and adopted.

(f) Development Management Panel

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meeting of the Development Management Panel held on 21st November 2011.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Development Management Panel held on 21st November 2011 be received and adopted.

(g) Licensing & Protection Panel

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing & Protection Panel held on 26th October

2011.

.....

In connection with Item No 9, Councillor Davies reaffirmed the statement made by Councillor T D Sanderson earlier in the meeting that the Council had received grant funding totalling £16,000 from the Foods Standards Agency (FSA) to migrate from the Scores on the Doors food hygiene scheme to the one run by the FSA.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing & Protection Panel held on 26th October 2011 be received and adopted.

(h) Licensing Committee

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 26th October 2011.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 26th October 2011 be received and adopted.

(i) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor E R Butler presented the Report of the meetings of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 2nd November and 7th December 2011.

.....

Upon being put to the vote, the recommendations contained in Item No 11 were declared to be CARRIED.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Report of the meetings of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 2nd November and 7th December 2011 be received and adopted.

(j) Employment Panel

Councillor P A Swales presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 30th November 2011.

.....

Councillor Swales asked the Council to join him in congratulating Mr J Clark on his 36 years of service in local government and in sending best wishes to him for his retirement.

.....

In connection with Item No 11 and in response to a question from Councillor S Greenall, Councillor Swales undertook to look into the circumstances described by the questioner which involved both sick pay and payments to temporary staff.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 30th November 2011 be received and adopted.

(k) Senior Officers Panel

Councillor N J Guyatt presented the Report of the meeting of the Senior Officers' Panel held on 1st December 2011.

.....

Upon being put to the vote, the recommendations contained in Item No 7 were declared to be CARRIED.

.....

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraph, the Report of the meeting of the Senior Officers' Panel held on 1st December 2011 be received and adopted.

49. MOTION ON NOTICE

It was moved by the Group Leaders – Councillors J D Ablewhite, P J Downes and P D Reeve and Independent Member, Councillor R G Tuplin and duly seconded that -

'Notwithstanding the correspondence that has already been sent by Members of this Council to Ministers at the Department of Communities and Local Government, this Council calls on the Secretary of State to adopt a flexible approach in judging any proposed increase in council tax as 'excessive' so as to encourage responsible local decision-making within a broad framework of guidance from the DCLG eg by dropping a crude percentage criterion for all Councils and instead taking as a 'capping ceiling' the cash value of a government – determined increase in the average council tax levied by each tier of local government'

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was declared to be CARRIED (unanimously).

50. 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 R S Farrer to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question which suggested that local Members had not been kept informed of matters relating to Loves Farm, St Neots, Councillor Ablewhite assured the questioner that the advent of the Corporate Office would improve communication with Members in this respect

Question from Councillor Mrs M Banerjee to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question regarding the Armed Forces Covenant, Councillor R Harrison, on behalf of Councillor Ablewhite, confirmed that although Cambridgeshire County Council had signed the covenant in principle, this commitment had not yet involved any financial obligation on their part.

Question from Councillor M F Shellens to the Deputy Executive Councillor and Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a series of questions requesting information on housing matters, Councillor Guyatt replied that there were currently 3541 on the housing waiting list, that only RSLs could apply to use those houses made empty due to management orders and that the Council had responded to government consultation on empty homes.

Question from Councillor S Greenall to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to comments regarding the efficiency of the process for managing Members' post, Councillor Ablewhite assured the questioner that he would look into the matter.

51. MEMBERSHIP OF CABINET, COMMITTEES AND PANELS

On the recommendation of the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, it was

RESOLVED

that Councillor G J Harlock be appointed to the membership of the Corporate Governance Panel in the place of Councillor J A Gray.

The meeting ended at 10 pm.

Chairman