

Awaiting approval by the Executive Leader

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## Cabinet

### Report of the meeting held on 13th December 2012

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#### Matters for Decision

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#### 40. DRAFT BUDGET 2013/2014 AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN

**In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) (Item No.36 of their Report refers)** and by way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (the report is reproduced as Item No. 4 on the Council Agenda) the Cabinet has reviewed the draft 2013/2014 budget and the Medium Term Plan for the period 2014 – 2018. Final approval for the proposals will be dealt with by Council at its meeting on 20th February 2013.

Executive Councillors were advised that the announcement of government grant figures may not be available until the 19th or 24th December 2012.

Attention was drawn to the latest forecast for the retention of business rates for which the starting base rate had yet to be confirmed. The Head of Financial Services explained that all the Cambridgeshire authorities were revising their level of business rates growth prior to a final decision on whether to proceed with a countywide pooling scheme.

With regard to the setting of the Council Tax base, the Cabinet referred to the Council's low level of Council Tax currently and expressed their frustration at not being in a position to increase the level by more than 2% due to guidance issued by the Secretary of State. Furthermore, Executive Councillors were of the view that the Council should not accept the proposed Council Tax Freeze Grant of 1%.

In discussing the Economic Well-Being Panel's views regarding the use of reserves, the Cabinet has emphasised that the Council were continuing to identify savings and progress against savings targets was being monitored.

With regard to car parking charge increases, the Cabinet was conscious of the economic outlook and agreed that it may not be possible to increase charges in 2015 and 2017. In that respect, Executive Councillors agreed that the final Medium Term Plan would

need to be adjusted to reflect this. During their discussions the Cabinet were advised that options will continue to be investigated to introduce Civil Parking Enforcement which may generate additional income.

Whilst congratulating Officers on the significant progress that has been made in both the efficiency and savings measures over the past 18 months, Executive Councillors have stressed the need to identify where additional savings can be made.

#### **RECOMMEND**

**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 2013/2014 and the revised Medium Term Plan 2014/2018.**

#### **41. TREASURY MANAGEMENT – REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE**

By way of a report by the Head of Financial Services (reproduced as Appendix A) the Cabinet has noted the performance of the District Council's Fund Managers for the period 1st April to 30th September 2012.

**Having noted the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the matter (Item No.37 of their Report refers) the Cabinet**

#### **RECOMMEND**

**that the Council notes the contents of the report and approves the revised table and targets set out in paragraph 6.2.**

#### **42. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT – 1ST APRIL 2013**

By way of a report by the Head of Customer Services (reproduced at Appendix B) the Cabinet has been updated with progress made to date to introduce a local Council Tax Support Scheme to replace the current national Council Tax Benefits Scheme which will be abolished on 31st March 2013.

Executive Councillors were reminded that the draft scheme has been subject to consultation in late summer, which has resulted in changes being made relating to the backdating of payments for up to six months and to the capital limit, which will remain at the existing Council Tax Benefit level of £16,000. It was reported that these changes have been incorporated within the new scheme.

In considering the scheme, the Cabinet took into account **the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) expressed at their meeting on 4th December 2012 (Item No.36 of their Report refers)**. Executive Councillors noted the impact of the proposals upon Town and Parishes in setting their precepts.

Executive Councillors were advised that they would need to consider grants to these Councils to provide an element of compensation at their January meeting, once final grant figures are available.

Having been advised that the new arrangements must be in place by 31st January 2013 and in authorising the Head of Customer Services to administer the new scheme in accordance with the Local Government Finance Act 2012, the Cabinet

## **RECOMMEND**

**that the Council Tax Support Scheme be approved.**

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### **Matters for Information**

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#### **43. SAFEGUARDING**

In conjunction with the Employment Panel, the Cabinet has endorsed the content of the Council's Safeguarding Policy. The Policy outlines good practice aimed at promoting the safety of young people and vulnerable adults using the Council's services and protecting employees and Members from false allegations.

#### **44. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988 (AS AMENDED) – PUBLICATION OF RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST**

The Cabinet has approved the content of a rural settlement list and agreed that it be made available for inspection. Billing authorities are required under Section 42 of the Local Government and Finance Act 1988 to compile and maintain a rural settlement list identifying the boundary of any settlement which has not more than 3,000 residents. This list can then be used to grant rural rate relief for local services such as post offices, village shops, public houses and petrol filling stations.

#### **45. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S LETTINGS POLICY**

The Cabinet has approved the contents of a revised Lettings Policy for the Council. The Policy is a requirement of the Homeless Act 2002 and the Localism Act 2011 and sets out how the Council, in partnership with Registered Providers, will allocate their properties through the "Home Link Choice Based Lettings Scheme".

In so doing, Executive Councillors were pleased to note that under the new Policy members of the armed forces who need to move because of serious injury or disability sustained as a result of service, will no longer need to satisfy local connection criteria. Furthermore, additional preference will be awarded for former members of the armed forces by back dating their "date in band" by the total number of years of military service.

In discussing the information before them, Executive Councillors referred to the recently approved Tenancy Strategy for Huntingdonshire and the need to move away from the granting of “lifetime tenancies” to fixed length tenancies of two to five years.

#### **46. RATIFICATION OF TECHNICAL REFORM OF COUNCIL TAX**

Further to Item No. 17 of their Report to the meeting of the Council held on 26th September 2012, the Cabinet has been acquainted with the present position in relation to the Government’s proposals to reform Council Tax.

Executive Councillors were reminded that the reforms will give local authorities the discretion to set the level and period of charge for unfurnished, domestic properties, second homes and uninhabitable properties. Furthermore, the billing Authority will have the option to levy an empty premium on properties left vacant for over two years.

The Cabinet were advised that the proposals formed part of the Local Government Act 2012 which received royal consent on 31st October 2012. With this in mind and having authorised the Head of Customer Services to calculate and award discounts under the Scheme, the Cabinet has agreed to the following changes to the Council Tax Policy:-

- ◆ unoccupied and unfurnished (Class C) properties be granted a 100% discount for one month and then 0% thereafter;
- ◆ second home discount be reduced to 0%;
- ◆ uninhabitable properties (Class A) be granted 100% discount for a maximum of twelve months (no change);
- ◆ empty homes premium be levied after two years at 50% in addition to the 100% charge currently made; and
- ◆ monthly instalments continue to be due on the 15th day of each month (extended to those who request 12 monthly instalments) but Managers be permitted to include an additional late instalment date purely as an incentive for those opting to pay by direct debit.

#### **47. CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE**

**In conjunction with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (Item No.34 of their Report refers),** the Cabinet has been acquainted with progress made towards the implementation of the Council’s Carbon Management Plan and has noted the positive impact that this has had on energy use and bills at the Council’s main sites. The Council is on target to achieve a 30% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from these sites by 2013/14 with 20% reduction already being achieved. In thanking the Head of Environmental Management and his staff on the valuable contributions they have made in achieving the carbon reduction target, the Cabinet has requested that work continue to expand the Management Plan beyond 2013/14.

**48. ROUND RE-SCHEDULING**

**Along with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (Item No.33 of their Report refers),** the Cabinet has been acquainted with progress to deliver more effective refuse, recycling and garden waste collection rounds.

Executive Councillors were advised that since the last major re-scheduling of waste collection in 2007 the rounds have changed significantly due to housing growth and the introduction of glass collections. As a result, a full review of the service has commenced and new rounds will be introduced throughout the District from February 2013. Members were advised that the round changes will be fully communicated to Members and residents during December.

**49. RISK MANAGEMENT**

In considering details of an emerging risk relating to affordable housing and homelessness, the Cabinet has approved the actions proposed to deal with this risk. In so doing, Executive Councillors have stressed that the measures to be taken should be met from within existing resources.

**50. DISPOSAL OF LAND – ST. MARY’S STREET, HUNTINGDON**

*(The following item was considered as a confidential item under paragraph 3 of Part I of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.)*

**Having regard to the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) (Item No.32 of their Report refers),** the Cabinet has authorised the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects), after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources to approve terms for the sale of Council-owned land at St. Mary’s Street, Huntingdon.

**51. CHARGING FOR A SECOND GREEN BIN**

Following on from Item No.38 of their Report circulated with the Council agenda, the Cabinet has been advised of **the deliberations of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) in relation to their call-in of a Cabinet’s decision regarding charging for a second green bin (Item No.32 of their Report refers)**. Although the Panel understood the need for savings and that the current proposal of charging for collecting a second green bin may need to be implemented, it referred the decision back for further consideration. The Panel were of the opinion that a judgement could not be made unless there was a comprehensive assessment of all the Council’s options. In response to which, the Cabinet has reiterated that the proposal will be considered with all the Council’s options for saving measures as part of the Medium Term Plan.

J D Ablewhite  
Chairman