

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Room 01A, Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 13 December 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.
Councillors B S Chapman, J A Gray,
N J Guyatt, T D Sanderson and D M Tysoe.

69. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 22nd November 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

70. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

71. SAFEGUARDING POLICY

By way of a report by the Lead Safeguarding Officer (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the content of a new Policy and procedures for safeguarding vulnerable people in Huntingdonshire, including children from abuse. The Policy will apply to all District Council employees and Members and is intended to promote the safety of those using Council services whilst protecting employees and Members from false allegations.

Having been advised that the document had been endorsed by the Employees' Liaison Advisory Group and Employment Panel and subject to minor consequential amendments to the text of the CRB self declaration form, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the new Safeguarding Policy appended to the report now submitted be approved.

72. UPDATE 2013/14 BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM PLAN

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) setting out the draft budget for 2013/2014 and the Medium Term Plan (MTP) for the period 2014 – 2018.

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

In discussing the contents of the report, Members' attention was drawn to the latest position on the retention of the 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%.

Having considered the Panel's views on the Council's use of reserves, the Cabinet emphasised that the Council would continue to identify savings and monitor progress.

In relation to car parking charge increases, the Cabinet were conscious of the economic outlook and agreed that it may not be possible to increase charges in 2015. 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 would continue to be investigated to introduce Civil Parking Enforcement which may generate additional income.

Having reiterated the need to identify where additional savings could be made, the Cabinet congratulated members and officers on the significant progress that had been made in both the efficiency and savings measures over the past 18 months.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that the contents of the report now submitted be noted;
and
- (b) that the draft Medium Term Plan be recommended to Council as a basis for the development of the 2013/2014 budget and the revised Medium Term Plan 2014/2018.

73. TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW OF PERFORMANCE

A report by the Head of Financial Services was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which reviewed the respective levels of performance achieved during April to September 2012 by external fund managers in the matter of investment of the Council's Capital Receipts.

Having received the views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being), the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that Council be recommended to note the contents of the report and approve the revised table and targets for borrowing set out in paragraph 6.2.

74. LOCAL GOVERNMENT FINANCE ACT 1988 - PUBLICATION OF RURAL SETTLEMENT LIST

By way of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet was acquainted with a review of the boundaries of rural settlements as required by the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Having been advised that the list required no amendments, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the rural settlement list, as appended to the report now submitted, be approved and made available for inspection.

75. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S LETTINGS POLICY

With reference to a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet gave consideration to the content of a revised lettings policy which sets out how the Council, in partnership with Registered Providers with properties in the District, will allocate their properties through the "Home Link Choice Based Lettings Scheme".

Executive Councillors were advised that the amended policy reflected the implications of the Welfare Reform Act on the Housing Benefits System and the flexibilities of the Localism Act for prioritising socially rented houses. Members referred to the recently approved Tenancy Strategy for Huntingdonshire and reiterated the need to move away from the granting of "lifetime tenancies" to fixed length tenancies of two to five years.

Having noted that the proposed policy had been the subject of a consultation exercise with the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) and interested bodies, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the revised Lettings Policy as appended to the report now submitted be approved to come into effect on 1st April 2013.

76. THE TECHNICAL REFORM OF COUNCIL TAX

Further to Minute No. 37 and by way of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were acquainted with the present position in relation to the Government's proposals to reform Council Tax. Executive Councillors were reminded that the proposals formed part of the Local Government Finance Act 2012.

Having been advised that the Act had received royal consent on 31st October 2012 and the changes would take effect from 1st April 2013, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that unoccupied and non-furnished (Class C) properties be granted 100% discount for one month and then 0% thereafter;
- (b) that second home discounts be reduced to 0%;
- (c) that uninhabitable properties (class A) be granted 100% discount for a maximum of twelve months (no change);
- (d) that empty homes premium be levied after two years at 50% in addition to the 100% charge currently made;
- (e) that monthly instalments continue to be made due on 15th day of each month (extended to those who request twelve monthly instalments) but Managers be permitted to include an additional later instalment date purely as an incentive for those opting to pay by direct debit; and
- (f) that in accordance with Section 10 – 13 of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, the Head of Customer Services be authorised to calculate and award such discounts and the Council's Scheme of Delegation be amended accordingly.

77. COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT FROM 1ST APRIL 2013

Further to Minute No.12/38 and by way of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were updated with progress made to date to introduce a Local Council Tax Support Scheme from 1st April 2013, as required by the new Local Government Finance Act 2012.

The new Scheme had been considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet. Members' attention was drawn to the impact of the proposals upon Town and Parishes in setting their precepts. Members 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 noted the responses received to a consultation exercise on the new arrangements and the findings of an Equality Impact Assessment, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that Council be recommended to endorse the Council Tax Support Scheme; and
- (b) that, in accordance with Schedule 10 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government Finance Act 2012, the Head of Customer Services be authorised to administer the Council Tax Support Scheme and the Council's Scheme of Delegation be amended accordingly.

78. CARBON MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE

A report by the Head of Environmental Management was submitted (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing progress towards the implementation of the targets set out in the Council's Carbon Management Plan. The report which included data and narrative on the savings achieved from energy efficiency measures during 2011/2012 had been considered also by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) whose comments were relayed to the Cabinet.

Executive Councillors were advised that the Council was on course to achieve its targets for reducing Co² emissions by 30% over a five year period. Members were assured that energy efficiency measures now formed part of any refurbishment opportunities and had been included in the re-modelling of One Leisure, St. Ives.

Having requested that work continue to expand the Management Plan Beyond 2013/14, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the progress made towards the implementation of the Council's Carbon Management Plan and the positive impact this had had on energy use and bills at the Council's main sites be noted; and
- (b) that the undertaking of cross-departmental working as a way of maximising cost savings and the continued use of the salix ring-fenced funding and Environment Strategy Capital Funding to implement further energy saving projects be supported.

79. ROUND RESCHEDULING

By way of a report by the Operations Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were updated on progress to deliver effective refuse, recycling and garden waste collection rounds. Members were advised that since the last major re-scheduling of waste collection in 2007, the rounds have changed significantly due to changes in recycling collections and tipping points and a growth in housing.

In considering the information contained in the report Executive Councillors were advised that it appeared unlikely that the rounds could be reduced as previously thought due to housing growth in the District. However, it was hoped that more efficient fuel savings will be achieved once the new rounds were implemented in February 2013.

Having considered the contents of a communications plan for the efficiency measures, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

80. RISK REGISTER

By way of a report by the Audit and Risk Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet were reminded that a register had been developed to identify corporate risk.

Having considered details of an emerging risk relating to affordable housing and homelessness and in discussing the options available to manage this risk to reduce its likelihood and severity, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted and the action proposed.

81. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains exempt information relating to the financial or business affairs of a particular person (including the authority that holds that information) and to terms proposed in the course of negotiations for the acquisition or disposal of property.

82. DISPOSAL OF LAND, ST. MARY'S STREET, HUNTINGDON

The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Environmental Management (a copy of which is appended in the Annex to the Minute Book) regarding the proposed disposal of Council-owned land at St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon.

Having noted the views expressed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) on the matter, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the disposal of Council-owned land at St. Mary's Street, Huntingdon be approved;
- (b) that the Managing Director (Communities, Partnerships and Projects), after consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources, be authorised to accept an offer for the land from the prospective purchaser.

83. CHARGING FOR A SECOND GREEN BIN - CALL IN

(The Chairman announced that he proposed to admit the following urgent item in accordance with Section 100B (4) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972 given the need for the Council to respond to the "call-in" of the decision of the Cabinet relating to the introduction of a charge for a second green bin).

Further to Minute No. 12/66 and with the assistance of a report by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) (a copy of

which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the deliberations of the Panel in relation to their “call-in” of the decision made by the Cabinet on charging for collecting second green bins at its meeting on the 22nd November 2012.

Executive Councillors were advised that the Panel recognised the need for savings and accepted that the current proposal of charging for an additional bin may need to be implemented. However, they felt that a judgement on charging for collecting second green bins cannot be made unless there was a comprehensive assessment of all the Council’s options. Having reiterated that the proposal will be considered with all the Council’s options for saving measures as part of the Medium Term Plan, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the views expressed by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel be noted.

Chairman