

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, 19 December 2012.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs B E Boddington – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar,
M G Baker, K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee,
I C Bates, P L E Bucknell, G J Bull,
E R Butler, R C Carter, S Cawley,
B S Chapman, K J Churchill, I J Curtis,
J W Davies, D B Dew, P J Downes,
Mrs L A Duffy, R Fuller, D A Giles, J A Gray,
S Greenall, N J Guyatt, A Hansard,
G J Harlock, R Harrison, D Harty, R B Howe,
C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan, P Kadewere,
Ms L Kadic, Mrs P J Longford,
A J Mackender-Lawrence, P G Mitchell,
M C Oliver, J W G Pethard, P D Reeve,
Mrs D C Reynolds, T V Rogers,
T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, R G Tuplin,
D M Tysoe and R J West.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors W T Clough, S J Criswell, S M Van De Kerkhove and A H Williams.

48. PRAYER

The Bishop of Huntingdon, the Right Reverend Dr D Thompson opened the meeting with Prayer.

49. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Chairman's Events

The Chairman thanked those Members who had attended the Civic Carol Service on 5th December 2012 at St. Mary's Church, Huntingdon and the Bishop of Ely, the Right Reverend Conway, the Lord Lieutenant, High Sheriff, Huntingdon Male Voice Choir, Huntingdon Sea Cadets and other dignitaries for their contribution and support. The Chairman also had attended carol services held by the Salvation Army, the Mayors of St. Neots and Huntingdon and Luminus and had delivered a reading to the District Council's carol service.

(b) Events for Young People

Having reminded the Council of her intention to encourage young people to take an interest in local government and their communities, the Chairman reported on her successful visit, together with Officers from the Environment and

Elections Teams, to Ernulf Academy in St. Neots on 15th December and looked forward to paying similar visits to other schools in the District in the future.

(c) **Town and Parish Councils**

The Chairman also had hosted a gathering of representatives from Fenstanton, Hemingford Abbots, Hilton and Houghton and Wyton Parish Councils on 23rd November when they had enjoyed a tour of Pathfinder House and the Civic Suite and met Officers informally over refreshments.

50. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Council held on 14th November 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

Councillor R Harrison declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No. 55 by virtue of his employment with the Highways Agency.

52. UPDATE - 2013/14 BUDGET 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 2013/2014 and MTP 2013/2017. Councillor Gray advised the Council that due to some delay to Government announcements, he could only update the Council on various issues and anticipate the position which the Council might find itself in when required to approve the 2013/2014 budget and MTP at their next meeting in February 2013.

Despite this outlook, Councillor Gray drew the Council's attention to Annex A to the report of the Head of Financial Services which highlighted the extent of activities which were underway or forecast. Although not yet aware of the details of Government funding for Huntingdonshire in 2013/2014, Councillor Gray forewarned Members that information thus far suggested that there would be a reduction in funding for local government generally.

The Council was reminded of the financial objectives of the Cabinet and advised of progress achieved towards these targets to-date. It was explained that the Council was on course to achieve a balanced revenue budget by the financial year 2016/2017, that it was anticipated that revenue reserves would stabilise at £5.4m from 2015/16 and that work was continuing to establish a clear protocol for borrowing and investment to deliver tangible returns. Councillor Gray was able to announce that the level of new home bonus allocated by the Government was as expected, which removed an element of uncertainty from the draft budget.

Councillor Gray continued to review the remainder of the report in detail drawing Members' attention to matters of particular interest.

In terms of council tax levels, Councillor Gray was pleased to

announce that discussions between the Executive Leader and Baroness Hanham had appeared to influence the council tax principles proposed for 2013/2014. These would provide an option for those Shire District Councils with historically low council tax to consider an increase to council tax of up to 2% or £5 without the need for a referendum. This announcement would offer the Council greater flexibility in proposing a budget for 2013/2014.

It was also made clear that although employees had been offered a 2% pay award to be payable from 1st April 2013, no performance increments would be recommended.

Councillor Gray reassured the Council that the Cabinet would not become complacent and remained open to suggestions for further savings. Ideas already received either had been implemented or were being evaluated and whilst challenging, work would continue towards the Council's objectives despite the prevailing economic difficulties.

On moving the recommendation of the Cabinet, Councillor Gray indicated his appreciation for the support he had received from the Managing Director (Resources) and the Head of Financial Services and his Team. The recommendation was duly seconded by Councillor J D Ablewhite.

In the debate that followed, Councillor M F Shellens asked whether the Cabinet had re-considered proposals to increase car parking charges given the importance of maintaining the vitality of town centres. In response, Councillor Gray reminded Members that the review of car parking had been published for consultation and responses received would be taken into account in setting new charges.

In terms of the announcement from the Government regarding the council tax principles, Councillor P J Downes congratulated the Executive Leader for his contribution to this outcome but was hopeful that his lobbying of Andrew Stunnell MP also had helped towards this cause. Referring to the service budgets in Annex A, and the savings which already had been made, Councillor Gray undertook to ensure, in future, that the text associated with each item better reflected how the savings had been achieved.

Having been requested by Councillor I C Bates to identify all individual savings proposed and the criteria being used to prioritise savings, Councillor Gray undertook to respond to the questioner in writing after the meeting. Following a question from Councillor P L E Bucknell regarding the level of revenue income anticipated from new industrial units, Councillor Gray reported that a review of the Council's commercial estate was currently underway and that he would hope that this would result in the achievement of better returns in future years.

Having welcomed the information presented on homelessness, Councillor S Greenall indicated his support for comments made previously on car parking charges referring to the ability to park free of charge at the Trafford Centre in Manchester. He added that he was fearful that increased charges might deter visitors to the town

centres and contribute still further to the decline in revenue being suffered by the weekly markets.

In thanking the questioner for his support of the Council's action on homelessness, Councillor Gray commented that markets generally were in decline because of changes to the nature of shopping and that this, together with the current climate, presented a challenge to all retailers to re-invent themselves. The Council would continue to do all it could to invigorate town centres.

Referring to a suggestion that developer contributions would be received in respect of Paxton Pits Nature Reserve, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite assured the questioner, Councillor K J Churchill that there was no intention to locate housing development on either Hinchingsbrooke Park or Paxton Pits but he added that the Council was required to fund Countryside Services and would continue to look for new and innovative ways to do this in future years but would, of course, involve local Members in any discussion of this nature. Having expressed the view that local Members should be consulted in advance of any discussions, Councillor Gray advised the questioner that he could assure his Ward that there was no intention to build on Paxton Pits but there might be an occasion in the future when the Council would be required to consider proposals that may be equally un-palatable but which the Council may have no alternative but to support.

In response to comments expressed by Councillor P D Reeve regarding the potential negative impact on business rates should car parking charges be increased, Councillor Gray encouraged the questioner to submit to him alternative budget proposals on behalf of the UKIP Group.

As Executive Councillor for Planning and Housing Strategy, Councillor N J Guyatt assured the Council that consultation on proposed new car parking charges would continue and comments received taken into account before new charges were fixed.

In closing the debate, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite thanked Baroness Hanham for responding to the representations made by the District Council but added that whilst the announcement had removed some pressure, there still were considerable savings to be achieved. Councillor Ablewhite thanked the meeting for all the positive contributions received from Members during the debate and Councillor Gray and Officers for their efforts in preparation of the draft budget. Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the draft budget and Medium Term Plan, appended to the report of the Head of Financial Services now submitted be approved as the basis for the development of the budget for 2013/14 and the revised Medium Term Plan for 2014/18.

53. DELEGATION OF NNDR1 CALCULATION

By way of a report by the Head of Customer Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), the Executive Councillor for

Customer Services, Councillor B S Chapman explained that Regulations arising from the Local Government Act 2012 required billing authorities, such as the District Council, to provide an estimate of its business rates income for the upcoming financial year by completing a statutory return known as the NNDR1.

Furthermore, advice received from the Department of Communities and Local Government had recommended that the Council should authorise Officers to complete and certify the return to enable its despatch to them by 31st January 2013.

Accordingly and having been moved by Councillor Chapman and duly seconded, it was

RESOLVED

that the Managing Director (Resources) be authorised to calculate and certify the completion of the NNDR1 Form and the Council's Scheme of Delegation amended accordingly.

54. GAMBLING ACT 2005 - STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

Further to Minute No. 45 (f) and by reference to a report by the Head of Legal and Democratic Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book), Councillor J W Davies, Chairman of the Licensing Committee reminded Members that the Council had been consulting the public, various public authorities and those involved in the gambling industry on a proposed new Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005 due to come into effect on 31st January 2013.

Members noted that the current statement would expire on 30th January 2013 and that replacement principles had been prepared in accordance with a template recommended by both the Local Government Association and Gambling Commission. Four replies had been received in response to the Consultation exercise and had resulted in one change to the text of the Statement in relation to vulnerable persons.

Having undertaken to respond, in writing, to a question received from Councillor S Greenall regarding the car parking revenue lost from accommodating travelling fun fairs, Councillor Davies moved and it was duly seconded and

RESOLVED

that the Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act 2005, as appended to the report now submitted, be approved to come into effect on 31st January 2013 for a period of three years duration.

55. GREEN PAPER ITEM

In his role as Executive Councillor for Planning and Housing Strategy and by reference to a power point presentation (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book and was circulated at the meeting.) Councillor N J Guyatt updated the Council on the current position with the improvement scheme to the A14.

Referring to the presentation, Councillor Guyatt reminded Members of the background to the Scheme and the position adopted by the District Council in consultation, the seven options which had been produced to meet various local scenarios and the timetable for development and funding which could result in commencement on-site by 2018. He added that public consultation on the various new options was likely to commence early in 2013 and that a Member seminar on the subject, possibly led by the Highways Agency, would be held at the appropriate time.

In response to a series of questions that followed, Councillor Guyatt confirmed his understanding that the proposals provided for the removal of the Huntingdon viaduct, that sections of the A14 would become tolled but that no decision had yet been made as to where such a system would start, that ultimately it was the intention to charge HCVs from the continent for use of the A14 but encourage local traffic to use other routes and that once the scheme of improvement to the A14 was approved attention would turn towards plans for the A428.

56. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

(a) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 12th November and 13th December 2012.

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In connection with Item No. 33, it was noted that the recommendation had been considered previously under Minute No. 54.

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In connection with Item No. 39 and in respect of meetings of the Huntingdonshire Traffic Management Area Joint Committee, Councillor P J Downes drew the Council's attention to a decision taken by the County Council to discontinue meetings of the Area Joint Committee. He considered that this was a regrettable decision which appeared to have been taken without any consultation. In response, Councillor Ablewhite was unable to comment in any detail but undertook to raise the questioner's concerns at the next meeting of Council Leaders which was due to take place in January.

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In connection with Item No. 40, it was noted that the recommendation had been considered previously under Minute No. 52.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation carried in Item No. 41 was declared to be CARRIED.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No. 42 was declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 51 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes on proposed changes to the Refuse, Recycling and Garden Waste Collection rounds, the Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe explained that time and care was being taken to communicate the changes to residents and that Members would be advised of the impact shortly.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 12th November and 13th December 2012 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor T V Rogers presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 8th November and 6th December 2012.

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Referring to Item No. 37, Councillor Rogers announced that the Panel would be meeting informally on 30th January 2013 to discuss the Council's Medium Term Plan and Budget and that all Members were welcome to attend.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 8th November and 6th December 2012 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor D Harty presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 13th November and 11th December 2012.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 13th November and 11th December 2012 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor R J West presented the Reports of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 6th November and 4th December 2012.

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In connection with Item No. 32 and in response to a question from Councillor P J Downes regarding the quality of advice services to be provided in Huntingdonshire and the need to closely monitor the performance of the new provider at a time of significant welfare reform, Councillor West assured the questioner that he was confident that the preferred bidder, Rural Cambs CAB, selected by Executive Councillors, was sufficiently competent to provide a successful replacement service which would ensure that the needs of the District were met initially during the interim period ending March 31st 2013 and thereafter for three years to commence in April 2013.

The Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson added that further details on the interim service to be provided by Rural CAB would be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) in January and that the service would start to operate on 3rd January.

On the same subject and in response to a question from Councillor K J Churchill, Councillor West explained that, together with the Chairman of the Panel, he had received an explanation on the process adopted to determine applications received under the new voluntary sector funding arrangements and was satisfied with the way in which the decision had been taken.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 6th November and 4th December 2012 be received and

adopted.

(e) **Development Management Panel**

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meeting of the Development Management Panel held on 19th November 2012.

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Councillor Dew thanked those Officers who had supported the meeting of the Panel held on 17th December 2012 which had concluded close to midnight.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Development Management Panel held on 19th November 2012 be received and adopted.

(f) **Employment Panel**

Councillor S Cawley presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 28th November 2012.

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In connection with Item No.18, Councillor Cawley invited the Council to endorse the sentiments of the Panel with regard to the five 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 28th November 2012 be received and adopted.

(g) **Standards Committee**

Councillor A Hansard presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 6th December 2012.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 6th December 2012 be received and adopted.

(h) **Corporate Governance Panel**

Councillor E R Butler presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 12th December 2012.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 12th December 2012 be received and adopted.

57. 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 K J Churchill to the Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe

The Executive Councillor acknowledged the appreciation expressed by the questioner for the manner in which the Operations Division had responded to the problem and given advice on the issue of frozen waste in the green recycling bins which had made them difficult to empty. The Executive Councillor was made aware of similar incidents in Brampton and undertook to establish whether these also had been dealt with in a satisfactory way.

Question from Councillor M F Shellens to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to a question regarding District Council membership of the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Panel, the Executive Leader reported that he had been appointed by the Cabinet as the District Council's representative on the Panel and that the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) would act as a substitute in the event that he was unable to attend meetings.

Question from Councillor D A Giles to the Deputy Executive Leader and Executive Councillor for Strategic Planning and Housing, Councillor N J Guyatt

In response to a question regarding the impact on footfall in town centres of proposed increases to charges for car parking and the suggestion that these were likely to encourage shoppers to visit out of town supermarkets more so than shop in town, the Executive Councillor reported that car parking issues could be a subject for

debate at a future meeting, that Members had the opportunity to respond to recent consultation on proposed changes and that it was the intention of the proposals to encourage visitors to remain in town to shop and frequent coffee/food outlets to add vibrancy and vitality to town centres.

Question from Councillor R Harrison to the Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe

In response to a question regarding the difficulty experienced by the Council's refuse vehicles in accessing un-adopted roads on the Loves Farm development in St. Neots, Councillor Tysoe informed the questioner that the Operations Division recently had purchased seven new smaller vehicles which were able to access the development and thus overcome the problems to which the questioner had referred.

Question from Councillor C R Hyams to the Executive Councillor for Healthy and Active Communities, Councillor T D Sanderson

In response to a question regarding the possibility of broadcasting the local community radio station in the District Council's One Leisure Centres and specifically, the gym, swimming pool and changing rooms given the opportunities this may offer to promote local businesses, the Executive Councillor undertook to look into this option and respond directly to the questioner.

Question from Councillor R J West to the Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe

In response to a question regarding the opportunities that might exist to increase revenue from the collection of trade waste, Councillor Tysoe explained that the Council currently collected some trade waste but because the market locally was relatively small and already covered by the private sector it would not currently be cost-effective for the District Council to take on this function. However, the opportunity to introduce a County Wide Scheme was under investigation and this could make the service more viable.

58. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

that the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contained 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 for disposal of property.

59. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEE

Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

In connection with Item No. 32 and in response to questions from Councillors S Greenall and P J Downes, the Executive Councillor for Resources, Councillor J A Gray confirmed that negotiations for the disposal of land on St. Mary's Street in Huntingdon were still in

progress but he was hopeful that there was potential to work with a Housing Association to secure the provision of a specialist accommodation scheme on the site.

The meeting ended at 9.20pm.

Chairman