

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, 30 April 2014.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs B E Boddington – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, S Akthar,
M G Baker, I C Bates, G J Bull, E R Butler,
R C Carter, S Cawley, B S Chapman,
K J Churchill, S J Criswell, I J Curtis,
J W Davies, D B Dew, Mrs L A Duffy,
R S Farrer, R Fuller, D A Giles, J A Gray,
S Greenall, A Hansard, R Harrison,
R B Howe, C R Hyams, Mrs P A Jordan,
P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic,
S M Van De Kerkhove, A J Mackender-
Lawrence, P G Mitchell, J P Morris,
M C Oliver, P D Reeve, Mrs D C Reynolds,
T V Rogers, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens,
R G Tuplin, D M Tysoe, P K Ursell, R J West
and A H Williams.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors K M Baker, Mrs M Banerjee, P L E Bucknell, W T Clough, N J Guyatt, G J Harlock, D Harty and Mrs P J Longford.

PRAYER

Mrs E. Levitt, the Council's Chaplain opened the meeting with prayer.

74. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Recent Bereavements

The Chairman reported, with regret, the recent deaths of Councillor J W G Pethard, former Councillor R W J Eaton and Mr T Calcott, a caretaker at the District Council who was well known to many Members. Having paid tribute to Councillor Pethard for the contribution he had made to the Council, to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel and to his community as Ward Councillor for Warboys & Bury the Council stood in silence for a few moments in memory of their former colleagues.

(b) Chairman's Events

The Chairman described the series of events that she had attended on the Council's behalf since the last meeting. Although many in number, the Chairman drew particular attention to those which would have long lasting significance in the District and which largely had been achieved in partnership with other agencies and the private sector. In this connection, Councillor Mrs Boddington referred to the official opening of the Flood Alleviation Scheme in Godmanchester and the multi storey car park and new town centre link road

in Huntingdon. The Chairman also was pleased to have been presented with a Badge of Recognition for Distinguished Services to St John's Ambulance by Commander Ivan Palmer, MBE.

(c) **Award**

Members requested that their congratulations be conveyed to the Council's Fraud Team for their success in receiving 'The Innovation Award' sponsored by LOCTA Search and presented under the 'fighting fraud awards scheme'.

(d) **Council Membership**

The Chairman referred to the impending retirement of Councillors W T Clough, N J Guyatt, C R Hyams, T V Rogers and A H Williams all of whom had indicated that they were not seeking re-election to the District Council in May 2014. Particular tribute was paid to the contributions made to the Council by Councillors W T Clough and T V Rogers, the latter in his former role of Executive Councillor for Finance and Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well Being). The Council recorded their thanks to all Members for their services during their respective periods of office and extended their best wishes to them and their families for the future.

75. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 26th February 2014 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

76. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No interests were declared by the Members present.

77. COUNCIL DEBATE - OUR ROLE IN SUPPORTING THE PROSPERITY AND VITALITY OF THE MARKET TOWNS?

The Chairman reminded Members of the decision by the Council to suspend Council Procedure Rule 11 (Rules of Debate) to enable the 'headline debate' 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 under Minute No. 77 during which time the common law rules of debate be observed by Members and applied by the Chairman.

Councillor T D Sanderson, Executive Councillor for Strategic Economic Development and Legal introduced the debate by referring to the supporting information that had been circulated to Members and by describing how towns in Huntingdonshire were performing in comparison to those elsewhere. Councillor Sanderson drew attention to the various projects which either had been recently completed or were on-going in town centres due principally to private sector investment. Despite a positive picture, Councillor Sanderson

highlighted issues which still required to be addressed, the various mechanisms that enabled the Council to promote and encourage the vitality of the town centres and the role of individual Councillors in supporting their town centres. The full text of Councillor Sanderson's address is appended in the Minute Book.

Councillor R Harrison opened the debate by describing the restaurant quarter around the Market Square which had contributed to the new vibrancy of St Neots town centre and positively improved the town's night time economy. He was disappointed, however, that the "Old Falcon" Hotel on the Market Square remained an "eyesore". Councillor Sanderson reported that he was aware that enforcement action was being taken against the owners of the Hotel and was hopeful of an improvement in the appearance of the building in the short term.

Turning to Huntingdon Town Centre, Councillor M G Baker reported that he was aware of the negative perception of the town on social media influenced by high car parking charges and the reduction in size and offer of the twice weekly market. He contended that the District Council could contribute more to the vitality of the town by, for instance, extending free car parking after 3 pm and ensuring that the Cromwell Museum remained opened to visitors.

In terms of car parking, Councillor Sanderson pointed out that fees and charges were an important component of a balanced budget. He also was of the opinion that free car parking would not necessarily lead to an increase in footfall in town centres. Councillor Sanderson reported that support for the Cromwell Museum had been provided by the Town Council and confirmed that the District Council continued to have a good working relationship with Churchmanor Estates who had contributed to much of the new development in the town.

Returning to St Neots, Councillor S M Van de Kerkhove drew the Council's attention to the recent decision by the Development Management Panel to give planning consent for a key/shoe repair kiosk in the Tesco car park at Barford Road, Eynesbury which, in his opinion, could lead to difficulties for three established businesses in the town centre. Councillor Van de Kerkhove also contended that the town had been "swamped" by new development without there being sufficient infrastructure in place which had contributed to severe traffic congestion in the town.

Whilst wishing to see all town centres thrive, Councillor Sanderson had no knowledge of the planning application to which the Councillor had referred so undertook to investigate the reasons why it had been supported by the Development Management Panel. The Executive Councillor also indicated his willingness to discuss with Councillor Van de Kerkhove, ways to generate and encourage the interests of the private sector in investing in the town.

Referring to the new Sainsburys development in Huntingdon and the intention of the store to vacate its existing premises, Councillor M F Shellens requested some indication as to which retailers might take their place in the town centre as a way to generate some positive news stories. Councillor Shellens also called for a restriction on out-of-town developments to avoid losing vibrancy in town centres. Other than the expectation that Waitrose would relocate to Chequers Court, Councillor Sanderson was unable to announce which retailers might move into Huntingdon but he was hopeful of good and positive

announcements soon. In terms of the proposed new Morrisons store in St Ives, Councillor Sanderson did not anticipate that this would impact upon the vibrancy of that town centre.

Councillor B S Chapman drew the Council's attention to the contribution it had made to the opportunity to open a new cinema in St Neots by allocating land for leisure and by generating private sector and partner interests in the town. He also mentioned recent improvements by the District Council in One Leisure which together with other partner contributions totalled an investment of £5m in the town. Although well placed in terms of its farmer and continental markets, Councillor Chapman considered that there were further opportunities to develop the potential of markets across the District.

Members were reminded of the content of a recent article in the Hunts Post which had indicated the Executive Leader's support for tourism in Huntingdonshire and in this context Councillor S Greenall mentioned the Cromwell Museum and Wilkinsons Gate in Huntingdon town centre. Councillor Greenall suggested that the Council should aspire to create social hubs rather than just concentrate on attracting new shopping outlets. The evolution of the restaurant quarter in St Neots was excellent in this respect. Councillor Sanderson reminded the Council that it had not been able to influence the decision on the erection of the "gate" and that online shopping had inevitably had a detrimental impact on High Streets. Councillor C R Hyams reminded the Council of the increase in visitors and trade generated by the guided bus in St Ives and questioned whether these benefits might assist Huntingdon if the guided track was further extended to the town. In terms of night time economy, Councillor Hyams was of the view that Huntingdon fell short in this respect. In reply, Councillor Sanderson was able to announce that the former "Level Two" nightclub might re-open in the near future. Notwithstanding the outcome of these discussions, however, Councillor Sanderson recognised that it was difficult for Huntingdon to compete with Cambridge and Peterborough in terms of evening entertainment although he was aware that the offer in St Ives appeared to be better in this respect.

On a related subject, Councillor P G Mitchell suggested that whilst there were opportunities to attract funding from development for youth and community facilities in rural areas, it proved to be more difficult to ensure sufficient funds were available for continuing maintenance. Councillor Sanderson indicated that he would give the matter some consideration.

Councillor P D Reeve drew the Council's attention to the level of investment by the Town Council in Ramsey which had resulted in successful Christmas lights, youth and market events. He invited the Executive Councillor to visit the town to view the projects which were underway and being supported but spoke of his frustration at the level of business rates which, in his view, were damaging to small businesses and the reluctance on the part of the District Council to make available land in their ownership for car parking to the rear of the doctor's surgery which might encourage greater numbers of visitors and shoppers to the town. Councillor Reeve welcomed the suggestion of a meeting with the Executive Councillor to address a series of issues which he was keen to discuss. In terms of the land ownership matter, Councillor J A Gray, Executive Councillor for Resources, urged Councillor Reeve to contact him to enable the potential use of the land to which he referred to be considered.

In welcoming the cinema development at St Neots, Councillor D A Giles urged Members to move away from the traditional view of shopping and whilst accepting the increasing preference for shopping online, remained of the view that there still was a place for a variety of shops in the town. Councillor Giles also drew attention to the disparity in parking charges between St Neots and Huntingdon, the length of time it appeared to take to address deteriorating buildings in the Market Square and need to discourage car drivers from accessing car parks via the town centre. Councillor R S Farrer added that the proximity of St Neots to Bedford had had an impact on the extent to which the town centre might develop adding that the planning process certainly had a part to play in this respect.

Councillor Mrs D C Reynolds concurred with the views of Councillor Hyams in respect of the impact of the guided bus on the town but pointed out that this had also raised other issues by offering free car parking close to the town centre and by causing congestion on Harrison Way. Councillor Mrs Reynolds urged the Executive Councillor to consider enforcement action against the owners of the Robin Hood Public House which also appeared to have been abandoned.

On a similar theme to Councillor Greenall, Councillor J P Morris considered that town centres should be viewed as social hubs and be made more attractive to young people by varying car parking charges at certain times and by providing good quality and clean public conveniences. He also pointed out that "living over the shop" housing schemes encouraged residential use of town centres and helped to prevent them from emptying after shops had closed.

On a related subject, Councillor T V Rogers reminded the Council that fifty per cent of the population of the District lived in a rural environment and that it was vital to improve rural transport to assist visitors and shoppers to access town centres. At this juncture, Councillor D M Tysoe advised Members of the extent of the support lent to transport schemes by the District such as "dial a ride" which assisted those more elderly and vulnerable residents. Councillor Sanderson also undertook to respond to Councillor I C Bates on whether any research was underway to identify those village shops/post offices which were crucial to life in rural villages such that initiatives might also be developed to seek to protect and support the vitality of village and community life.

In general terms, Councillor Harrison urged the Council to recognise the good quality of life in Huntingdonshire and the reasons why residents might have chosen to live in the District's towns despite the absence of facilities found in cities. Whilst he acknowledged that the Council and agencies should continue to work in partnership to improve the towns, he called on Members to support the achievements of the District Council in improving the towns and to acknowledge that they lived in an excellent place.

Councillor R B Howe paid tribute to the role of Ramsey in terms of its importance to neighbouring villages and the fact that it was respectable, well managed and clean. He contended that it was Members' responsibility to ensure that the town continued to thrive and receive support through the infrastructure under the District Council's control. Councillor Howe offered to assist the Town Council in developing a strategic plan to continue the work to revitalise the

town.

The Council was reminded by the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, that it remained a District Council priority to provide pivotal support for the local economy and to maintain the vitality of towns, such as St Ives, as the hub of rural communities. However, it was equally important to meet the needs of rural villages by developing links to the towns and using these means to increase footfall. He urged Members to support the campaign to attract visitors to Huntingdonshire and think positively about what the towns could offer. Whilst the planning process would inevitably influence the progress of some issues, he was confident that by working with partners, local groups and other local councils, the District could develop master plans for all its town which could really make a difference to their future.

The Chairman thanked all those who had contributed to the discussion and those visitors in the public gallery who had attended.

78. CORPORATE PLAN AND PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK

In conjunction with a recommendation of the Cabinet, Minute No 80a refers, the Executive Leader introduced a report by the Interim Corporate Team Leader (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached the proposed Corporate Plan and Performance Management Framework for the period 2014-16.

Members understood that the Corporate Plan contained the Council's vision and priorities for the next two years whereas the Performance Management Framework would ensure that the organisation remained focussed in setting, delivering and monitoring its priorities and taking action when necessary where issues had been identified that require to be addressed. The Framework identified the role and responsibilities of elected Members as well as Officers in this respect. The outcome of further work on key actions for 2014/15 and proposed corporate health indicators would be presented to Members in due course.

Whilst content with the concept, Councillor M F Shellens indicated that he was reluctant to support the recommendation in the absence of clear objectives and realistic output targets. It also was his view that the Plan undertook to deliver factors that, in some cases, were beyond the control of the District Council. Councillor Shellens further commented that the expectations it placed on staff were unreasonable given the decision to release experienced senior managers. He doubted the capacity of remaining Officers to deliver whatever objectives might be set during the next stage of the process.

In expressing his support of the overall priorities, Councillor K J Churchill pointed out that it represented a Framework for the future and he would look forward to further discussion on the detailed matters that remained outstanding. Similar support for the process also was expressed by Councillor Mrs L M Duffy.

Councillor Gray welcomed the support of Members of the UKIP Group accepting that the Corporate Plan and Framework required further work. Councillor Gray welcomed Members involvement in the next stage of the process in challenging the detail of the documents and

their scrutiny when establishing targets such that they become robust and strong.

Having noted support from Councillor P G Mitchell for the priorities listed in the proposed Corporate Plan, the Council

RESOLVED

that the Corporate Plan 2014-16 and the Performance Management Framework (April 2014) be adopted.

79. SENIOR OFFICER STRUCTURE

In accordance with Article 12 of the Constitution, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite presented, on behalf of the Head of Paid Services, a report describing the new management structure of the District Council and the posts through which services would be discharged.

Having confirmed that the external recruitment process would not exclude internal candidates, it was moved, seconded and

RESOLVED

that the District Council's Constitution be varied accordingly.

80. 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 20th March and 10th April 2014.

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In connection with Item No. 47, it was noted that the recommendations had been considered previously under Minute No. 78.

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In connection with Item No 48, the Executive Leader reported that this item was now subject to call in.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 20th March and 10th April 2014 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 6th March and 3rd April 2014.

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In connection with Item No 35 and in response to a question from Councillor K J Churchill, Councillor Rogers reported that the Business Plan to be prepared by the Community Group managing the Loves Farm Centre was still in preparation.

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In connection with Item No 41, Councillor I J Curtis advised the Council that the UKIP Group was currently reviewing the 'Facing the Future' documents and would be in a position to respond by the end of May.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Reports of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 6th March and 3rd April 2014 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor G J Bull presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 11th March and 8th April 2014.

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In connection with Item No 31, Councillor Bull reported that the visit to the Waterbeach Waste Management Plant would not take place on 9th May as originally intended and would be rearranged for an alternative date in the future.

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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 11th March and 8th April 2014 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 4th March and 1st April 2014.

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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 4th March and 1st April 2014 be received and adopted.

(e) Development Management Panel

Councillor D B Dew presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 24th February, 17th March and 7th April 2014.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 24th February, 17th March and 7th April 2014 be received and adopted.

(f) Standards Committee

Councillor A Hansard presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 6th March 2014 .

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No 13 was declared to be CARRIED.

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Upon being put to the vote, the recommendation contained in Item No 14 was declared to be CARRIED.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 6th March 2014 be received and adopted.

(g) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor E R Butler presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 26th March 2014.

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In connection with Item No 37 and recommendation (f) (ii), Councillor Butler acknowledged a request from Councillor K J Churchill that Members should be invited, in future, to vote separately on each recommendation relating to the final

budget and MTP.

Whereupon, on being put to the vote, the recommendations contained in Item No. 37 were declared to be CARRIED.

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In connection with Item No. 38 and after contributions during discussion from Councillors M G Baker, K J Churchill, R S Farrer, D A Giles, C R Hyams, T V Rogers, M F Shellens and S M Van de Kerkhove regarding the style, content and tone of language used in the proposed Employee Handbook and the perceived lack of value placed on the contribution of employees to the organisation, the Council

RESOLVED

that the Employee Handbook be referred back to the Panel for further consideration.

On the same subject, Councillor Butler undertook to advise Councillor J A Gray of the feedback received from the Staff Council on the draft handbook.

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In connection with Item No. 40 and in response to a question from Councillor S Greenall, Councillor Butler undertook to advise the questioner, in writing, of the meaning of the term "triviality threshold" and the reasons why this should be set at £90k.

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Whereupon, it was further

RESOLVED

that, subject to the foregoing paragraphs, the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 26th March 2014 be received and adopted.

81. ORAL QUESTIONS

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

Question from Councillor P D Reeve to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

In response to the questioner and whilst he could not predict the outcome of any future local government review, Councillor Ablewhite was of the opinion that the current three tier arrangement comprising the County, District and Parish authorities worked well in Cambridgeshire.

Question from Councillor S Greenall to the Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe

In response to a question regarding the potential for review of the introduction of a charge for the collection of a second green bin after twelve months of operation, Councillor Tysoe considered that such a review was not necessary as the issue had not been raised with him during election canvassing and he was also aware that, due to its success, Cambridge City Council also had decided to implement a similar scheme.

Question from Councillor J P Morris to the Executive Councillor for Resources, Councillor J A Gray

Having regard to the proposal to raise capital receipts from the disposal of potential development sites included as an option in the "facing the future" exercise and the need for new homes in the District, the Executive Councillor was requested to comment the extent to which these sites could be used to develop affordable housing or shared ownership schemes. In response, the Executive Councillor re-affirmed that it was the Council's desire to maximise capital receipts and to use the funds made available, if appropriate, to meet the demand for affordable housing. It would also be the intention to invest in property to provide bed and breakfast accommodation, reduce the budget spent on expensive bed and breakfast provision and thus provide for those in vulnerable and difficult situations. Councillor Morris added that he would like to be involved in discussions which would help to move these proposals forward in a positive way.

Question from Councillor P Kadeware to the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite

Although difficult to avoid some clashes, Councillor Ablewhite assured the questioner that every effort was made to ensure that meetings of the District Council did not coincide with those programmed by Town and Parish Councils in order to alleviate the impact on dual-hatted Councillors and to help those members of the public who wished to attend Council meetings.

Question from Councillor P Kadeware to the Executive Councillor for the Environment, Councillor D M Tysoe

In terms of the management of trees in public spaces, Councillor Tysoe undertook to discuss the District Council's policy in this respect with the questioner after the meeting.

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

Regarding the proposed changes to the Senior Management structure of the District Council, Councillor Ablewhite advised Members that the recruitment exercise presented an opportunity to introduce new and different experiences to the organisation the impact of which, in terms of employee retention and morale would continue to be monitored on a quarterly basis by the Employment Panel.

Question from Councillor K J Churchill to the Executive Councillor for Resources, Councillor J A Gray

Regarding the District Council's decision not to allocate grants to Town and Parish Councils to mitigate the impact of any increase in Council Tax, Councillor Gray emphasized that whilst he respected the views of NALC and the work of Town and Parish Councils, this decision had been taken formally at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, Cabinet and Council as part of the Council's final budget process.

82. VARIATION TO THE MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND PANELS, ETC

Having regard to the membership of the Senior Officers' Panel, it was

RESOLVED

- (a) that Councillor J D Ablewhite be appointed to replace Councillor N J Guyatt;
- (b) that Councillor M G Baker be appointed to replace Councillor W T Clough for meetings of the Panel to be held on 14th and 16th May 2014; and
- (c) that Councillor C R Hyams be appointed to replace Councillor W T Clough for meetings of the Panel to be held on 19th, 20th and 21st May 2014.

The meeting ended at 10.03 pm

Chairman