

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Civic Suite 0.1A, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon, PE29 3TN on Thursday, 22 October 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor J D Ablewhite – Chairman.

Councillors R B Howe, R C Carter, S Cawley,
D B Dew, R Harrison, J A Gray and
D M Tysoe.

39. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 17th September 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

40. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations of disclosable pecuniary or other interests received at the meeting.

41. REPLACEMENT FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) that was presented in his absence by the Corporate Director (Services) regarding the joint procurement and implementation of a new Financial Management System (FMS) in partnership with the Councils strategic partners, Cambridge City Council (CCC) and South Cambridgeshire District Council (SCDC).

It was reported to the Cabinet that the Councils current FMS had been in operation for a number of years with little improvement or modifications to the system. Although the system continued to meet basic accounting requirements a new system would provide better financial reporting, improved financial management and support the sharing of financial resources.

Both CCC and SCDC had recently gained approval from their Members for the joint procurement of a new FMS and it was considered that there were distinct advantages for the Council to enter into a joint procurement exercise.

Until the formal procurement had concluded the exact costs of a new FMS were unknown and it was noted that the financial figures contained within the Officer's report were indicative figures. CCC had undertaken some preliminary soft market testing earlier in 2015 and the initial costing exercise had indicated a range of possible costs, which ultimately depended upon the system eventually procured. As both CCC and SCDC were statutory landlords, and the service was financially resource intensive, it was assumed that the Councils implementation and subscription costs would be less as Huntingdonshire District Council did not operate a Housing Revenue Account.

The Cabinet agreed that although the matter had progressed quicker than expected it was an opportune time to enter into a joint procurement exercise with CCC and SCDC and therefore the Cabinet supported the recommendations. Although all three Councils did not need to operate the same FMS system it was important that each system provided the same standard of information and the main issue was that the Council's current FMS was no longer fit for purpose. The new system needed to be versatile and meet the progressing demands of the commercial market. It was suggested that savings would be generated from areas identified via the new FMS rather than from the IT system itself.

In response to questions the Cabinet were assured that the replacement FMS would meet the required International Financial Reporting Standards. The savings would be generated from the licence fee of the current FMS and other efficiency savings that the replacement system would deliver. It was confirmed that financing the replacement FMS would be obtained from the Revenue side of the Special Earmarked Reserve budget and that there were no Minimum Revenue Provision implications as the Council was not borrowing any money. Whereupon it was,

RESOLVED

That the Cabinet:

- i. Agreed the involvement of the Council in the procurement and implementation of a new Financial Management System in partnership with its strategic partners, Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- ii. Approved the release of up to £258,667 to finance the £192,000 capital acquisition and implementation costs and £66,667 first year revenue costs from the Special Earmarked Reserve.
- iii. Delegated final approval, subject to a 10% contingency, to the Head of Resources in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Resources for the release of the reserve to finance the project.

42. URGENT REPAIRS TO THE OCTAGON BUILDING, ST IVES

The Cabinet received a report (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the funding of repairs to the Octagon Building in St Ives from the Strategic Assessment of Estates and Estates Management Surveyor which was presented in their absence by the Executive Councillor for Resources.

The Octagon building was owned by the Council and located within the Cattle Market Car Park in St Ives. The building was not listed but did have protection against demolition by being in the Conservation Area.

The condition of the building condition was such that repairs were now required to ensure that the structure was made safe, was able to be secured and to improve the use of the internal space.

It was noted that the repairs identified via the visible condition survey were estimated at £40,629. However, as the estimate did not include a contingent for other works that might be necessary a budget of £50,000 was considered more appropriate.

It was further noted that the requested £50,000 could be accommodated from underspend in the 2015/16 capital programme budget.

The Cabinet were reminded of the two representations that they had received prior to the meeting from the two Local Ward Members, Councillors J Davies and Mrs A Dickinson, who both supported the recommendation contained within the Officer's report.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor R Fuller as a Ward Member for St Ives, addressed the Cabinet. Councillor R Fuller concurred with the representations from the two Local Ward Members that emphasised the heritage and importance of the building. Although the building was not listed it had been in existence for a long time and was of historical importance. The building was showing signs of neglect and was the first building observed by people arriving at the bus station. The building was of community value and once the repairs had been undertaken had potential for community use. In concluding Cllr Fuller urged the Cabinet to support the recommendation.

It was noted that the Officer's report was factually incorrect as it stated that the Octagon building and the old railings was the only evidence left of the former usage. However, there was other evidence still in existence.

The Council had undertaken a significant amount of work on the building a number of years ago and since there had been little maintenance. Therefore if the funding of the repairs was approved it was important that the building was maintained in the future.

In discussing the potential uses of the building it was felt that the building was more appropriate to community use than commercial and community groups were encouraged to approach the Council.

Whilst considering the requested funding it was noted that there would be on-going implications on the budget for the maintenance of the building particularly as an occupier for the building would not be immediate. The Cabinet were assured that the estates budget was robust enough to fund the maintenance of the building and once the building was in a good condition depending on its future use some of the costs could potentially be recouped.

The Cabinet hoped that the Local District Ward Members would engage with the Local Town Councillors regarding potential future uses of the building.

In concluding the Cabinet agreed that the capital allocation to repair and preserve the building would demonstrate that the Council was committed to the longevity of the building and subsequently the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

To approve the capital allocation of £50,000 to repair and preserve the Octagon building in St Ives.

43. PRESENTATION ON EMPLOYEE OPINION SURVEY RESULTS 2015

By means of a presentation by the Corporate Team Manager the Cabinet were informed of the results of the Employee Opinion Survey 2015.

For comparison purposes and to measure progress, the questions contained in the Survey were largely based on those questions previously asked in 2014. The Council was committed to asking the same questions again on an annual basis to see whether the actions introduced were making a difference.

There had been an increased response rate to the 2015 survey and the response rate of 55% was considered to be good for a local authority. 82% of responses indicated which of the seven service areas they worked in, compared to 64% last year, which demonstrated that more people felt able to share the details of where they worked.

The Cabinet were acquainted with the broad findings under each of the subject areas in the questionnaire. While there was an overall improvement in nearly all results since the 2014 Survey, with many results appearing to show that the actions taken in response to last year's survey were making a difference, more action was required to make the Council a better place to work.

In response to questions the Cabinet were informed that although the Operations Team had the lowest response rate to the Survey it was only by 1% compared to the next lowest responding service area, and that the Corporate Management Team were most disappointed with the results in relation to questions on communication and harassment and bullying.

The Cabinet agreed that the results of the Survey were positive and moving in the right direction, which was expected given the significant changes that had occurred last year and the new Senior Management Team that were now in place. However, there was still room for improvement which was going to be difficult given the financial pressures that the Council continued to experience. The Cabinet anticipated that the results of the Survey next year would improve further.

44. SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

RESOLVED

The report of the Safety Advisory Group meeting held on 9th September 2015 was received and noted.

Chairman