

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the COUNCIL held in Civic Suite, Pathfinder House, St Mary's Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Wednesday, 30 September 2015.

PRESENT: Councillor P L E Bucknell – Chairman.

Councillors J D Ablewhite, T D Alban, K M Baker, I C Bates, Mrs B E Boddington, D Brown, G J Bull, S Cawley, B S Chapman, K J Churchill, Mrs S Conboy, S J Criswell, Mrs A D Curtis, J W Davies, D B Dew, Mrs A Dickinson, R S Farrer, M Francis, R Fuller, I D Gardener, L George, D A Giles, A Hansard, R Harrison, D Harty, T Hayward, R B Howe, B Hyland, P Kadewere, Ms L Kadic, Mrs R E Mathews, D J Mead, J P Morris, M C Oliver, J M Palmer, P D Reeve, T D Sanderson, M F Shellens, D M Tysoe, R J West and J E White.

APOLOGIES: Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors E R Butler, R C Carter, Mrs L A Duffy, J A Gray, A J Hardy, Mrs P A Jordan, S M Van De Kerkhove, Mrs D C Reynolds, R G Tuplin and K D Wainwright.

25. PRAYER

The Reverend A Milton, Vicar of All Saints and St. Mary's, Huntingdon, opened the meeting with prayer.

26. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman presented to the Council an account of the activities both he and the Vice-Chairman Councillor R J West had attended since the last meeting. These had included his attendance at the Queen's Award for Anglian Water with the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, attendance at the Godmanchester Civic Service, Paxton Pits opening of the new bird hide and the opening of homes on California Road, Huntingdon. Members attention was particularly drawn to attendance at the Battle of Britain events and forthcoming events in relation to the festival of remembrance including a wreath laying in Huntingdon on 8th November 2015 and raising of the flag at Pathfinder House at 11.00am on 11th November 2015. The Chairman concluded by reminding Members of his forthcoming Carol Service on 7th December 2015 led by the Reverend A Milton and the Holocaust Day of Remembrance on 27th January 2016.

27. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 29th July 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

28. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

No declarations were received.

29. COUNCIL DEBATE

The Chairman welcomed Mr A Wood, Chief Constable of Cambridgeshire Constabulary to the meeting, accompanied by Ms L Hunt, Chief Inspector of Cambridgeshire Constabulary who had been invited to address the Council.

Mr Wood thanks Members for the invite and indicated that this had been the first Council meeting he had been invited to speak at since his appointment as Chief Constable. He explained that he would be outlining his vision for Cambridgeshire Constabulary and how he would be moving it forward and Ms Hunt would further expand on the specific local policing issues.

In outlining his vision for policing, Mr Wood explained that he would be building upon the vision of creating a safer Cambridgeshire, through the core values of the police officers and the positions they held in the community. He indicated that one of the primary purposes of the police was to safeguard the vulnerable in our communities, which had included the prevalence of domestic burglaries. It had been reported in the press that the police had not been able to attend all burglaries, but Mr Wood had stressed that this had not be the case in Cambridgeshire and they had endeavoured to attend all reported cases and investigate the circumstances.

In addressing the subject of criminality, Mr Wood outlined to Members the work that had been undertaken of preventing crime though working with partners, including Councils and other agencies. This had been a particular challenge with decreasing budgets and whilst enabling value for money and continuing to reassure the public.

The Council had been informed of the relationship with Sir G Bright, Police and Crime Commissioner, whose commitment had been to maintain independence whilst working closely with the police to deliver the best possible service for the Community on Cambridgeshire. The Police and Crime Commissioner had been elected democratically to reflect the views of the constituents of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.

In referring to the ongoing budgetary constraints that had been challenging all public sector organisations, Mr Wood explained that the Constabulary had identified a £9m budget shortfall in the ensuing financial year and work was ongoing to deliver efficiencies through collaborative work with neighbouring forces, including Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Specifically, work had been undertaken on combining the HR and ICT functions with these forces, coming to fruition the following year and would contribute to addressing the budgetary deficit.

Over the term of the current Parliament, budgetary challenges would continue with £24m taken from the Constabulary's budget and Mr Wood indicated his uncertainty of the budget forecast to 2019/20. He explained that the Home Office had suggested that front line services would be critically maintained and an effective front line service would be delivered in Cambridgeshire, but it had not been possible to provide reassurance that the number of front line constables would exist.

Mr Wood outlined the importance of local communities with local teams, particularly with the prevalence of rural crime and he recognised that the fear of rural crime can often be forgotten. The Constabulary had developed a strong Strategy through the deployment of officers to tackle these issues. Mr Wood provided some headline statistics that had been prepared by the National Rural Crime Network and had reported that 39% of the rural population had confidence in the police to tackle rural crime. In addressing these issues, Mr Wood explained that he was keen to explore the development of rural special constables to work with district communities.

Ms Hunt continued the debate focussing on the staffing in Huntingdonshire and outlined the Teams involved and work with Councillors on tackling community safety involving effective communication. Moving forward, Ms Hunt indicated her desire to undertake more work with Councillors and developing work with communities through Speed Watch and Neighbourhood Watch.

Councillor D M Tysoe indicated his interest with relation to engagement with Members and Mr Wood explained that his attendance at the Council meeting had commenced these discussions and also reported that he would like to attend, with Ms Hunt, on a regular basis to update Members and utilise the opportunity to listen to concerns and identify any issues.

In response to a question from Councillor B S Chapman on responses to incidents, specifically in relation to The Priory, St Neots, Ms Hunt explained that they had been working closely with the premises to address the issues.

In relation to a question from Councillor D A Giles regarding the value of CCTV, Mr Wood reported that the presence had made a massive difference to crime and stressed the importance of supporting CCTV in Huntingdonshire and across the county. Ms Hunt also indicated the imminence of streaming CCTV images to front line officers to provide a more effective decision making process.

Councillor T Hayward highlighted problems in his Ward, specifically in relation to Speed Watch and the 20 mph limit and Ms Hunt indicated her support to such schemes through the delivery of warning letters.

Councillor Mrs S J Conboy raised a question in relation to encouraging communities to be more pro-active in utilising 101 and plans for harnessing new technology to assist in reporting. Mr Wood explained that the Constabulary had one of the fastest pick up rates for 101 calls and explained that the use of social media would be

encouraged to reduce the demand on the control room.

In response to a question from Councillor P Kadewere on the anti-social behaviour difficulties he experienced in his ward and his concerns regarding the loss of front line constables, Mr Wood indicated his determination to preserve constables and Police Community Support Officers to deliver local policing within the budgetary constraints.

Councillor T D Sanderson questioned the success on the Public Space Protection Order in existence in Huntingdon Town Centre and Ms Hunt explained that it had been successful through the partnership working with Street Rangers, the Fire Service and other agencies that had policed the area. Unfortunately, a problem still existed with the displacement of previously reported problems to other areas, but was being continually monitored.

In response to a question from Councillor M F Shellens on the fear of crime and measure of response, Ms Hunt explained that they had undertaken a telephone survey on how safe you feel in your community. The results had fed into the development of the Confidence through Communication Action Plan and Mr Wood undertook to improving upon the communication to communities that action had been taken.

Councillor J W Davies shared his concerns regarding the budget reductions and Mr Wood explained that there would be greater use of collaborative working of back office functions to enable front line officers to be maintained.

In concluding the debate, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite shared the views of increased collaborative working and indicated his openness to new ideas within the ongoing constraints of budgetary pressures. Mr Wood thanked Members for the opportunity to address the Council and welcomed a further debate at a future meeting.

30. ELECTORAL BOUNDARY REVIEW

Further to Item No.18 of the meeting of the Council held on 29th July 2015 and in conjunction with a report by the Managing Director (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Managing Director provided an update of the electoral review of Huntingdonshire. The Council were reminded of the background to the review, specifically in relation to the discrepancies that existed in some wards with electoral imbalances. Members noted that a cross-party Working Group had been convened to consider the options in relation to council size and had met on three occasions.

The Working Group had considered the magnitude of growth predicted in the District over the forthcoming years and the fact that the Councillors currently represented more electors than those in comparison authorities. The growth was likely to be greater in this area compared with many other authorities and it was noted that demands on Councillors time was likely to increase as a result.

In considering the options, Councillor P D Reeve indicated his

concern with a potential move to whole Council elections and the Managing Director reminded Members of the parameters that had been established by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England in relation to retaining elections by thirds with a council size being divisible by three.

In noting that the draft submission had been considered by the Standards Committee, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, moved and seconded by Councillor R B Howe and

RESOLVED

that the District Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on a Council size of 52 be approved and the Managing Director, after consultation with the Chairman and Leader, be authorised to make any minor amendments to the submission.

31. EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR PRESENTATIONS

(a) Councillor R B Howe, Executive Councillor for Commercial Activities

Councillor R B Howe, Executive Councillor for Commercial Activities addressed the Council on some of the principal services within the portfolio responsibilities, namely CCTV, the Document Centre, parking services and One Leisure. A copy of Councillor Howe's PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

Councillor Howe updated Members on the shared service arrangement that existed with Cambridge City Council for CCTV and reported that there were 260 cameras in the combined network. As a result £67k of savings had been realised and tranche 3 of the Zero Based Budgeting (ZBB) exercise was underway. He reported that commercial contracts had been renewed with Town and Parish Councils and investigations were underway with a view to expanding the service to external organisations for outdoor events such as the Secret Garden Party. In conjunction with the comments earlier from the Chief Constable, work was also underway to develop an image sharing system with the Police.

Members were acquainted with the level of income that the Document Centre had accrued of £60k compared with £26k in the previous financial year. In addition to this the ZBB process had yielded £91k of efficiencies in the service. A marketing study was underway to engage with neighbouring councils and Councillor Howe outlined the vision of the service to develop a High Security Document Management model operating on a 24/7 basis. Councillor Howe also highlighted the potential for developing a market for small job printing, such as housing associations and estate agents, through the development of website for this purpose.

In terms of the car parking service, Members noted that

income had been £195k above budget with a full year forecast of £350k above budget. Councillor Howe reminded Members of the Council's decision to reject the proposal for Civil Parking Enforcement and reported upon the rationalisation programme for the car parks estate resulting in a capital gain of £650k through their disposal.

Councillor Howe updated the Council on the One Leisure restructuring that had resulted in the appointment of a new Senior Management Team. In terms of the budgetary impact, it was reported that the service was currently profiled to surplus £157k to August 2015 and profiled to forecast a surplus of £350k at the year end. The Council had been informed of the improvement in attendances and increase in admissions and noted the rationalisation programme underway in Ramsey and Sawtry Leisure Centres. In concluding, Councillor Howe reported upon the success of the service in achieving a level of income above expenditure for the first time.

In congratulating the One Leisure Service in its achievement to make profit, Councillor D A Giles sought reassurance from Councillor Howe that car parking charges would not be introduced on Sundays. Councillor Howe confirmed that car parking charges would not be applied on Sundays.

Councillor D M Tysoe and Councillor P D Reeve stressed the community importance of Sawtry and Ramsey Leisure Centres and Councillor Reeve suggested building resilience for these services through the development of community apprenticeships.

In relation to CCTV, Councillor Reeve reported that Ramsey had renewed its contract and questioned that charging level. In response, Councillor Howe explained that the charges would be reviewed but had not been able to provide a timescale.

Councillor K J Churchill raised a question in relation to car parking in areas of high recreational use and Councillor Howe indicated that there were no plans to introduce further parking charges for such car parks but may be reviewed in the future.

In concluding, the Executive Leader, Councillor J D Ablewhite, congratulated the Teams on the achievements that had been highlighted by Councillor Howe and for the work of the Officers and Members involved.

(b) Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Customer Services

Councillor D M Tysoe, Executive Councillor for Customer Services addressed the Council on the Customer Service portfolio, which included the Call Centre, Customer Service Centres, Local Taxation, Housing Benefits and Fraud,

Housing Needs and Resources and IT. A copy of Councillor Tysoe's PowerPoint presentation is appended in the Minute Book.

Councillor Tysoe highlighted measures contained in the Corporate Plan attributable to Customer Service and had indicated that they were all on target. He proceeded to update Members on the new website launch proposal for October 2015 and the shared service arrangement with Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire for the IT service predicted to realise savings of £330k per annum. Members also noted the forthcoming proposal to relocate the Call Centre from its St Ives location to Pathfinder House to enable a reduction in costs for the service. He also envisaged an improved use of IT and support for Members.

In response to a question from Councillor T Hayward on the depth of training of the Call Centre staff, Councillor Tysoe explained the level of competency training involved and invited Councillor Hayward to provide further details outside of the meeting.

Councillor P D Reeve raised a question in relation to the capacity to encourage more partners and agencies to be located at the Council headquarters. In response, Councillor Tysoe indicated that if space were available the concept could be developed in line with the Citizens Advice Bureau and Department of Work and Pensions developing a One Stop Shop arrangement.

(c) Questions to Other Members of the Cabinet

In response to a question from Councillor D A Giles on the date for the referendum on the St Neots Neighbourhood Plan, Councillor D B Dew reported that a date had not been agreed and undertook to find out further information.

Arising from a question from Councillor J E White on an update of the Cambridgeshire Armed Forces Community Covenant Board, whereby Councillor R Harrison explained that he had met with the Department for Communities and Local Government two years ago to raise concerns regarding the Board as not all Councils had Boards in their areas and now all Councils had established Boards. He reported upon his attendance at a meeting with Cambridgeshire County Council that had been instigated to re-focus the Board due to a change in the Armed Forces grants scheme. Difficulties continued to exist with identifying ex-forces or current serving personnel in the District and access to third party data through the Royal British Legion.

Councillor J P Morris raised a question in relation to the action that the District Council would be undertaking to support refugees fleeing from war zones as recently reported in the Hunts Post. In response, Councillor Ablewhite explained that the Council had many challenges in supporting local communities, with a number of families

living in temporary accommodation and balancing this need with other national priorities. He reported that the Local Government Association had been working with the Government, Cambridgeshire County Council, as the lead authority, and other authorities and indicated his support for the crisis and willingness to support refugees on the basis that the Government would provide full funding for five years.

In response to a question from Councillor P D Reeve on the problems that existed with developers not exploiting the potential of their land for housing needs, Councillor D B Dew reported that the problems existed nationally as well as locally and undertook to investigate further and provide and update at a future meeting.

33. REPORTS OF THE CABINET, PANELS AND COMMITTEES

(a) Cabinet

Councillor J D Ablewhite, Executive Leader of the Council and Chairman of the Cabinet presented the Report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 17th September 2015 be received and adopted.

(b) Corporate Governance Panel

Councillor M Francis presented the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 16th September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Corporate Governance Panel held on 16th September 2015 be received and adopted.

(c) Development Management Panel

Councillor Mrs B E Boddington presented the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 17th August and 21st September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meetings of the Development Management Panel held on 17th August and 21st September 2015 be received and adopted.

(d) Employment Panel

Councillor J W Davies presented the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 23rd September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Employment Panel held on 23rd September 2015 be received and adopted.

(e) Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being)

Councillor G J Bull presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 3rd September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) held on 3rd September 2015 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor T D Sanderson presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 8th September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environmental Well-Being) held on 8th September 2015 be received and adopted.

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

Councillor S J Criswell presented the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 1st September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Social Well-Being) held on 1st September 2015 be received and adopted.

(h) Standards Committee

Councillor A Hansard presented the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 10th September 2015.

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Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that the Report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 10th September 2015 be received and adopted.

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

There were no changes to report.

The meeting ended at 9.30pm.

Chairman