

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, 21 January 2016.

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.

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors R Fuller, S Criswell and
T D Sanderson.

69. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 10th December 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

70. MEMBERS' INTERESTS

During Minute No 77 Councillor S Criswell, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers), declared a non-statutory disclosable interest by virtue of his appointment as a Non-Executive Director of Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations in his capacity as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor.

71. HINCHINGBROOKE COUNTRY PARK JOINT GROUP

RESOLVED

that Councillors R C Carter, T F Hayward, T D Sanderson and R J West be appointed to serve on the Hinchingsbrooke Country Park Joint Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

72. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY ADVISORY GROUP

RESOLVED

that Councillors Mrs B E Boddington, P L E Bucknell, E R Butler, Mrs S J Conboy, D B Dew, Mrs L A Duffy and J M Palmer be appointed to serve on the Development Plan Policy Advisory Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

73. SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

RESOLVED

that Councillors Mrs B Boddington, J W Davies, A Hansard, B Hyland and Mrs P A Jordan be appointed to serve on the Safety Advisory Group for the remainder of the Municipal Year.

74. OXMOOR ACTION PLAN FOR OPEN SPACE - TREATMENT OF SECTION 106 MONIES

The Cabinet considered a report by the Interim Head of Service (Operations) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the treatment of Section 106 monies received from the sale of land for housing development at California Road.

At 7.06pm the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) entered the meeting.

The Council had received £1.405m in Section 106 payments from the sale of the Cambridgeshire County Council land at California Road. To seek an agreement with Huntingdon Town Council (HTC) regarding the treatment of Section 106 monies, and to ensure the remaining monies are targeted as clearly identified priorities from the Needs Analysis of Open Space and Play in Huntingdon, the Cabinet approved in principle the way forward to enable the conclusion of the matter with HTC, as detailed in Section 3 of the submitted report.

Having considered the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Finance and Performance), which were circulated subsequent to the dispatch of the Cabinet Agenda, the Cabinet were informed of the timescales in which it was hoped the matter would be concluded.

It was noted that £200k of the remaining balance of Section 106 monies (£482k) would be allocated to the District Council to support the continued employment of a Ranger, as approved as part of the report to the Cabinet in January 2003, and £282k would be allocated to HTC for the ongoing maintenance of Coneygear Park. The reduced sum for maintenance of Coneygear Park was proposed on the basis that £413k of additional resources had been invested in the creation of the park.

In addition to the recommendation as contained within the submitted report, the Cabinet agreed that negotiation with HTC be delegated to the Managing Director in consultation with the Executive Councillors for Operations and Environment and Commercial Activities. The Cabinet subsequently,

RESOLVED

to approve in principle the proposed way forward as detailed in Section 3 of the submitted report, to enable final negotiations with Huntingdon Town Council to reach a settlement to conclude this matter, and that negotiation with Huntingdon Town Council be delegated to the Managing Director in consultation with the Executive Councillors for Operations and Environment and Commercial Activities.

75. STREET CLEANSING - SERVICE SPECIFICATION

By way of a report from the Interim Head of Service (Operations) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet was presented with the Street Cleansing Service Specification.

The Street Cleansing Service Specification had been developed to

better direct the street cleansing activities delivered by the Operations Service, and to make cleansing frequencies and standards more transparent for the residents of the District.

The service had operated outside of the previously adopted service specification and following a full review the proposed Specification had been developed and now included detailed zoning of all areas to be cleansed, as well as response times when there was a fall in the specified standard.

It was explained to the Cabinet that the Street Cleansing Service Specification was part of a suite of documents being devised and had been developed in line with the requirements of the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

Active independent monitoring of the Street Cleansing Service was being introduced (NI 195 auditing) to a prescribed format and the results would be benchmarked nationally. In addition the service availability detail and the cleansing zones would be published on the Council's Website to enable residents to have immediate access to the core information regarding the street cleansing service provided by the Council including maps of the zones.

Once in operation the Cabinet agreed that the residents of the District would receive an increase and more consistent delivery of service. One area that the Cabinet stated required attention was the constant detritus along rural slip roads which it was considered would be improved by a mix of cleansing, awareness and enforcement. It was requested that all Members be provided with information on how to report an incident of someone witnessed disposing of litter from their vehicle.

Having been invited to address the Cabinet, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economy and Growth) stated that the Panel had been satisfied with the report and had accepted that it was important to prioritise the Council's resources regarding the type of graffiti removed. The Panel had discussed the establishment of a Working Group to consider how to increase awareness and enforcement regarding dog fouling and littering and the Panel had suggested a press release should be issued as a deterrent for anyone fined for littering. The Panel were pleased to note that a fall in standard from Grade A – D would receive a response time of one hour. Whereupon the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

to approve the Street Cleansing Service Specification, as attached to the submitted report, and the publishing of core information regarding the service on the Council's website. The future service specification would be subject to review against the results of the NI 195 auditing of the service.

76. OPEN SPACES WATER SAFETY POLICY

The Cabinet received a report by the Interim Head of Service (Operations) (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the Open Spaces Water Safety Policy.

An open water area within public open space could present a danger to users if it was not well managed and the Policy established the direction for the future management of Council owned open water.

The Open Spaces Water Safety Policy had been developed to enable the Council to better ensure the safety of users of public open space and included a proposed programme of site specific risk assessments.

In accordance with best practice the management measures adopted following the site specific risk assessments would include:

- provision of off-site safety information predominantly via the Council's Website;
- when confirmed as required by the site specific risk assessments, provision of onsite signage that detailed the key dangers and safety arrangements;
- site rescue equipment to be provided if confirmed by the site specific risk assessments;
- edge protection, particularly the removal of dense vegetation at the appropriate time of year if confirmed as required by the site specific risk assessments;
- in the design of future new sites that contain open water, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) design guidance would be followed.

It was explained that the Water Safety Policy had been designed and developed based on advice and guidance from the RoSPA 'Safety in Inland Water Sites - Operational Guidelines'. Over the next 12 months RoSPA would train staff to conduct site specific risk assessments resulting in the Council being self-sufficient in the future to create sustainable arrangements for managing open water areas.

Every open water area would be categorised in accordance with the Risk Level Classification contained in Appendix 3 of the submitted report. The categorisation would indicate the appropriate safety measures required.

The Cabinet commended the report and requested that the provision of off-site safety information include the promotion and importance of swimming lessons.

Having been invited to address the Cabinet, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economy and Growth) explained that the Panel fully supported the pump priming of £30,000 for the provision of equipment and signage confirmed as necessary from the site specific risk assessments. The Panel had requested that a balance between safety of the public and the environmental benefit of the biodiversity of water edges be considered during risk assessments. Whereupon the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

to approve the Open Spaces Water Safety Policy, as attached to the submitted report, including the proposed programme of site specific risk assessments to confirm the safety measures to

be implemented on a site by site basis.

77. VOLUNTARY SECTOR GRANT FUNDING 2016/17 TO 2019/2020

By way of a report by the Head of Community (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet received a report on the Council's Voluntary Sector Grant fund. The Council's grant funding agreements for the voluntary sector expired on 31st March 2016 and a report was presented to the Cabinet on how, or if, the Council should continue to grant fund the voluntary sector over another four year term.

Over the last three years the Council had operated a Voluntary Sector Grant fund. In 2015/16, the budget for the grants was £248,700 from which the following organisations were funded: Rural Cambridgeshire Citizens Advice Bureau; Disability Information Services Huntingdonshire; Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations; Care Network; Huntingdon Volunteer Centres; and Huntingdon Shopmobility.

On the principle of needing to secure proper value for money and real community outcomes from the effective use of public funds, and on the basis that the six community organisations currently in receipt of such funds had already been notified of potential changes to the Council's grant support, revised recommendations were proposed, which were supported by the Cabinet.

The Councils current financial objective was by March 2020 to reduce all budgets by 38% and Government guidelines stated that 'voluntary sector organisations in receipt of public finances should not be treated disproportionately to those services directly provided by statutory authorities'. On that basis the Cabinet expressed a preference for Option 2 as detailed in the submitted report, that the Voluntary Sector Grant Fund Budget be reduced equally over the term of the current Medium Term Financial Strategy by 38% by 2019/2020.

Having considered the various options for the future funding of voluntary sector grants as detailed within the submitted report, the Cabinet agreed that funding cease to the Huntingdon Shop Mobility scheme on the basis that it had not met the performance conditions within the existing grant award in not achieving additional matched external funding; and it was not a service that the Council provided across its other major towns. Local businesses could consider offering financial support to the shop mobility service.

The Cabinet agreed that the Council continue to fund the remaining five organisations for the financial year 2016/17 at the same existing grant level subject to confirmation and funding evidence from each organisation of its continued financial/operational viability (including identification of other funding streams which it was dependent upon); and notification of a fundamental review of the Voluntary Sector Grant Funding system during 2016/17.

The Cabinet agreed that the criteria for receiving funding required significant review as the only obligation was to match external funding over two years to guarantee funding in the third year. Organisations in receipt of funding were not required to deliver a report to

demonstrate the public benefit they delivered. The Cabinet were keen for the revised scheme to unite with Council policies and incorporate that funding would cease if defined targets were not achieved. It was also important that other organisations were able to bid for funding. The Cabinet therefore agreed that a District Council led Working Group of appropriate Members and Officers of both the District and County Councils be established to review the Voluntary Sector Grant Funding system, on the principles of:

- a) tapering funding from 2016/17 in line with the District Councils overall Medium Term Financial Strategy and as detailed in Paragraph 3.1.3 Option 2 of the submitted report;
- b) a commissioning and outcomes model with funding focused upon infrastructure organisations, taking due account of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) 'Change for Good' report and in particular Recommendation 14 of that report as expressed at Paragraph 3.2.2 Option B of the submitted report; and
- c) the Working Group to conclude its recommendations direct to the Cabinet no later than end July 2016.

The Cabinet expected funded organisations to undertake an efficiency review of their individual business on a 'Lean' or Zero Based Budgeting concept approach, which the Council could assist with and for which support should be sought from the NAVCA and from the Hunts Forum as a representative of voluntary sector organisations. The Cabinet were mindful that not all voluntary organisations had the expertise to undertake an efficiency review of their individual businesses and therefore the Council would offer assistance where possible, which would provide information as to the value of the service.

It was noted that one option for consideration by the voluntary sector was to create a multi-agency HUB to enable overhead costs to be divided.

Having been invited to address the Cabinet, prior to doing so the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) declared a non-statutory disclosable interest by virtue of his appointment as a Non-Executive Director of Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations in his capacity as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor.

It was explained to the Cabinet that organisations in receipt of Voluntary Sector Grant funding had presented to the Panel meeting in October and the Panel were disappointed that a report on the options for future grant funding for the voluntary sector had not been submitted to an earlier meeting, given the funding agreements expired in March 2016.

The Panel had considered that rather than reduce the Voluntary Sector Grant Fund Budget by 38% the question should be the value for money the organisation delivered and whether other savings could be achieved if funding to an organisation was increased.

The Panel was keen on the option of the voluntary sector working together through an umbrella organisation funding arrangement as

organisations would need to work closer in collaboration to the overall benefit of the local communities.

It was further explained to the Cabinet that there had been full support from the Panel for the formation of a Working Group to investigate funding options.

The Cabinet agreed that the outcome of the review of the Voluntary Sector Grant Funding would be more valuable if Cambridgeshire County Council were involved and that there was a significant role in the process for the Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations. In concluding the debate the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

- i. that funding is ceased to the Huntingdon Shop Mobility scheme with no further grant award for 2016/17, on the basis that:
 - a) it has not met the performance conditions within the existing grant award in not achieving additional matched external funding; and
 - b) that this is not a service that the Council provides across its other major towns.
- ii. that the remaining five funded organisations be informed of continuation of Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) funding for the financial year 2016/17 at the same existing grant level subject to:
 - a) confirmation and funding evidence from each group of its continued financial/operational viability (including identification of other funding streams which that is dependent upon); and
 - b) notification of a fundamental review of HDC Voluntary Sector Grant Funding system during 2016/17 as per the resolution detailed in (iii) below.
- iii. that an HDC led Working Group of appropriate Members and Officers of both the District and County Councils be established to review the Voluntary Sector Grant Funding system, on the principles of:
 - a) tapering funding from 2016/17 in line with the District Councils overall Medium Term Financial Strategy and as detailed in Paragraph 3.1.3 Option 2 of the submitted report;
 - b) a commissioning and outcomes model with funding focused upon infrastructure organisations, taking due account of the National Association for Voluntary and Community Action (NAVCA) 'Change for Good' report and in particular Recommendation 14 of that report as expressed at Paragraph 3.2.2 Option B of the submitted report; and
 - c) the Working Group to conclude its recommendations direct to the Cabinet no later than end July 2016.
- iv. that the Council expect funded organisations to undertake an efficiency review of their individual business on a 'Lean' or Zero Based Budgeting concept approach, which the Council could assist with and for which support should be sought from the

NAVCA and from the Hunts Forum for Voluntary Organisations as representative of voluntary sector organisations.

78. DRAFT 2016/17 REVENUE BUDGET AND MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY (2017/18 TO 2020/21)

The Cabinet received a report by the Head of Resources (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding the draft budget preparations to date.

The 2016/17 budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had been established following agreed policies and the completion of the Zero Based Budget (ZBB) exercise that started in the autumn of 2014. All departments within the Council had received a fundamental review of the service and the resources required to deliver those services. Tranche 1 savings from the ZBB programme delivered in December 2014 were incorporated into the 2015/16 budget. Tranches 2 and 3 had taken place during the current financial year and had been incorporated within the draft Budget for 2016/17 and the MTFS 2016/17 to 2020/21. The Cabinet were referred to the total savings agreed via Tranches 2 and 3 of the ZBB exercise as detailed within the 2016/17 Budget and MTFS document.

In addition, the draft Budget and MTFS had also taken account of the following:

- conclusions of ZBB Light reviews;
- revenue implications of the draft Capital Programme;
- grant settlement relating to New Homes Bonus and Council Tax Freeze Grant and Funding Estimates for Revenue Support Grant and New Homes Bonus; and
- the draft Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2020/21.

It was noted that the Budget 2016/17 and MTFS included a Council tax freeze and that overall ZBB, Capital and Growth had resulted in a net reduction in the Council's budget of £1.4m (7%) and £0.9m (5%) when compared to the 2015/16 Forecast Outturn and the original Budget.

Included in the Tranche 2 proposals was a recommendation to implement a bus departure levy in the District. However, this proposal was removed from the ZBB savings and its removal had been incorporated into the draft Budget.

In respect of the New Homes Bonus (NHB) the Government had announced the 2016/17 settlement. Although the Council presently relied on Government funding the Council continued to work towards its financial ambition of reducing reliance to nil by 2020/2021.

The impact on the General Fund Reserve of the grant settlement from Government, the Council's policy to freeze Council Tax and the savings and growth were built into the Budget 2016/17 and MTFS and the Cabinet were referred to Table F on page 10 of the Budget 2016/17 and MTFS document.

The Cabinet were informed that there was an unsustainable budget position in that the Council would have an unbalanced budget in

2020/2021 and therefore an additional £3.2m of savings/income was required to address this deficit. As a result it was proposed that the Council maintained the current level of reserves and Commercial Investment Strategy investments and continued the programme of ZBB reviews in order to find the necessary savings to bring the General Fund reserve to prudent recommended levels.

The Cabinet congratulated Members and Officers for the achievements to date and noted that the next stage in the savings process was transformation and delivery. The Council also needed to address the culture of sickness absence within the Authority as this was a cost to the Council.

As the organisation becomes more accustomed to analysing its customs and practices it would be more efficient, and the additional savings required would be generated from a higher level of income. The Cabinet was concerned when some Town and Parish Councils chose to disproportionately increase its Council Tax Levy on the residents of the Parish.

Having considered the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

- i. to approve the freezing of Council Tax for 2016/17;
- ii. to approve the removal of the savings proposal to charge a bus departure levy within the District;
- iii. to approve the draft Capital Programme 2016/17 to 2020/21;
- iv. to approve the overall draft Budget 2016/17 and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2017/18 to 2020/21;
- v. to consider the current MTFS position with regards to the General Fund Reserve and agrees to continue the use of the Zero Based Budgeting principles and commits to continue to develop the actions and programmes as set out in the 'Plan on a Page' to find further savings and efficiencies in order to maintain a prudent level of reserves throughout the MTFS;
- vi. to approve the Council Tax Base 2016/17 as detailed in Appendix 2 of the submitted report;
- vii. to consider the offer by Government to all Councils of a four-year financial settlement and agrees that if the deadline for submission of an efficiency plan is before the February Cabinet meeting, that delegated authority is given to the Head of Resources to approve the plan subject to agreement by the Executive Councillor for Resources;
- viii. that following the resolution regarding Voluntary Sector Grant Funding 2016/17 – 2019/20 (Minute No. 77) changes be reflected in the Voluntary Sector Grants budget for 2016/17 and over the MTFS period.

At the conclusion of the above item, at 8.50pm, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Communities and Customers) left the room and did not return to the meeting.

79. ANNUAL EQUALITY PROGRESS REPORT 2015

The Cabinet received a report on progress with the Council's equality objectives by the Policy, Performance and Transformation Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) which was presented by the Corporate Team Manager.

The Single Equality Scheme (SES) 2010-2013 and annual Human Resources Employee Equality Monitoring Report demonstrated how the Council achieved its statutory responsibilities, in particular how the Council accounted for the Public Sector Equality Duties (PSED) as set out in the Equality Act 2010; and achievement against the Equality Framework for Local Government (EFLG).

The Cabinet suggested that the Council's report template incorporate reference to PSED to ensure consideration was given to equality issues as part of the decision making process.

Having considered the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Economic Well-Being) the Cabinet,

RESOLVED

to approve the equality objectives and actions that are more relevant and Huntingdonshire focused as attached as Appendix 1 of the submitted report.

80. SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP REPORT

RESOLVED

The report of the Safety Advisory Group meeting held on 25th November 2015 was received and noted.

At the conclusion of the above item, at 8.57pm, Councillor J Gray left the meeting and the Cabinet took a short adjournment.

At 8.59pm Councillor J Gray returned to the meeting and the Cabinet meeting was resumed.

81. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED

That the press and public be excluded from the meeting because the business to be transacted contains information relating to any individual; information that is likely to reveal the identity of an individual; information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information); and information relating to any consultations or negotiations, or contemplated consultations or negotiations, in connection with any labour relations matter arising between the authority or a Minister of the Crown and employees of, or office holders under, the authority.

82. FUTURE SERVICE PROVISION

The Cabinet gave consideration to an exempt report by the Corporate Team Manager (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding options for future service provision as contained within the submitted report.

Having considered the comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Finance and Performance) the Cabinet agreed the recommendations as detailed within the Officer's report. Whereupon it was

RESOLVED

that the Cabinet agree the recommendations as detailed within the submitted exempt report.

Chairman