

HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the CABINET held in the Cabinet Room, Pathfinder House, St Marys Street, Huntingdon PE29 3TN on Thursday, 26 June 2003

PRESENT: Councillor D P Holley - Chairman
Councillors I C Bates, R L Clarke,
Mrs K P Gregory, N J Guyatt, T V Rogers and
L M Simpson

APOLOGY: An apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs J Chandler.

26. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Cabinet held on 5th June 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

27. SAFETY ADVISORY GROUP

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Safety Advisory Group held on 4th June 2003 were received and noted.

28. CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Following on from its submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels consideration was given to a report by the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) to which was attached a copy of a draft Customer Service Strategy which contained proposals assigned to improve customer access to the District Council's services.

The draft Strategy outlined, inter alia, the overwhelming preference of customers in their choice of contact with the Council (70%) by telephone, followed by Internet/email (12%), face to face (8%) and correspondence (8%). With this in mind, the strategy proposed the establishment of a contact centre to deal with the majority of telephone enquiries, a customer service centre in Huntingdon and appropriate upgrading of the Council's website.

The Cabinet were acquainted with details of the three options for a contact centre service, namely –

- ◆ a centre specified, managed, procured, owned and staffed by the District Council;
- ◆ a centre owned, managed and staffed by the District Council, but utilizing the same hardware/software specified and procured by Cambridgeshire County Council in conjunction with its "Cambridgeshire Direct" contact centre facility; and

- ◆ procurement of the Cambridgeshire Direct service from the County Council.

In discussing these options, Members expressed general concern about the risks associated with centralisation of the telephone calls service and; on the assumption that one of the options for a call centre was adopted, asked that the issues associated with business continuity be addressed in future progress reports.

In considering the estimated capital and revenue costs for each of the three options and while acknowledging that appropriate provision would need to be made for management and support, Members requested that steps should be taken to ensure that the creation of further, additional posts should be kept to a level consistent with the delivery of a high quality service. In that context and while noting assurances from the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology that the estimated costs would be subject to further detailed analysis as the project developed, it was agreed that all staffing costs initially should be contained within the provision made in the Medium Term Plan and further reports with the necessary justifications presented to Cabinet before committing to additional expenditure.

With regard to the provision of customer service centres, Members recognised the difficulties some customers experienced in accessing Council facilities and concluded that it might be productive to examine other options, including the use of mobile offices and for the employment of peripatetic staff. At the same time, attention was drawn to the impact of electronic government and the potential for change in the future years as other access methods were used by customers who currently preferred face-to-face contact.

Having commended the content of the draft strategy and in recording their unanimous support for an approach which would secure significant investment to deliver a step-change improvement in public access to Council Services, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

- (a) that the centralisation of telephone call handling in a District Council contact centre be approved;
- (b) that the implementation of a contact centre owned, managed and staffed by the District Council using the technology/infrastructure procured by the County Council in conjunction with its "Cambridgeshire Direct" facilities, be approved;
- (c) that the establishment of a customer service centre in Huntingdon, bringing together the services currently provided via separate reception areas in Pathfinder House and the cash office in Castle Hill House be approved;
- (d) that the Huntingdon customer service centre be located on the ground floor of a suitable building and

that options for its exact location be evaluated once the future of accommodation for the District Council has been resolved;

- (e) that the establishment of additional customer service facilities elsewhere in the District be approved in principle and that further work be undertaken to determine what facilities are required and how they are to be delivered to best reflect customer needs and demand;
- (f) that the indicative nature of the costs contained in the report be noted; and
- (g) that the Corporate Director, Commerce and Technology be requested to submit quarterly progress reports to Cabinet on implementation of the strategy.

29. DEVELOPING A COMMUNITY STRATEGY FOR HUNTINGDONSHIRE

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Policy (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) on progress with the development of a Community Strategy for Huntingdonshire.

Having considered the information contained in the report and in noting comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Panels in relation to the work carried out to date by the Thematic Groups which would be reflected in the second stage of public consultation to be commissioned shortly, the Cabinet

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report now submitted be noted.

30. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

Following on from its submission to the Overview and Scrutiny Panels the Cabinet considered the latest draft of the Best Value Performance Plan for 2002/03 (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book).

Having noted arrangements previously approved by full Council for approval of the Plan and its publication by 30th June 2003 prior to the delivery of a summary to all households in the District, it was

RESOLVED

that progress with regard to preparation of the District Council's Best Value Performance Plan for 2002/03 be noted.

31. RISK MANAGEMENT

The Cabinet considered a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) regarding a proposal to establish a part-time post regarding of Risk Manager.

In so doing, Member's attention was drawn to a new statutory

requirement under the Accounts and Audit regulations, 2003 for local authorities to address risk management as an integral part of management processes. Having been advised of the work undertaken so far to develop a risk register, the need to train staff and develop mitigation and in reviewing the provision made in the Medium Term Plan for future initiatives in this field, it was

RESOLVED

that the proposed rephrasing of the Medium Term Plan in the period 2003 – 2007 to accommodate the proposed establishment of a part-time post of Risk Manager and the acquisition of appropriate software and training as outlined in paragraph 2.6 of the report now submitted be approved.

32. TREASURY MANAGEMENT ANNUAL REPORT 2002/03

Consideration was given to a report by the Head of Financial Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) reviewing the outcomes of the Council's Treasury Management Strategy in 2002/03

RESOLVED

that the contents of the report be noted.

33. OFFORD CLUNY CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER STATEMENT

With the aid of a report by the Head of Planning Services (a copy of which is appended in the Minute Book) the Cabinet considered the content of a draft character statement for Offord Cluny Conservation Area.

RESOLVED

that the draft character statement for the Offord Cluny Conservation Area be approved for public consultation.

Chairman