

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 8 December 2005

PRESENT: Councillor SGM Kindersley (Leader of Council)
Councillor RT Summerfield (Deputy Leader of Council and Resources & Staffing Portfolio Holder)

Councillors:	Dr DR Bard	Planning & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
	JD Batchelor	Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder
	Mrs JM Healey	Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder
	Mrs EM Heazell	Housing Portfolio Holder
	Mrs DP Roberts	Community Development Portfolio Holder
	Mrs DSK Spink MBE	Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Councillors RF Bryant, SM Edwards, Mrs A Elsby, JA Hockney, Mrs CAED Murfitt, J Shepperson and Mrs GJ Smith were in attendance, by invitation.

Procedural Items

1. COTTENHAM: VICTORIA VIEW, SMITHY FEN

Urgent item with permission of the Leader.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) had dismissed all planning appeals relating to the unauthorised Traveller encampments at Victoria View, Smithy Fen, Cottenham and these unauthorised Travellers had been given twelve months to leave Victoria View. The Leader thanked officers and Members for their work on this issue and Cottenham Parish Council for contributing to the appeal to the ODPM to uphold the Planning Inspector's decision.

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 10 November 2005 as a correct record, subject to the following change:

Reducing Numbers In and Costs of Temporary Accommodation (Minute 8)

Resolution (a): "To let up to 10% of Council vacancies...for example, *one-bed units* let to families..."

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following personal interests were declared:

Dr DR Bard	As a Governor of Sawston Village College (Item 9)
JD Batchelor	As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (Items 5 & 10) and a Governor of Linton Village College (Item 9)
SM Edwards	By virtue of his professional involvement in supplying communications equipment to, among other places, Call Centres (Item 11)
JA Hockney	As a Council appointee to the Farmland Museum Trustees Board of Management (Item 9)

SGM Kindersley	As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (Items 5 & 10)
Mrs CAED Murfitt	As a Council appointee to the Melbourn Community Sports Ltd (MCSPLIM) (Item 9)
Mrs GJ Smith	As a Council appointee to Linton Village College (Item 9)
Mrs DSK Spink	As a Council appointee to Crossroads Caring for Carers, Gamlingay Village College and Wysing Arts (Item 9)

**Recommendation to Council and Decision
made by Cabinet**

4. COUNCIL PRIORITIES IN 2006/07 AND 2007/08 ONWARDS

The Cabinet considered the continuation of the Council's current three priorities into 2006/07 and a programme to carry out a major re-think of the Council's priorities for 2007/08 onwards to coincide with the development of the second Community Strategy. Financial and other pressures would make it necessary to be realistic and specific about what could be achieved in 2006/07 and future years.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED COUNCIL** to continue the Council's current three priorities (customer service, Northstowe and affordable housing) into 2006/07.

Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) To request Management Team to report back on a limited number of realistic outcomes and milestones to be achieved in the three priority areas in 2006/07 within existing planned resources; and
- (b) To support the proposals in the report for a substantial review of the Council's corporate objectives and priorities from 2007/08, combining the process with the review of the Community Strategy.

Decisions made by Cabinet

5. NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING

Inspector Paul Ormerod, South Cambridgeshire Sector Commander, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, gave a presentation on the establishment and role of neighbourhood panels, which aimed to prove a community with a means of engagement on policing priorities and performance, with regular meetings to consider the issues and the policing response.

Members were supportive of the neighbourhood panels, and explanations were given for the following matters raised:

- (i) Parish Councils had an important role to play and should be included on the panels. Parish Councils in the Histon area, where a pilot panel would be established, preferred to progress matters through their local District Councillors, but there would be scope for Parish Council involvement elsewhere. A copy of Inspector Ormerod's presentation was available on the SCDC website and Members were encouraged to discuss neighbourhood panels with their Parish Councils;
- (ii) There was reluctance to limit the size of the panels, but, at the same time concern about their becoming unwieldy. The Histon pilot panel would help identify an appropriate size;
- (iii) It was crucial to engage members of the general public to help identify local

priorities, but there was a danger that frustrations could arise when police resources limited delivery of priorities. Panels would be limited to three realistic priorities per area and would not be a strategic talking shop, but a group which could bring about results and provide regular feedback to residents. It was hoped that once the panels were up and running and residents could see how they could have a voice in local policing, more members of the general public would attend panel meetings;

- (iv) Five meetings annually could be too few to pick up on "hot" local issues, so it was important to maintain contact such as informal police visits to local groups.

Members thanked Inspector Ormerod for his presentation and Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) To work in partnership with Cambridgeshire Constabulary to establish a pilot Community Panel from around January 2006 in the Histon area; and
- (b) That, following an evaluation of the pilot above after the first two Panel meetings, terms of reference be drawn up for Community Panels and they be established across the District during 2006.

6. **ESTIMATES FOR DEPARTMENTAL AND CENTRAL OVERHEADS BUDGET FOR 2006/07**

The draft estimates for all services would be presented to Portfolio Holders in January for consideration and endorsement, including the budget reductions to meet capping requirements as agreed by Council in October 2005. Council would give final approval to the estimates on 23 February 2006. In order to start this process, Cabinet was asked to determine the estimates for staffing and central overheads.

Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning

Discussions were taking place through Cambridgeshire Horizons for funding towards the vacant Northstowe post, but there were sensitivities to consider before approaching developers for contributions towards a planning post.

Cambourne Office

The Council did not have the resources to undertake an external assessment of selling the Cambourne Office and leasing space; the Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder had refused the suggestion since selling the office would realise a large capital sum, which could then be spent only on capital projects, while requiring revenue savings to be identified elsewhere to cover rental payments. Councillor Mrs GJ Smith asked that the savings realised in relation to the costs of telephones, energy and rates be publicised.

The Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder undertook to liaise with the Housing and Environmental Services Director regarding heating in the Housing Department.

Cabinet **AGREED** to

- (a) Confirm the inflation figure of 2 ½% for both general expenditure and pay awards, on which all the estimates were being prepared;
- (b) Approve the revenue estimates and recharges as presented and shown at **Appendices A and B**; and
- (c) Approve the capital programme shown at **Appendix C**.

7. **LOCAL AUTHORITY FINANCE SETTLEMENT**

Urgent item with permission of the Leader.

The Local Authority Financial Settlement for 2006/07 had been issued: the government had changed the formulae again this year, making it difficult to analyse the information, but the Council had received a 13 ½% cash increase over the current year. This amount was the Shire District average and was the lowest amongst the rural Districts in Cambridgeshire: it did not take into account the Council's special circumstances as a high-growth area. Unlike previous years, the government had issued a 2-year provisional grant settlement, with promises of a 3-year forecast from 2006/07. This new information would be reflected in the Medium Term Financial Strategy when it came to Cabinet in January 2006. Members welcomed the government's responding to requests to bring data up-to-date as it was now forecasting population figures forward from mid-year rather than using two-year old information.

The government had also announced that it expected Council Tax increases for 2006/07 to be under 5% and that when setting the 2006/07 Council Tax Authorities would include an indication of the expected 2007/08 Council Tax. Cabinet **SUPPORTED** an indicative figure of a 4.9% Council Tax rise on which to prepare the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

8. **RESPONSIVE REPAIRS PROCUREMENT**

Cabinet, at its meeting of 14 April 2005, had commissioned a full assessment of the operational, legal and financial impacts of future procurement options for the housing responsive repairs service. The review was now complete and the Housing Portfolio Holder thanked everyone who took part, especially Mathew Baxter of echelon consultancy ltd and Councillor Mrs DSK Spink, who attended all the meetings and visits. She also paid tribute to the workforce who, during a difficult period of transition, continued to receive high results in satisfaction surveys, in some areas even improving previous scores.

Cabinet **AGREED** to:

- (a) Note the content of the echelon consultancy ltd report attached at Appendix A to the agenda, its appraisal of the procurement options and its recommendations;
- (b) Retain its in-house direct labour organisation and implement the 22-point action plan as recommended in the report at Appendix A to the agenda; and
- (c) Request that the Housing and Environmental Services Director establish an implementation group, based upon the membership of the Responsive Repairs Core Group, to oversee delivery of the action plan and to report back to Cabinet within six months.

9. **DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF FOR CHARITABLE ORGANISATIONS**

Council, at its meeting of 27 October 2005, had agreed that a policy on discretionary rate relief had to be adopted formally in order to implement the reduction in expenditure agreed. A formal policy would ensure that future awards of rate relief were allocated in a manner which maximised the benefit to local residents and assisted those organisations which contributed to the Council's Corporate Objectives.

Cabinet **AGREED** that

- (a) The criteria described in Appendix A to the report "Policy for the Award of 'Top-up' Discretionary Rate Relief to Charitable Organisations" as amended at the meeting be adopted formally as a policy for the award of 'top-up' rate relief with effect from 1st April 2006;
- (b) In order to minimise the administrative burden on both the Council and applicants, this policy only take effect where the award of relief to the organisation would cost the Council in excess of £1,000 per annum;

- (c) Authority to make decisions on awards within the criteria set out in the policy be delegated to the Finance and Resources Director;
- (d) Authority to make decision on appeals against the decision of the Finance and Resources Director be delegated to the Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder; and
- (e) A further report making recommendations for a policy to cover all other forms of discretionary relief be submitted to Cabinet during the 2006/07 financial year.

10. CHILDREN'S SERVICES: THE CONTRIBUTION OF DISTRICT COUNCILS

The Children Act 2004 set statutory duties on District Councils to work in partnership with other organisations to improve outcomes for all children and young people. The Community Development Portfolio Holder reminded Members that departmental resources had been much reduced and that the Council needed to be seen to do what it could within its limited resources. The Head of Community Services confirmed that it was anticipated that the Council would work with the County Council's locality teams, but the working relationship had yet to be defined.

Members highlighted the importance of preventative work on homelessness.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) The Community Development Portfolio Holder be appointed as the lead member for children and young people; and
- (b) Any comments on the draft Children Plan be incorporated into a response to the consultation, including asking Parish Councils to consult with children and young people when drawing up Parish Plans.

11. IEG STATEMENT

The Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council was on schedule to meet its e-government targets, and corrected paragraph 2 of the report: the Council had received £900,000, not £750,000, in capital grants from the government from its four previous IEG Statements. Due to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's required format for the statement, it was not possible to change from red to green those services which the Council did not provide.

The Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder further confirmed that:

- (i) Training of Cambourne Office staff to co-ordinate with Contact Centre staff would be part of the Service First Project;
- (ii) Training of Contact Centre staff was an on-going and continual part of their positions;
- (iii) With regards to Local e-Government Implementation Expenditure, although the 05/06 forward look for resources being applied from internal revenue and capital budgets to implement e-government had read £1 million in July, it had been revised since to £1.37 million which he thought was due to rollover expected during the year as Phase 2 had been moved out of the initial sequence. All the funding had already been approved by full Council and the actual explanation for the variance would be circulated to all Members as soon as available;
- (iv) Failure to meet e-government targets could result in the government reclaiming its £900,000 grant; and
- (v) The transfer of the Benefits service to the Contact Centre was delayed until the third week of January 2006 due to recruitment difficulties at the Contact Centre, but that this was still within the government's revised target deadline of 31 March 2006.

Councillor JA Hockney stated that the general public did not support e-government, failed to see its benefit to residents, and were confused by the Council's decisions to invest in new technologies, while Councillor SM Edwards voiced his support of the Council's commitment to new technologies.

Cabinet

- (a) **NOTED** the progress of the IEG Statement 2005; and
- (b) **APPROVED** the delegation and approval of subsequent changes to the Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder and the Finance and Resources Director prior to submission to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 19th December 2005 with the final copy being distributed to all Members when available.

12. TRAVELLERS' HOUSING NEEDS SURVEY

The provisional outcomes of the Travellers' Housing Needs Survey were presented to Cabinet, with a full report due later in the 2005/06 financial year. The Leader highlighted that South Cambridgeshire had more caravans on authorised private plots than anywhere else in the country and also that it was in the top 10% of all districts for the number of caravans on council-run sites.

The delay in the report had been due to other organisations requesting additional work not included in the contract: the Council had not requested anything outside the original brief. Details on the other organisations involved would be included in the full report.

Councillor SM Edwards highlighted the concerns of a member of Cottenham Parish Council, who had contacted him regarding Cabinet's conclusion in September 2005 that the Council did not own any land for land swap purposes, but was now selling off Council land. Cabinet emphasised that their conclusion in September 2005 was regarding land *suitable* for land swap, and the Housing Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Council owned odd pockets of land, often locked by other properties or of a size adequate for a garden extension, and it was land such as this being considered for sale. A report to Cabinet in January 2006 would publish the results of the recent survey of Council-owned land, which could identify some pockets of potentially suitable land, and there was an audit trail demonstrating that the Council's own policies had been applied to all Council-owned land to confirm whether or not it was suitable for travellers. The Leader emphasised that anything the Council could do, it would, and expressed his hope that Cottenham Parish Council felt that there was enough openness between the two authorities to contact the Corporate Project Officer for clarification of any of their concerns.

Councillor Mrs DP Roberts voiced her concern that a public report should indicate demand for a further 170-220 Traveller pitches over the next 5 years, which could cause distress in villages, especially if misreported in the local press as a definite figure. Any press releases would make it clear that the Council did not confuse demand with provision.

Cabinet **NOTED** the provisional findings of the Travellers' Housing Needs Survey as they related to South Cambridgeshire, as set out in paragraph 21 of the report and the appendix; and **AGREED**

- (a) To instruct officers to make the survey findings available to the Regional Housing Board and, at the same time, make the case as to why not all of the need currently found in the district should be met long-term within the South Cambridgeshire district, as set out in paragraphs 25-26 of the report;
- (b) To instruct officers to adopt the same approach as in (a) above in respect to the

- Examination in Public of the East of England Plan;
- (c) To use the results of the survey to support any future bids for capital or revenue funding for site provision;
- (d) To refer this report and the Travellers' Housing Needs Survey to the Development and Conservation Control Committee for its information; and
- (e) That the survey output inform the work of the Local Development Framework (LDF) including work on finding suitable locations for sites.

13. APPOINTMENT OF WINDMILL ESTATE STEERING GROUP

The Windmill Estate Project Steering Group had been meeting since August 2004 to develop proposals for the redevelopment of the estate; however, despite Council agreeing in May 2005 to support the project in principle, the Steering Group had not been included in the formal list of bodies for which nominees were sought. The Housing Portfolio Holder noted that Nene Housing Association had already contributed financially towards the administration of meetings.

Cabinet **AGREED:**

Terms of Reference

That the Windmill Estate Project Steering Group:

- (a) Provide key stakeholders with periodic reports on project progress and issues;
- (b) Provide an opportunity for key stakeholders to raise issues of strategic significance for discussion;
- (c) Allow key stakeholders the opportunity to advise the Project sponsor (Housing Portfolio Holder) on how the project can be delivered most efficiently and effectively at a strategic level; and
- (d) Work together to put forward a redevelopment scheme proposal for consideration by Cabinet / Full Council.

Membership

That the formally constituted Steering Group comprise:

- (a) Housing Portfolio Holder
- (b) Leader of Council
- (c) SCDC Fulbourn Members (x 2)
- (d) Fulbourn Parish Council representative
- (e) Local County Councillor
- (f) Tenant representative
- (g) Owner-Occupier representative

Attended by Nene Housing Society:

- (a) Director of Development
- (b) Housing Operations Manager
- (c) Regeneration Manager
- (d) Resident Involvement Officer

Supported by the following Council officers:

- (a) Housing and Environmental Services Director
- (b) Head of Housing Strategic Services
- (c) Housing Services Manager
- (d) Housing Services Officer
- (e) Community Development Manager
- (f) Principal Housing Accountant
- (g) Special Projects Officer

14. RE-ORGANISATION OF HOUSING SERVICES

The Housing Portfolio Holder presented a report on the progress of the re-organisation of Housing Services and sought delegated authority to proceed with the project. It was confirmed that:

- (i) The net reduction of 4.8 posts would include staff at the Cambourne Offices as well as wardens;
- (ii) Housing Services currently employed approximately 150 staff, over half of whom were wardens. Members could view an organisation tree on the Intranet or contact the Housing and Environmental Services Director for more detailed information;
- (iii) The Council employed the fewest Housing Services staff within its audit group of similar local authorities but it was difficult to make a like-for-like comparison with the private sector;
- (iv) Market trends rather than Council policies had caused reductions in Right To Buy sales and assisted grant schemes to enable tenants to buy privately, although the Council continued to publicise through *Key Issues Magazine* ways tenants could buy their own house.

Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) The next stage of the Housing Service re-organisation as set out in the report; and
- (b) That detailed process, assimilation and redundancy issues, including the deletion and creation of posts, arising from the review of Housing Services be delegated to the Housing and Environmental Services Director with Human Resources advice, in consultation with the Housing and Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holders.

Information Items

15. TRAVELLERS COSTS QUARTERLY UPDATE

Cabinet **NOTED** the Travellers Costs Quarterly Update and that there remained £10,000 in outstanding invoices.

Standing Items

16. MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Cabinet **NOTED** the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's:

- (a) Congratulations on Cabinet's work on the Traveller issue; and
- (b) Recommendation that Cabinet continue to strive towards meeting the Council's targets on affordable housing, as there was currently an annual shortfall of 870 houses.

17. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Cambridgeshire Women and Homelessness Group had spoken to Councillor Mrs EM Heazell about their sadness with the diminution in the Council's grant, but emphasised that they did not blame the Council for the situation.

Councillor Mrs DSK Spink reported that South Cambridgeshire Crossroads Caring for Carers had cut overheads through amalgamation with the Huntingdonshire Branch and was considering further amalgamation with Fenland. She also reported the Wysing Arts Centre's success in their recent fund-raising and that Mary Archer had expressed an interest in becoming involved with the organisation.

The Meeting ended at 12.20 p.m.
