

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 12 April 2007

PRESENT: Councillor RMA Manning (Leader of the Council)
Councillor SM Edwards (Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services
Portfolio Holder / Deputy Leader of the Council)

Councillors: Mrs DSK Spink MBE Housing Portfolio Holder
Dr DR Bard Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder
Mrs VG Ford Community Development Portfolio Holder
MP Howell Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Holly Adams	Democratic Services Officer
Jenny Clark	Lands Officer
Steve Hampson	Executive Director
Greg Harlock	Chief Executive
Richard May	Democratic Services Manager
Simon McIntosh	Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships)
Kelly Quigley	Communications Officer
Kirsty Simmons	Corporate Project Officer

Councillors JD Batchelor, RF Bryant, EW Bullman, Mrs A Elsby, R Hall, Mrs EM Heazell, Mrs CAED Murfitt, Mrs DP Roberts, Mrs HM Smith and RT Summerfield were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors JA Hockney and Dr SEK van de Ven.

Procedural Items

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 8 March 2007, subject to the following amendments:

Arbury Park: Sustainable Lettings Policy (Minute 4)

“...was essential to meet the aims and *objectives*...”

9-month (April to December 2006) Corporate Performance Indicators (Minute 6)

“Members were reminded of a ~~Service-First~~ *Customer Service Strategy* workshop on 28 March 2007...”

Further to Minute 6, the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder explained that the Customer Service Strategy workshop, although attended by only four members, had been very constructive and worthwhile, and regretted that more members had not engaged with the process as customer service was key to serving the public. Councillor Mrs DSK Spink asked for a follow-up workshop in six months' time.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following personal interests were declared:

Councillor SM Edwards	In item 7, as his daughter attended Impington Village College.
Councillor MP Howell	In item 5, as an employee of a Registered Social Landlord
Councillor Mrs HM Smith	In item 15, as a member of Milton Parish Council, the Milton Community Centre and Recreation Grounds Committee and the Save Milton Country Park campaign.
Councillor Mrs DSK Spink	In item 7, as a governor of Gamlingay Village College.
Councillor RT Summerfield	In item 15, as a member of Milton Parish Council, the Milton Community Centre and Recreation Grounds Committee and the Save Milton Country Park campaign.

Recommendations to Council

3. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE INSPECTION (CGI): IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Cabinet received the draft Improvement Plan, the final version of which must be submitted to the Audit Commission by the end of April 2007. A draft executive summary, which would be incorporated into the Improvement Plan, was tabled, and members were asked to submit any written comments to the Chief Executive as soon as possible. The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder updated members on the successful first meeting of the Improvement Board and explained that the Transformation Project would be subsumed by the Improvement Plan.

The Chief Executive reported that Building Capacity East had agreed to fund fully the costs of the Improvement Manager's secondment. He confirmed that it was realistic to achieve Investors in people accreditation across the organisation, and that this would feature in the Improvement Plan. Referring to the very real risk that the improvement plan could fail to meet its objectives if other initiatives distracted focus, Senior Management Team urged members to be realistic with their demands on staff during this period.

In response to a request from Councillor Mrs EM Heazell, Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, the Chief Executive agreed to receive her input into the Scrutiny Support Officer job description before a second independent job evaluation was undertaken prior to advertisement.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Improvement Plan be approved; and **AGREED** that the three new posts of Equalities Co-ordinator, Strategic Partnerships Officer and Scrutiny Support Officer be established, these posts to be funded from the £300,000 allocation approved by Council in its response to the Corporate Governance Inspection report.

Cabinet **NOTED** the secondment of Cecilia Tredget as Improvement Manager and thanked East Cambridgeshire District Council for releasing her.

4. POLICY FOR THE AWARD OF DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder explained that the proposed policy would formalise existing practices, facilitating transparent, fair and consistent awards.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the policy for award of discretionary housing payments be adopted in order to facilitate future awards from the financial year 2007/08 onwards.

Decisions made by Cabinet

5. HOUSING STOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL PROCESS

The Housing Portfolio Holder reminded members of the housing capital and revenue financial position, which, within the next few years would see the existing budgets reduced to negligible levels as 50% of all rents and 75% of capital receipts on sales were required to be transferred to central government. It was essential to consult with, and fully inform, tenants of the situation and the likely reduction in services, including improvements to the housing stock, as the financial situation worsened. The consultation process would last between 12-24 months and would be overseen by a member / tenant working group, with elected tenant representatives. Councillor SM Edwards reminded members that the Council's overriding responsibility was to its residents and that the priority should be ensuring that their homes be maintained to a decent standard, rather than seeking to retain all the houses in Council ownership. He emphasised that it was essential to have an appraisal of all options before a strategy to overcome the financial difficulties could be formulated. The Housing Portfolio Holder confirmed that the final decision rested with tenants.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) a new stock options appraisal be carried out to evaluate the options to deliver a sustainable future for the Council's housing stock in full consultation with / involvement of tenants, staff, members and other key stakeholders;
- (b) the stock options appraisal process commence as soon as possible, taking into account receipt of stock condition survey and financial modelling information, with a view to presenting the outcome to the Cabinet and Council later this year;
- (c) a member / tenant working group be established to oversee the project, supported by a corporate officer project team, to be comprised of five members, appointed in accordance with the political proportionality rules, and five tenants; and
- (d) the initial project management and staffing proposals be implemented and that the other costs associated with the stock options appraisal, e.g., consultancy fees, be from within the Housing Revenue Account Estimates for 2007/08, in order that the project be well managed and adequately resourced.

6. CAMBRIDGE CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAU GRANT

The Citizens' Advice Bureaux provided essential services for South Cambridgeshire residents and the Community Development reported that there was growing demand for debt and bankruptcy advice. To better assist the Bureaux with their medium-term financial planning, Cabinet was asked to give a three-year indication of grant support, which would be subject to the organisations meeting their Service Level Agreement targets.

Cabinet **AGREED**:

- (a) to approve a grant of £53,360 to Cambridge Citizens' Advice Bureau for 2007/08;
- (b) as part of its commitment to the Cambridgeshire Compact, to increase its funding agreements with Citizens' Advice Bureaux from one year to three years, these agreements being statements of intent rather than legally binding commitments, and
- (c) that this three-year agreement be extended to other voluntary organisations that the Council funds for over £3,000 and with whom the Council has Service Level Agreements.

Cabinet **NOTED** the grants awarded by the Community Development Portfolio Holder to the other Citizens' Advice Bureaux and Advice for Life for their work in South Cambridgeshire.

7. USE OF BALANCES AND RESERVES UNUSED FOR OVER TWO YEARS

Cabinet approval was required for all uncommitted balances over two years old and members were advised that it was not uncommon for the Dual Use Capital Grants to be carried forward in light of the long-term nature of the related projects. Members commended the successes of the Dual Use schemes, of which the Council was a pioneer, and the huge benefits they brought to South Cambridgeshire residents. The Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships) confirmed that the Dual Use schemes at Impington and Gamlingay Village Colleges were expected to come through during the 2007/08 financial year.

Cabinet **AGREED** that

- (a) the following uncommitted reserve balances that are over two years old be carried forward into the 2007/08 financial year:

Dual Use Capital Grants (£770,977 in total)	£458,477
Heritage Initiatives Grants	£9,511
Historic Buildings Preservation Fund (estimated)	£54,968

- (b) the balance of £16,320 in the Millennium Working Party Grants be transferred to Heritage Initiatives Grants and be carried forward with the above balance.

8. HISTON: FUTURE OF PUBLIC CAR PARK, HIGH STREET

The Housing Portfolio Holder, at her meeting of 3 April 2007, had agreed to retain the status quo, and therefore no Cabinet decision was required.

9. QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT INCLUDING BUDGETARY CONTROL AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS: FOURTH QUARTER 2006/07

Cabinet considered the final quarterly monitoring report for 2006/07. The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder drew attention to the details of savings realised through the Transformation Project which would remain constant at £125,000 per annum, making it unnecessary to continue to report separately.

Cabinet **AGREED** to the monitoring of additional expenditure and efficiency savings originating from the (former) Transformation Project becoming part of the Improvement Plan update reports, supplemented as appropriate with more detailed reports on the results of individual Business Process Re-engineering exercises.

Cabinet **NOTED** the projected expenditure position and the monitoring of prudential indicators and referred the report to the next meeting of the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder for more detailed consideration.

Information Items

10. **GERSHON FORWARD LOOK 2007/2008**

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder explained that this report would be the final Forward Look under the Gershon system, but cautioned that the next regime likely would be more punitive. The Council was on course for meeting all the 2006/07 savings whilst retaining the 2005/06 savings. All members would receive a copy of the Forward Look once finalised and it would be an information item at the next meeting of Cabinet.

Cabinet **NOTED** the progress and delegated authority to the Chief Executive, with the Leader and Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder for finalising the Council's Forward Look 2007/08 Annual Efficiency Statement.

11. **3-YEARLY CONSULTATION RESULTS: PLANNING SERVICE**

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder, commenting on the downward direction of travel demonstrated on the customer satisfaction survey, explained that he would be addressing the matter through the revised Service Plan, and would be monitoring the situation closely for the coming months. The planning service had already arranged for a duty officer to address casual planning enquiries and for a customer satisfaction feedback panel. Satisfaction rates for the on-line planning service continued to improve.

The Council had received a letter of congratulations from the Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government after it had exceeded all national planning standards.

Cabinet **NOTED** the disappointing findings from the survey and required the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder to ensure that the implementation of the actions in the improvement plan be monitored regularly at Portfolio Holder meetings.

Standing Items

12. **MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

Nothing to report.

13. **UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

Nothing to report.

14. **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during

consideration of part of the following item in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) (exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act).

Confidential Item

15. MILTON COUNTRY PARK - PROGRESS REPORT

The Community Development Portfolio Holder, referring to the well-attended workshop on 29 March 2007, said that there had been a general consensus that a future would be found to preserve Milton Country Park under new management arrangements. She emphasised that the District Council had sought feedback on the process to ensure the best way to secure the park's sustainable financial future. She drew attention to the reduction in running costs by over half in the past six months through the introduction of car park charging, promotion of use of the Visitors' Centre, donations and other fundraising schemes. Whilst acknowledging that some organisations had suggested an endowment as a necessity for their agreement to take on management of the park, she explained that negotiations were on-going, after which a report would go to full Council for decision.

The press and public were excluded from the remainder of the debate, which involved discussion of exempt information but did not include any additional decisions nor amendments to the recommendations.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that it approve in principle the disposal of the SCDC land in the park, and the land on a 999-year lease from the Stokes, on the basis of a 99-year lease on a peppercorn basis to the organisation who are selected to take on the management.

Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) for a negotiated expression of interest procedure to take place;
- (b) the establishment of a review / interview panel in order to select the best option for the Council; and
- (c) that the County Council be requested to confirm its willingness to dispose of its land in the park on a similar basis to South Cambs to enable the public benefit of the park to be secured.

**The Meeting ended at 12.06
p.m.**
