

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 13 April 2006

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, R Hall, JA Hockney, Mrs CA Hunt, Mrs HF Kember, Mrs CAED Murfitt, RJ Turner and Dr JR Williamson were in attendance, by invitation.

Procedural Items

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2006 as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

Declarations of Interest (Minute 2)

Councillor Mrs JM Healey was a governor of *Impington Village College*
Councillor SGM Kindersley was a governor of *Gamlingay First School*

Cambridge Office (Minute 13)

“The Finance and Resources Director explained that there was also a shortfall in the Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder’s *budget...*”

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor JD Batchelor	As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (Item 6) and as a member of Linton Parish Council (Item 10)
Councillor Mrs EM Heazell	As a homeowner whose property was in direct line of the chimney at Barrington Cement Works (Item 6)
Councillor SGM Kindersley	As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (Item 6) and Clerk to Hatley Parish Council (Item 10)
Councillor Mrs CAED Murfitt	As local member for Steeple Morden (Item 6)
Councillor RJ Turner	As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (Item 6)

**Recommendations to
Council**

3. COMPUTERISATION OF LOCAL LAND CHARGES SYSTEM

Procurement and development of a computerised Land Charges system had been under consideration two years previously, and the Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder emphasised the benefit of progressing to a cost-effective and efficient system as soon as possible. The Council could expect to realise approximately £60,000 savings per year through increased revenue from applied search fees, staff time savings and reduced costs due to increased productivity. The Head of Legal Services had understood that funding was already in place, but in reality the income generated from the increase in search fees already applied had not been ring-fenced for this purpose and thus Cabinet had to make a recommendation to Council to exceed cash limits.

Northgate / MVM was a contractor already engaged by the Council to provide software packages, and using the same system would allow integration with other services such as Environmental Health and the Contact Centre.

Cabinet **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** that:

- (a) The local land charges / local search process be fully computerised at the earliest opportunity, starting 1 May 2006;
- (b) The following variance to cash limits and the budget for 2006/07 be approved to implement and support an electronic Local Land Charges system:

Supplier		
Northgate / MVM M3		
Software and Implementation	£77,000	<i>Capital one-off</i>
Data Conversion / Additional Costs	£50,000	<i>Revenue</i>
Annual maintenance	£2,500	<i>Revenue on-going</i>
Total	£129,500	

- (c) And that a contract to be placed with Northgate / MVM for the M3 system under the provisions of Contract Standing Order 4.5 (the Council considers it desirable in the best interests of the Council that a tender be negotiated with a contractor already engaged by the Council).

4. RESOURCES FOR CHOICE BASED LETTINGS

The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that the Cabinet agreement of 8 September 2005 to implement a sub-regional choice based lettings (CBL) scheme required an 18-month fixed-term postholder to oversee the project. It was unlikely the Council would meet the government's deadlines with its existing resources.

Cabinet **RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL** that an 18-month fixed-term post of Choice Based Lettings (CBL) Project Officer be established to support the implementation of CBL, to be funded from a mix of Housing General Fund and Housing Revenue Account sources.

Decisions made by Cabinet

5. USE OF BALANCES AND RESERVES UNUSED OVER TWO YEARS

The Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the annual report on uncommitted grant balances over two years old and drew Cabinet's attention to one particular balance relating to shopping car parks, for which there had not been any annual budget provision for the last five years.

Following discussion of the four items concerning car parks, Cabinet supported the return of the £36,850 balance designated for car parks but which had been uncommitted for over two years, and acknowledged that the Housing Portfolio Holder could return to Cabinet if funds were required to complete the negotiations to sell the car parks. Cabinet assumed all car parks were in reasonable order as all were in use.

Cabinet **NOTED** that the shopping car parks balance of £36,850 would be returned to the overall General Fund Reserve and **AGREED** that the following uncommitted reserve balances over two years old be carried forward into the 2006/07 financial year:

Dual Use Capital Grants (£890,095 in total)	£575,295
Heritage Initiatives Grants	£9,511
Historic Buildings Preservation Fund (estimated)	£54,390

6. MINERALS AND WASTE DEVELOPMENT PLAN - CONSULTATION

Cabinet considered the Council's response to Cambridgeshire County Council's consultation document on issues and options for the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Minerals and Waste Local Development Framework. Cabinet was being asked to consider sites within South Cambridgeshire, but not any sites in adjacent Districts which could be located just over the borders from South Cambridgeshire villages.

Members objected to the consultation in general, as the list of specific sites had been produced without a Core Strategy and policy framework against which sites could be evaluated. In addition, the sites identified appeared to have been put forward by interested parties in what was seen to be an industry-led process. The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder noted that Environmental Health officers had strong reservations against each site and Members condemned the lack of consultation, especially considering the amount of effort the District Council had put into recycling initiatives.

Site 21: Station Quarry, Steeple Morden

The proposal was to extend the existing operation. Councillor Mrs CAED Murfitt, local member, had been on a site visit and reported that the Swiss owners of the quarry had confirmed that they would not have any money available for the village as a concession towards the extension, although they might provide a football strip for the under-10s. It was unknown whether Hertfordshire County Council had been consulted on this site.

Site 25: Smithy Fen, Cottenham

There was poor access to this site and vehicle routing would be likely to be through Cottenham village. The fen landscape would be destroyed.

Site 28: Girton

The proposal for a Household Waste Recycling Centre and Transfer Facility was causing great concern in a village which was already under significant development pressures.

Site 29: Milton

The new site would lead to massive queues back to the A14/A10 interchange. Both the existing site at Butt Lane and the proposed site were in the Green Belt.

Site 36: South of Newmarket Road, Cambridge (Area of Search)

The proposal contradicted the Cambridge East Area Action Plan and it was not made clear that it would only be suitable if Marshalls airport were relocated. The waste recovery and recycling centre was inappropriate in a high-density residential area.

Site 38: Barrington Cement Works & Quarry

This site was already the location of existing development plans and opposition to further development should be made immediately. There were fears that increased development on this site could lead to construction of a major waste facility in the future.

SS5 Site 1: Honey Hill, Horningsea (Area of Search)

Anglian Water had indicated that they could remain in their existing location with a smaller footprint and still cater for growth, but this had not been mentioned in the consultation document. The land would need decontamination before development and it was unclear whether the area would ever be safe for housing. Local residents felt that construction of a waste water treatment works on this site would have a detrimental effect on village life and affect Wicken Fen and the Bridge of Reeds project.

Consultation Process

Despite the County Council's draft plan document referring to the greater involvement of the community in the new Local Development Framework process, Parish Councils to the east of Cambridge City had found out about the proposals only via third parties, and it was through their lobbying of the County Council that the deadline for representations had been extended. Local Members had had to use the Freedom of Information Act to obtain information regarding particular sites.

The Principal Planning Policy Officer explained that waste was being generated and it was necessary to deal with it, and that a Household Waste Recycling Centre should be located near the residential location it served. She advised that consultation with Parish Councils was a requirement of the Local Development Framework.

Cabinet **AGREED** to respond to the Minerals and Waste Issues and Options consultation 2 as follows:

- (a) To object in principle to the consultation being conducted without a Core Strategy and policy framework against which to assess the sites specified;
- (b) To express concerns about the apparent lack of consultation with local residents and Parish Councils;
- (c) To comment that it is unsuitable to locate Mechanical Biological Treatment (MBT) facilities in residential areas; and
- (d) To comment that:

“There is no clear strategy included in the Waste Local Plan or proposed in the issues and options report for provision of major waste management facilities. A strategy is essential to provide a clear framework for site specific allocations for all scales of waste management facilities, from major waste management facilities to household waste recycling centres, and also any supporting uses such as waste transfer stations. This should make clear the number, nature and scale of uses proposed and their intended catchment. It should also identify the broad locations for such facilities to meet the objectives of the strategy. This will enable a more detailed site selection process to be undertaken within the context of clear strategy.

“It is understood that the County Council intends that the next stage in the Waste Local Development Framework process will include preferred options for specific sites. The District Council is concerned that this is a big step from the general approach being explored here without an intermediate consultation stage on both the overall strategy and site options. The District Council would hope to be consulted on both the strategy and options for site specific allocations before preferred sites are identified that affect South Cambridgeshire, including the major developments.

“Whilst fully endorsing the proposal to carry out a full sustainability appraisal of this plan in the future, all environmental impacts should be considered and any potential health impacts identified so that mitigation measures can be implemented where appropriate.

“As a waste collection authority the District Council would wish to ensure that the sites are suitably located in order that South Cambs can deliver its waste collection responsibilities with minimal additional cost to the authority.

“The Plan should include a sufficient number of sites as is appropriate and those sites are located to enable effective delivery of the PFI contract.

“Combined Heat and Power plant using waste derived fuel from a local source, in line with government policy, has not been identified as a possible additional option. We would welcome the addition of this option in the growth areas within the policy.

“There is concern that this consultation on specific sites is taking place in the absence of a clear strategy for minerals and waste, making comments on the suitability of some sites difficult. Also, these sites are put forward by the industry and there is no commentary from the minerals and waste authority to help provide a context for consultees to provide their comments.”

Cabinet thanked Members for the time and effort they had put into researching the issue and preparing reports.

7. **CAMBRIDGE CITIZENS' ADVICE BUREAUX GRANT**

The Community Development Portfolio Holder commended the work of the local Citizens' Advice Bureaux (CAB) and explained that the level of grant proposed for the Cambridge and District CAB exceeded the limits which could be agreed by a Portfolio Holder and was thus brought to Cabinet. She had awarded the other CAB grants mentioned in the report.

Councillor JA Hockney, Chairman of the Community, Arts and Sport Advisory Group, expressed his wish that the grant aid to the CAB continue, and expressed his disappointment at the effect of the budget cuts agreed by Council as part of the capping exercise.

Cabinet **AGREED** to award a grant of £52,060 to the Cambridge and District Citizens' Advice Bureau for 2006/07.

Cabinet **NOTED** the grants awarded by the Community Development Portfolio Holder to the other CABs and the Cambridge Independent Advice Centre for their work in South Cambridgeshire.

8. LINTON: FUTURE OF PUBLIC CAR PARK, COLES LANE

The Housing Portfolio Holder had agreed on 8 March 2006 to offer a long-term lease of the car park site to Linton Parish Council, subject to Cabinet approval, but had not been aware at that time of the issue of removing the recycling bins currently on the site or of any request by Linton Parish Council that maintenance works be undertaken before the lease was agreed. The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder explained that most car parks in the District had recycling facilities and contracts for their provision and emptying. The Housing and Environmental Services Director confirmed that all negotiations would defray as much as possible any legal costs to be incurred by the District Council.

Cabinet **AGREED** to support in principle the decision of the Housing Portfolio Holder to offer a long-term lease of the car park site off Coles Lane, Linton at nominal rent, subject to

- (a) The leaseholder being responsible for on-going maintenance and payment of National Non-Domestic Rates;
- (b) The site remaining in use as a free public car park, and
- (c) Retention of recycling facilities, either at the car park or elsewhere in the village.

9. MELBOURN: HIGH STREET - SALE OF SCDC CAR PARK TO MELBOURN PARISH COUNCIL

The Housing Portfolio Holder sought Cabinet's endorsement of her decision on 8 March 2006 to offer the High Street, Melbourn car park for sale to Melbourn Parish Council. She explained that retaining free car parking on the site reduced its value to £100,000 from a market value of the freehold interest with vacant possession of £185,000. Planning officers had already been discussing with the Parish Council plans for a small hall, Parish Council offices and Library Access Point plus necessary facilities. Parking spaces for this proposal would be a material planning consideration when an application was submitted. The existing Cambridgeshire County Council Safer Routes to School would be retained.

The Finance and Resources Director reported that approximately £3,300 had been collected in garage rents in the previous year.

Cabinet, with five in favour, one against and one abstention, **AGREED** to offer the car park site off High Street, Melbourn for sale to Melbourn Parish Council at the price of £100,000 plus legal costs, subject to the following:

- (a) That the portion of the site to be designated for parking is to remain in use as a free public parking area in perpetuity;
- (b) That the Parish Council be responsible for maintenance of the site and payment of National Non-Domestic Rates; and
- (c) That recycling facilities be retained on the site or the Parish Council provide an alternate site for their location within the village.

10. PARISH COUNCIL CHARTERS

Cabinet was asked to consider the approach to developing a Quality Charter with Parish Councils. This could set out formally the ways in which the District and Parish Councils worked together to deliver services. The Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils (CALC) had been working with the District Council to progress this agenda and a Model Charter, based on one from Cheshire, had been proposed as the basis for a similar Cambridgeshire Charter.

Bearing in mind the limited resources in the Community Development section, making work on a formal charter difficult, the Head of Community Services was prepared to attend a CALC meeting to hear Parish Councils' expectations of the District Council and to help establish ways to improve working relations. Such a meeting would also give the District Council an opportunity to explain how it worked and to correct any misinformation or misconceptions.

Members noted that parish council attendance at CALC meetings tended to be very low and Councillor Dr JR Williamson, the Council representative on CALC, commented that it would benefit from better publicity of its meetings. She asked Members to encourage their Parish Councils to attend the next meeting on 31 May. Members recommended that CALC undertake outreach work and attend parish council meetings. Councillor RF Bryant expressed his disappointment that the General Secretary of CALC had been unable to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee at which the relationship between the Council and CALC was to have been examined. The Leader encouraged the Committee to re-consider this issue and commended training sessions provided by CALC.

Cabinet **ENDORSED** the attendance of the Head of Community Services at the next South Cambridgeshire District meeting of CALC, to clarify expectations CALC, parish councils and the District Council had of each other as a basis on which to consider the provisions of a Quality Charter for Parish Councils.

11. **PREVENTATIVE TECHNOLOGY GRANT FOR LIFELINES / TELECARE OFFICER POST**

The Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trusts had offered the Council a grant for 2006/07 and 2007/08 to provide preventative technology (also known as Telecare or Assistive Technology) solutions to enable vulnerable, elderly and disabled residents to remain in their own houses. The grant would also fund a dedicated full-time officer to install and maintain the additional Telecare devices. It was confirmed that the residents would not have to operate the new technology themselves; rather the devices would respond to triggers, such as a cooker left on, and alert help.

Cabinet **AGREED** to accept the offer of grant from Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trusts for the purposes of creating a full-time post of Lifelines / Telecare Officer, initially on a fixed-term basis until 31 March 2008.

12. **RENT SERVICE STAFFING STRUCTURE**

The Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder explained that the increase in arrears levels over the past two years was now returning to normal, but that this situation highlighted the vulnerability of the service to staff sickness or other absence. He drew Cabinet's attention to the 6,500 accounts overseen by the Council's two officers, compared to the 5,000 accounts overseen by the Local Housing Association's six officers, demonstrating the workload of the Council's staff. Members commented on the stress experienced by people in this field of work, but asked that the situation be monitored. The Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder noted that Cabinet and Council had asked him to monitor the Performance Indicator for staff sickness and absence, and that this proposal was a cost-neutral solution which should further reduce that PI figure.

Cabinet **AGREED** to approve an increase in the authorised establishment of the Finance and Resources Department to provide for an additional 22 hours per week to be worked on the Rent Collection Service.

Information Items

13. HISTON: FUTURE OF CAR PARK - UPDATE

The Housing Portfolio Holder had discussed offering the car park off High Street, Histon to Histon Parish Council for a long-term lease of the site, but the Parish Council had expressed its hope for an endowment and for the District Council to accept maintenance responsibility for the lights. She had explained that the sale was part of the Council's savings exercise. Histon Parish Council was unable to commit to the lease but wished to continue discussions and review the options for the site.

Cabinet **NOTED** the result of recent discussions with Histon Parish Council regarding the future of the car park at High Street, Histon.

14. SAWSTON: FUTURE OF CAR PARK - UPDATE

Sawston Parish Council had undertaken meetings with local businesses to discuss the future of the car park, but the Housing Portfolio Holder had nothing further to report at this time. Future negotiations would include discussion of existing recycling facilities and Councillor Dr DR Bard, local Member, asked that the legal section consider the public rights of way over the car park.

Cabinet **NOTED** the current situation regarding the public car park off High Street, Sawston.

15. IEG STATEMENT

Cabinet received the sixth and final IEG Statement, which had been submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 10 April 2006, and offered congratulations to staff for meeting all the government's obligations. The Information and Customer Services Portfolio Holder explained that the IEG Statement would serve as the basis for the forthcoming Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Strategy 2006-09, which would be presented to Cabinet in June 2006.

With the IEG programme now complete, the government was turning its focus to "Transformation", with the aim of realising savings made by investment in ICT. A national advertising campaign was due to begin in May and June to encourage the use of e-government; residents' transition from a primarily phone-based service to self-service through the website was not thought to be an immediate concern, but the Council's contract for the Contact Centre did allow for staffing adjustments based on the amount of work received. In the short-term more work would be directed to the Contact Centre as part of the process re-engineering.

The Portfolio Holder confirmed that:

- (a) There would not be any further government funding for IEG;
- (b) It was not yet known whether the government would set further IEG targets, or of any of the targets to be set for its Transformation programme; and
- (c) The Council's short-term contract for a web services officer was due to finish in July and the officer had completed the transition to a new website: updates to the website now would be the responsibility of each section.

Cabinet **NOTED** the IEG Statement 2006 and the success of the IEG programme.

16. TRAVELLERS ISSUES - UPDATE ON SPENDING

Cabinet **NOTED** the report.

17. HOUSING CAPITAL ALLOCATION 2006-07

The Housing Portfolio Holder reported that the Housing Capital Allocation 2006-07 was £356,000, funding which the Council was happy to receive, although it was half the previous year's funding and the lowest possible allocation. She agreed to provide detailed information, as soon as possible, on how the money would be spent.

Cabinet **NOTED** the report and the associated variation to the capital estimates.

18. QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS (TO 31 MARCH 2006)

The Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder reminded Cabinet that they had agreed to receive this report late each quarter so that the figures were the most up-to-date available, rather than waiting to receive it the following month. He confirmed that there had been a £327,000 underspend in 2005/06 and anticipated a £1,356,000 shortfall in capital receipts.

Members queried whether the underspend could be used to help fund the concessionary bus fares scheme or whether this would create the impression that the Council had money to subsidise other authorities despite service and staffing cuts, and could prevent the government from funding the scheme properly. The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder had distributed to all members figures from a neutral third party source which claimed to show that grants to the Cambridgeshire authorities were distributed unequally, but other authorities had disputed the figures. He had written to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister detailing how the District Council had been severely underfunded and was in need of government assistance to make the scheme a success, and proposed that the £327,000 be used to fund the scheme. Cabinet acknowledged that this was a partnership scheme and was reluctant to commit to a decision before receiving confirmation of the funding already received by all Cambridgeshire authorities, and noted that there were other Council service areas which could also benefit a wide section of the population with this money: the issue had to be considered in a wider context and Cabinet noted that a review of the concessionary fares scheme was on the Scrutiny and Overview Committee's agenda programme.

The favourable predicated out-turn on the Housing Revenue Account and reduced net deficit in the Direct Labour Organisation were praised.

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

19. LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

The Chief Executive reported on a regional meeting which he and the Leader had attended to help contribute to a government White Paper on local government reorganisation, due to be published in June. He confirmed that Democratic Services were collating information on the previous reorganisation exercise as preparatory work should the current proposals go forward, and noted that the old paperwork was not available electronically. There did not appear to be any local consensus on

reorganisation, which was to be a bottom-up process, led by the local authorities, nor was any clarity provided on how the reorganisation would proceed.

Cabinet **NOTED** the report.

Standing Items

20. MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

None.

21. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

None.

22. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration 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 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act).

Confidential Item

23. GROUNDS MAINTENANCE REORGANISATION

The Housing and Environmental Services Director confirmed that the reorganisation was the result of agreements to find savings, but was an attempt to make the team more efficient without reducing the service level.

Cabinet **AGREED** to:

- (a) Delete the Operations Manager (General Works) post and make the current postholder redundant; and
- (b) Delegate authority to the Housing and Environmental Services Director to implement alternative supervisory arrangements.

COUNCILLOR MRS JM HEALEY

The Leader offered his personal thanks, and expressed gratitude on behalf of the Cabinet and Council, to Councillor Mrs JM Healey, who was standing down at the forthcoming election. He paid tribute to her years of loyal service as a Councillor and for her two years on Cabinet, noting that her efforts on behalf of her wide-ranging portfolio would have a beneficial effect on many South Cambridgeshire residents. Councillor Mrs Healey received a round of applause and remarked on how much she would miss everyone, and even long Cabinet meetings.

**The Meeting ended at 1.14
p.m.**
