

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

At a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 12 October 2006

PRESENT: Councillor Dr DR Bard (Leader of Council)
Councillor Mrs DSK Spink MBE (Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder and Deputy Leader of Council)

Councillors:	SM Edwards	Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder
	Mrs VG Ford	Community Development Portfolio Holder
	JA Hockney	Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder
	RMA Manning	Environmental Health Portfolio Holder
	Mrs DP Roberts	Housing Portfolio Holder

Councillors JD Batchelor, RF Bryant, NN Cathcart, Mrs SM Ellington, Mrs SA Hatton, Mrs CAED Murfitt, A Riley, RT Summerfield and NIC Wright were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors SGM Kindersley and Mrs HM Smith.

Procedural Items

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2006.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations were made:

Councillor JD Batchelor	As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor
Councillor Mrs DSK Spink	As the former Council representative on the board of Wysing Arts

Recommendations to Council

3. ARBURY CAMPS: SECTION 106 AGREEMENT

The Section 106 Agreement for Arbury Camps provided for drainage payment being made solely to South Cambridgeshire District Council, but a subsequent verbal agreement had been made between this Council and Cambridge City Council to share the sum proportionally according to the length of the drain. Local members had expressed concerns about the efficacy of the drain on the site and whether Anglian Water would adopt the drain.

Cabinet, having considered that there was not any urgency to make the payments and preferring that a formal legal agreement be drafted between the two authorities,

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL that a decision be **DEFERRED** until after such time as Anglian Water adopted the drain.

4. **INFORMATION & COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) STRATEGY 2006-2009**

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder introduced the strategy, noting that it was difficult to produce such a document amidst constant developments in technology. It was key to have a robust, scaleable and flexible strategy to enable residents to carry out all District Council-related business electronically if they so wished. He felt confident that the strategy would be delivered on target as the majority of infrastructure was in place and the Council was no longer as dependent on third party suppliers.

Inconsistencies in the report regarding staffing figures would be investigated and reported to Council on 26 October 2006, and the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder undertook to provide a detailed financial background on the agenda for that meeting.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that:

- (a) the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Strategy 2006-2009 be adopted; and
- (b) authority be delegated to the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder and Chief Executive for approval of any subsequent changes.

5. **THATCH AND THATCHING IN SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE**

The document, *Thatch and thatching in South Cambridgeshire*, had been subject to wide consultation. No objections had been received and all relevant comments had been incorporated. The Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder confirmed that the complete document had cost about £1.50 per copy, but would have officers investigate whether a smaller, less detailed, leaflet could be produced for the general public. Members encouraged local growth of thatching materials where possible.

The Conservation and Design section was commended for its work on producing the policy.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the document *Thatch and thatching in South Cambridgeshire* be adopted as Council policy.

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

6. **MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2011: DRAFT**

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder introduced the draft Medium Term Financial Strategy, the final version of which would establish the basis for a sustainable budget over the next five years. Members' attention was drawn to the spending pressures in Appendix 1, which required further refinement.

Priorities for 2007/08

Concern was expressed at setting a target for affordable housing completions, into

which the Council had little input as the actual build rate was dependent upon developers and the current economic climate. The Council, however, had an influence upon the percentage of residential planning permissions for affordable housing and Cabinet supported setting a target for this area.

Position on Capital

Two projections of capital spending were considered and the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder advised Cabinet that restricting the housing repair programme to necessary spending to meet Decent Homes minimum standard and other statutory requirements would benefit the General Fund for the five-year period 2007/08-2011/12, but the subsequent negative impact on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) would leave the Council worse off financially.

Draft Medium Term Financial Strategy

Cabinet acknowledged that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) had a deficit which must be addressed. To balance the strategy, it was necessary to:

- (i) reduce future spending commitments;
- (ii) maximise savings / cost reductions across all services; and
- (iii) seek external help through partnership work, developer contributions, business sector, etc.

Members acknowledged that the amount of Council Tax raised did not meet the current cost of providing services to residents and that the Council was one of the lowest-taxing authorities in the country. The authority either could continue to draw down on its reserves, which would soon run out, or could review all services to see if there were ways to achieve better value for money. Cabinet was unanimous in its support of addressing the financial situation now, rather than waiting to see if there were any changes to local government finance regulations and / or withdrawal of the capping regime. It was felt that this approach would also remove much uncertainty from staff, although there would be redundancies.

The Leader, through Cambridgeshire Horizons, had been making representations to the government, demonstrating that the growth agenda, costs of which continued to rise, could not be done on the current levels of government funding.

Councillor Mrs SA Hatton asked that officers investigate whether savings could be achieved on empty Council properties, although it was pointed out that this would be advantageous to the HRA rather than to the General Fund.

Reducing the Number of Meetings

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee previously had recommended replacement of the existing Advisory Groups with four cross-cutting panels focussing on larger service areas. Councillor NIC Wright, highlighting the increased use of delegation to reduce the Planning Committee agenda, suggested that further delegation could leave sufficient time to hold site visits and the Committee meeting on the same day. Cabinet welcomed the suggestion and noted that it was not only the number of meetings to be considered, but also their effectiveness.

Councillor A Riley expressed concern that a reduction in the number of meetings, especially proposals to halve the number of Council meetings, would leave non-executive members feeling marginalised. Councillor RF Bryant noted that, during the 2002-2003 municipal year, there had been five ordinary meetings of Council, and that the cost of meetings had been reported to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee in February of this year.

Conclusion

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder concluded that the MTFS was a working document of which the entire Council needed to take ownership as one Council working together towards a common purpose.

Cabinet urged all District Councillors to read the report and the recommendations and asked the group leaders to encourage their members to consider the seriousness of the situation. The final MTFS would be brought to Cabinet and Council in November 2006.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** approval of the posts previously approved in principle, with effect from 1 January 2007 where appropriate, otherwise from 1 April 2007.

Cabinet AGREED:

- (a) to include in the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2011 levels of future expenditure indicated in Table 2 of the report;
- (b) to retain current policies and programmes for the capital plan, as shown in Appendix 2a of the report, and to review the position further in the light of the outcome of the stock condition survey and the clarification of the future capital spending pressures in Appendix 1;
- (c) in principle, the targets in paragraph 16 (a)-(d) and (f)-(h) of the report to progress the Council's three priorities in 2007/08, to request service heads and portfolio holders to work up more quantified targets, and to seek to retain the Council's capacity to deliver these targets in the savings exercise;
- (d) adoption of the projections in Appendix 3A of the report as the basis for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2011;
- (e) to request portfolio holders and service heads to report to the November Cabinet with recommendations to meet the savings targets in Appendix 3A to the report, informed by the methodology devised last year;
- (f) to request that the further areas for savings identified in paragraph 28 of the report (together with any further suggestions from Members) be pursued;
- (g) to make approaches to the Government and Cambridgeshire Horizons as suggested in paragraph 30 of the report;
- (h) to request all service heads to produce service plans for growth areas to provide greater certainty in financial planning; and
- (i) in principle to reduce the number of council meetings to 50% of the current levels.

Cabinet **NOTED** the scale of future spending pressures on the Council as indicated in Appendix 1 to the report.

Senior Management Team was commended for its full, frank and honest report of the Council's current financial position.

Decisions made by Cabinet

7. ADMINISTRATION OF THE LOW COST HOME OWNERSHIP REGISTER

The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that transferring responsibility for the administration of the Low Cost Home Ownership (LCHO) Register to Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association would free up officer time for higher priority work and would enable residents searching for such housing to visit a "one-stop shop" to look for

suitable properties across local authority boundaries, rather than having to register separately with each authority. All other authorities in the Cambridge and Bedford sub-region had joined the scheme, and it was expected that all Registered Social Landlords would as well. Funding was guaranteed only for the first two years, but the Housing Portfolio Holder was confident that there would be future support and financing available, although the service could be taken back in-house if not.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) responsibility for the administration of the Low Cost Home Ownership Register be transferred to Bedfordshire Pilgrims Housing Association as the Housing Corporation / Department of Communities and Local Government-appointed Homebuy agenda for the Cambridge Sub-region for the period 1 October 2006 to 31 March 2008;
- (b) the service level agreement attached as an Appendix to the report form the basis for the terms of the arrangement, subject to correction of grammatical errors; and
- (c) options for the administration of the LCHO Register beyond March 2008 be brought forward for consideration by no later than January / February 2008.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

The Council sought to eliminate or control significant risk to an acceptable level. Identified strategic risks had been translated into a matrix and action plans were in the process of being prepared for those falling above the "Risk Tolerance Line". Cabinet supported the forthcoming risk management training on 16 November, which was being provided free of charge by the Council's insurers, and urged all Members to attend the session.

Cabinet **AGREED**:

- (a) the risk management process in operation at the Council, including the requirement for Cabinet and other relevant Members to participate in associated training;
- (b) the Risk Scenarios provided at Appendix A to the report, the Prioritisation Matrix provided at Appendix B and the Strategic Risk Register provided at Appendix C; and
- (c) the utilisation of staff recently trained to assist service managers in compiling and managing future service area risk registers, which would incorporate any significant operational risk matters arising in those service areas.

9. BOURN: WYSING ARTS - ARTS CAPITAL GRANT 2006-07

The Wysing Arts Centre at Bourn was within £40,000 of the £1.4 million required to complete phase 1a of their major building works project, to which the Council had already contributed £205,000. The Community Development Portfolio Holder confirmed that the director of Wysing Arts had secured match funding of £20,000, mostly through private donors, but that the project would fail without the contribution from the District Council. The building works were scheduled to begin in November 2006, and, with demolition of the derelict buildings already completed, Wysing Arts could not return to its previous operation. The Arts Council had undertaken a strict review and would not approve the progression of the development unless funding had been secured.

Following cuts to the arts revenue budget in the previous municipal year, Wysing Arts had become a major service provider for organisations which previously had received District Council funding. The Community Development Portfolio Holder emphasised that this would be a one-off grant and it would be made very clear to the recipient that no further grants could be expected. There was £80,000 allocated in the budget for arts

capital funding, from which it was likely over £40,000 would be unallocated by the end of the financial year even if this grant were approved.

There was support for awarding the grant, as it was planned spending and within the budget, but concerns were expressed about the impression the public could form if they did not distinguish between revenue savings on services and capital expenditure on this grant. Queries were raised about contributions from other local authorities and Members were reminded that South Cambridgeshire residents used facilities in other districts which were funded wholly or partly by other authorities. The Community Development Portfolio Holder, in response to concerns that the funding could be used for village halls, explained that separate budgets existed for sports grants and for village halls but that few applications had been received for these funds.

Cabinet, with five in favour, one against and one abstention, **AGREED**, subject to match funding of £20,000 by Wysing Arts Centre being raised, to award a final contribution of £20,000, bringing the total grant award for Phase One to £225,000. It was emphasised that, in light of the Council's financial situation, this would be the last grant which could be made.

10. NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING PANELS

Cabinet received an update on the development of Neighbourhood Policing Panels, which had now been established in Histon and Sawston. Turnout had been high at the meetings and public feedback had been very positive. The Youth Parliament Representative on the Local Strategic Partnership had been very enthusiastic about the panel as a positive way for youth to be involved with setting policing priorities in their villages.

The police were very constrained in terms of available staff, and there was disappointment expressed that the third panel, for Cambourne, where there were a significant number of issues, likely would not be established until December 2006 or January 2007. The police had given an assurance that the full scheme would be rolled out by July 2007. At present, John Fuller, Community Engagement Officer, Cambridgeshire Constabulary, was leading the panels, supported by Inspector Paul Ormerod and the Head of Community Services.

Councillor RMA Manning was concerned that the panels could become a venue for discussion rather than action; the Head of Community Services explained that the meetings resulted in public-led policing priorities by allowing attendees to vote on the issues they felt were most important in their area, after which the police had the responsibility to address the priorities.

Cabinet **AGREED** to:

- (a) endorse the draft Terms of Reference for the Neighbourhood Policing Panels;
- (b) approve the programme for setting up the remaining three panels, in around November 2006, March and June 2007, with a proposal for Cambourne to be the next panel;
- (c) seek lead council officers to work with the police leads once each panel has been established; and
- (d) review neighbourhood policing and neighbourhood panels in Autumn 2007.

11. FLEXI-TIME

Cabinet supported reinstating the previous flexi-time entitlement, noting the effect its withdrawal had had on staff morale, recruitment and retention.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) the decision to cap the number of flexi-days be reversed and, with effect from 1 November 2006, within the parameters of the scheme, entitlement of up to one flexi-day leave per four-week accounting period be reintroduced;
- (b) line managers adopt a more pro-active approach to the application of the scheme; and
- (c) the flexi-time scheme remain an integral part of the Council's commitment to flexible working practices in line with the recruitment and retention strategy.

12. **COTTENHAM: APPOINTMENT OF CONTRACTOR - PINE VIEW, SMITHY FEN**

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder confirmed that the Planning Sub-Committee had agreed, at its meeting on 11 October 2006, to take direct action pursuant to Section 178 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 to enforce the provisions of an Enforcement Notice and High Court Injunction to remove sheds, caravans and hard standing from Pine View, Smithy Fen.

Cabinet **AGREED** that the agents used in previous direct action preparations be appointed as preferred contractors for the taking of enforcement action at Pine View, Smithy Fen, Cottenham, in accordance with Contract Standing Order 4.5.

13. **DISCRETIONARY COMPENSATION REGULATIONS**

The Chief Executive explained that the agenda item had been drafted in anticipation of the Government withdrawing the *Local Government (Early Termination of Employment) (Discretionary Compensation) (England and Wales) Regulations 2000* but, despite the Government having advised that this would be done on 1 October 2006 to remove the conflict with the new Age Discrimination legislation, the withdrawal has been postponed. It was unclear whether or not the withdrawal, when it did occur, would be retrospective to 1 October 2006. Members were advised that there were not any expected employment situations under which these regulations could be applied.

Cabinet **DEFERRED** until November 2006 a decision on Discretionary Compensation Regulations.

Information Item

14. **QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORT INCLUDING BUDGETARY CONTROL AND PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS**

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder provided an overview of the quarterly monitoring report and drew Members' attention to the significant increase in underspends since the previous quarter, arising primarily from vacancies, lower than expected energy bills, additional savings on refuse collection and street cleaning, higher than anticipated interest rates and interest on £7 million owed to the Council by the Government on the pooling of business rates. The refuse collection and street cleaning team was commended for identifying £50,000 additional savings. These additional underspends had been identified in time to inform the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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.

Standing Items

15. MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Concern was expressed that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee had not referred any strategic or policy issues, or matters raised by monitors attending portfolio holder meetings, but rather had made a recommendation on the seating arrangements for Cabinet. Cabinet hoped that there would be input from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on the Medium Term Financial Strategy and felt that there was scope for learning by example from other authorities whose Scrutiny Committees were well recognised.

To limit the amount of officer time spent setting up meeting rooms, Cabinet preferred that there not be any particular layout required for its meetings as long as the tables were positioned in such a way to allow Cabinet members to see one another.

16. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

None.

**The Meeting ended at 1.04
p.m.**
