

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 8 March 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
JA Hockney Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning
Portfolio Holder
MP Howell Environmental Health Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Holly Adams	Democratic Services Officer
Steve Hampson	Executive Director
Greg Harlock	Chief Executive
Denise Lewis	Head of Housing Strategic Services
Simon McIntosh	Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships)
Kelly Quigley	Communications Officer
Dale Robinson	Corporate Manager (Health & Environmental Services)

Councillors JD Batchelor, RF Bryant, EW Bullman, R Hall, Mrs CAED Murfitt, CR Nightingale, Mrs HM Smith, RT Summerfield and Dr SEK van de Ven were in attendance, by invitation.

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 February 2007.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following personal interests were declared:

Councillor MP Howell	As a smoker (minute 9)
Councillor RT Summerfield	As a member of Milton Parish Council and Milton Community Centre (minute 8)

Recommendation to Council

3. INVESTMENT STRATEGY

The Council's current investment strategy continued to prove successful and the authority remained debt-free. Cabinet congratulated officers for their excellent work

managing finances.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Investment Strategy be approved.

Decisions made by Cabinet

4. **ARBURY PARK: SUSTAINABLE LETTINGS POLICY**

A nominations and management agreement, setting out how affordable homes would be let or sold to qualifying households, was essential to meet the aims and objections of the joint housing strategy for Arbury Park, and would take into account lessons learned at Cambourne. The design of homes meeting a minimum Eco-homes standard of "Very Good" and the water conservation measures were welcomed and could serve as best practice for future developments. A new Youth Bus was being organised specifically for growth areas before other facilities were in place.

Cabinet **AGREED** that the Nominations and Management Agreement *Building a Sustainable Community at Arbury Park* be approved as the associated local lettings policy.

5. **9-MONTH (APRIL TO DECEMBER 2006) CORPORATE MILESTONES**

The nine-month report on progress towards achievement of the 2006/07 corporate milestones was received and the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder drew attention to the move from critical to non-critical a delay for the improvement of customer service. This had been caused by external circumstances surrounding integration of the CRM software at the contact centre, which now was being progressed with a go-live date of 7 June 2007: CRM integration would allow contact centre agents to have all customer information from back office programmes available on one screen, improving the opportunity for customers to have all their issues dealt with at the first point of contact.

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder noted that the Local Development Framework had been formally adopted in January 2007. Today was the final day for receipt of objections to the Core Strategy; no objections had been received so far.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) the remaining 13 (48%) of the 2006/07 milestones be included in the appropriate 2007/08 Service Plans and be monitored in quarterly reports in 2007/08; and
- (b) officers give high priority to recruitment to posts to avoid prolonged vacancies, where the vacancy would have adverse implications for the achievement of council priorities.

Cabinet **NOTED** that 14 (52%) of the 27 2006/07 milestones would be completed within the 2006/07 period.

6. **9-MONTH (APRIL TO DECEMBER 2006) CORPORATE PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Council was on schedule to achieve 76% of its performance indicator targets, an improvement since the six-month report at which time it had been assumed that only

71% of targets would be met. Portfolio Holders explained that:

- BV111 (Planning Satisfaction Survey) – an action plan was in place to address the downward direction of travel within the next six months;
- BV12 (Working days / shifts lost to sickness absence) – the figures from 2004/05 were higher than usual in light of the impact on staff morale of the capping decision, and it was expected that there could be a similar impact from the Corporate Governance Inspection, although the situation was being actively managed. Long-term sickness did affect the figures, but could not be separated from the overall totals;
- BV199b (% of land / highways with visible graffiti) – the Council had employed an independent investigator to report on this target, which had resulted in a higher amount of graffiti reported than was the case with local authorities using internal resources, but at the same time was a procedure now being examined by the Audit Commission as an example of best practice which could be recommended for use country-wide;
- BV218b (% abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours) – officers were investigating using other staff to help meet this target;
- BV79a (% of cases for which the calculation of the amount of benefit due was correct) – although some authorities did not include payments of under £1 difference from the correct amount as an error, the Council counted every error no matter how small, which did have an effect on this PI, but which also gave a more accurate and honest picture;
- BV82ai (% waste sent for recycling) and BV82aii (tonnage of waste sent for recycling) – the improvement in these areas was due largely to the publicity from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Waste and Environment Forum. There was an anomaly that the Council was to promote home composting, but then was not allowed to include the levels of home composting in its totals;
- SE203 (% of Environmental Health complaints responded to within 3 working days) – this referred to the main contact with the complainant to begin the investigation process. There were other targets for resolving specific types of complaint, depending on their severity;
- SF731 (% Contact Centre calls abandoned by the caller) – a system failure had prevented the information from being obtained, but the disaster recovery procedures in place had worked properly and it was not anticipated that there would be any impact on the targets. When compared with the private sector, the Contact Centre performance was excellent;
- SH311 (Number of affordable housing of all types and tenures completed) – this target would be revised in the coming year to reflect what the Council was doing rather than measuring external performance over which the Council had little control;
- The Scrutiny and Overview Committee would be reviewing the Complaints and Compliments Process on 15 March;
- The existing performance management system (PIMMS) would be replaced shortly with a system which would allow Portfolio Holders to manage actively targets earlier in the year.

Members were reminded of a Service First workshop on 28 March 2007.

Cabinet congratulated the collection service for excellent results.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) targets for 2007/08 remain at the level of government minimum standards;
- (b) Portfolio Holders use their meetings to monitor implementation of the improvement measures in the various Service Plans;
- (c) Portfolio Holders work with the service planning managers to ensure that plans

- are robust and clearly set out to help achieve the Council's 2007/08 priorities;
and
- (d) lessons learnt be accepted as a means of helping ensure that appropriate plans be set and successfully implemented for 2007/08.

Cabinet **REQUESTED** that the Scrutiny and Overview Committee monitor progress, at least annually, to ensure that the three-year targets be achieved.

Cabinet **NOTED** the progress on performance indicators after the first nine months of 2006/07, with 76% projected to be on target.

7. **COMMUNITY STRATEGY 2007-2010**

The forthcoming Sustainable Community Strategy 2007-2010 took account of the Local Government White Paper and the recommendations from the Corporate Governance Inspection. The current strategy, 2003-2006, had six aims, but the forthcoming strategy would reduce this to four to better focus resources. The Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder confirmed that the process had begun to create a post for a dedicated officer to support the community strategy, a report on which would be coming to Cabinet in April 2007.

Cabinet **AGREED** that the emerging priorities for the Sustainable Community Strategy be taken into account in developing new priorities for the Council.

Cabinet **REQUESTED** that all members take advantage of opportunities to take part in the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

Cabinet **NOTED** the progress on the development of the Sustainable Community Strategy and the timetable to complete the strategy in time to influence the Local Area Agreement from April 2008.

8. **MILTON COUNTRY PARK - LAND OWNERSHIP**

In order for a new manager to run the park, Cabinet approval, in principle, was required for the transfer of the Council's land to another agency. Cambridgeshire County Council would have to undertake a legal process to ensure that transfer of their land ownership at the Park was the best outcome for a public asset. There would be a workshop on 29 March 2007 for a number of bodies who were keen to take forward management of Milton Country Park.

The Leader emphasised that the Council had never suggested that any part of Milton Country Park be released for development.

Cabinet thanked the Corporate Manager (Policy, Performance and Partnerships) and his team for their work on Milton Country Park and dealing with public concerns.

Cabinet would **SUPPORT** the principle of transferring the Council's land within Milton Country Park to a new agency, to enable that agency to take on the park's management, subject to a full consideration of the nature of such a disposal bring brought to a future Cabinet for decision, taking into account the views of other agencies.

9. **STAFF TO IMPLEMENT THE HEALTH ACT 2006 (SMOKE FREE REGULATIONS)**

The proposal to employ two additional members of staff temporarily to implement the requirements of the Health Act 2006 (Smoke Free legislation) would be cost-neutral as

the funding would be covered by government grant. Learning from experience in Scotland and Ireland, the Council intended to implement the requirements initially through raising awareness of the new legislation.

Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) an increase in the Staffing Establishment by one full-time equivalent (FTE) for a twelve-month period and one FTE for a six-month period; and
- (b) that, in order that appointments not be delayed, delegated authority be given to Senior Management Team to agree the salary scale and post titles to be applied with the Human Resources Manager following the outcome of job evaluations.

10. PRIVATE HIRE AND HACKNEY CARRIAGE VEHICLES: AMENDMENTS TO LICENSING CONDITIONS

The Licensing Committee had considered thoroughly the proposed licensing conditions for private hire and hackney carriage vehicles at its meeting on 20 February 2007.

Cabinet **AGREED** to adopt the Vehicle Licensing Conditions with effect from 1 April 2007.

11. PRIVATE HIRE AND HACKNEY CARRIAGE DRIVERS: ADOPTION OF DRIVING TEST

The proposals for adoption of the driving test were in line with those of other authorities and would demonstrate that the driver had met more than just the minimum standards required. Almost all private hire and taxi firms consulted supported the recommendations.

Cabinet **AGREED** that, with effect from 23 April 2007, all new applicants or existing drivers who have allowed their licences to lapse in any manner be required to undertake and pass the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) test for Private Hire and Hackney Carriages before being granted a licence by South Cambridgeshire District Council, except:

- (a) where an applicant for a Private Hire or Hackney Carriage driver's licence has successfully completed all the Go Skills vocational qualification modules; and / or
- (b) where an applicant already holds the Institute of Advanced Motoring qualification or RoSPA advanced driving test, the DSA driving test shall be waived.

12. PRIVATE HIRE AND HACKNEY CARRIAGE APPLICATIONS: DRIVER GUIDELINES

The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder explained that the Council intended to take the toughest stance possible with regards to applicants previously convicted of indecency offences. The Council could not ban applicants for life, but instead would recommend that applications should not be considered until three years from the end of the period of any sentence awarded by a court, whether that sentence had been served in full or not. This would not guarantee that the applicant would automatically be approved, just that such a person would be able to apply for a licence; other policies and procedures were in place governing the application process and an unsuccessful applicant could appeal to a sub-committee of the Licensing Committee and / or to Magistrates' Court.

The Corporate Manager (Health and Environmental Services) agreed to amend the list of indecency offences to include indecent exposure with intent to insult a male and indecent assault on a male, if such offences were recognised legally.

Cabinet **AGREED** to adopt the Private Hire / Hackney Carriage Driver Application Guidelines with effect from 1 April 2007, with delegated authority granted to the Environmental Health Portfolio Holder and Corporate Manager (Health and Environmental Services) to make any relevant amendments to the list of indecency offences.

13. PRIVATE HIRE DRIVER: LICENSING CONDITIONS

A private hire driver would not be required to disclose any on-the-spot fines for driving offences via the CRB check, although these could be noted when the Council received updated licence information from the DVLA if such a fine resulted in points being taken from a licence.

Cabinet thanked the licensing team for their work preparing all the private hire and hackney carriage reports.

Cabinet **AGREED** to adopt the Private Hire Driver Licensing Conditions with effect from 1 April 2007.

Information Items

14. CAPITAL POOLING RECEIPTS - UPDATE

Since April 2004 Local Authorities have been required to send part of the receipts from the sale of Housing Revenue Account (HRA) assets to the government, where the funds were redistributed for housing purposes across the country on the basis of need, a process known as "pooling". It had been expected that receipts from equity share sales would be exempt from pooling from October 2006, but it now was unlikely that these exemptions would come into force until 1 April 2008. A robust and prudent strategy, intended to minimise the impact on the capital reserves, would be devised and brought to full Council for decision.

The Chief Executive explained that there was not any guidance on what was considered an appropriate balance for the capital reserves, nor any firm guidance on reserves in general: the target figure of £1.5 million in revenue reserves had been calculated by officers and external auditors as the appropriate level based on the income and expenditure of the authority.

Cabinet **NOTED** the update on capital receipts pooling.

Standing Items

15. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE INSPECTION

The Chief Executive updated members on progress:

- Officers continued to work towards the achievement of an Improvement Plan, with two meetings held so far and completion of the stakeholder analysis. Areas of work had been allocated over eight workstreams which would be led by senior officers and aggregated to form the Improvement Plan;
- The eight service leads were consulting with members about particular areas and

there would be opportunities for members and officers to participate at workshops before the Improvement Board meeting on 29 March. The Improvement Board, membership of which had been agreed by Council on 22 February, would then consider the Improvement Plan, for consideration by Cabinet on 12 April and approval by Council on 26 April;

- The officer-level team was keen to agree any new posts identified as urgent for progression of the Plan: already identified was the Local Strategic Partnership Officer and a Scrutiny Support Officer, the latter of which could be seconded from IDeA or Building Capacity East;
- Negotiations were underway with a neighbouring authority for secondment of an officer to serve as Improvement Manager;
- The Audit Commission had written to confirm that it did not intend to refer the Council to the Secretary of State, but this was conditional upon the Improvement Plan being submitted by 30 April with the endorsement of the Improvement Monitoring Board;
- A follow-up Corporate Governance Inspection would take place later in 2007/08; and
- Scrutiny and Overview training and analysis of the scrutiny function would begin on 15 March.

16. MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Nothing to report.

17. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Nothing to report.

**The Meeting ended at 11.39
a.m.**
