

CABINET

At a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 18 December 2003

PRESENT: Councillor RT Summerfield, Deputy Leader in the Chair

Councillors: Dr DR Bard Planning & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
CC Barker Environmental Health Portfolio Holder
JD Batchelor Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder
RF Collinson Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder
Mrs EM Heazell Housing Portfolio Holder and Liberal Democrat Group
Leader
Mrs DP Roberts Community Development Portfolio Holder

Councillors RF Bryant, R Hall, SGM Kindersley and Mrs GJ Smith were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs DSK Spink, Leader and Conservation Portfolio Holder.

Procedural Items

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 27th November 2003 subject to the following amendments:

Council Tax Discounts and Exemptions (Minute 3)

Paragraph 4.

“A vote was therefore taken on recommendation a) and Cabinet, with four in favour, one against and two abstentions recommended to Council...”

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Dr DR Bard declared a personal interest in item 12 (Sawston Arts Capital Grant 03/04) as a governor of Sawston College.

Decisions made by the Cabinet and reported for information

3. CAMBRIDGE SUB-REGION INFRASTRUCTURE PARTNERSHIP

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder explained that growth in the Cambridge Sub-Region and the District in particular was one of the most important issues likely to face the Council in the forthcoming years. Central government required a cross cutting vehicle to deliver this growth, and there was a choice between agreement among the local authorities or an imposed solution. The proposed solution was a Limited Liability Partnership with a Board including local authority representatives. This was a development of existing informal structures and the Board would not be making new policy, although it would have some compulsory purchase powers in order to bring

forward development sites. Councillor Dr Bard advised that the Board would proceed and that the Council would therefore be excluded if it did not join.

Key points made in discussion were:

- £20.4 million of government money had already been agreed to be passed to the partnership
- The Council had been involved from the start of the infrastructure partnership
- This Council should ask for two representatives on the Board given that it was the infrastructure of this District that was most affected
- Concern over the high salary to be paid to the CEO of the partnership
- Concern regarding Compulsory Purchase powers
- The Council would lose some control over the planning process
- Concern over water supplies
- Concern that Developers were excluded from the board membership
- There would be significant impact on additional levels of staffing required within planning if this Council was to meet rapid development targets. (56% increase)
- It was pointless for Fenland District Council to have a seat on the board when all the development targets fell outside of the Fenland District
- The board member should produce reports for Cabinet on key issues and minutes of Board meetings should be presented

Kevin Scobell from Cambridgeshire County Council and Keith Miles, Planning Policy Manager commented that:

- The partnership was a good device to attract government funding and the most representative model, giving local authorities in Cambridgeshire a 40% share of representation instead of the normal 20%. The Government would not agree an increase in local authority membership
- The salary to be paid to the CEO would be funded out of the £20.4 million already secured and that the person appointed would need substantial working knowledge of Whitehall to cut through bureaucracy
- Compulsory Purchase Orders were essential to speed up development rates
- Powers over planning applications would not be taken away from planning authorities: the aim of the Partnership Board was to produce overall plans and programmes for service provision. Nevertheless the Board would make decisions the Council would have to accept.
- The Board would have a "Section 106 Negotiator" to ensure more funding was provided not only for peripheral items but for affordable housing
- The Housing Providers forum included Developers and building contractors
- In terms of major infrastructure, it was believed that the Highways Agency and the Water companies for example, would reflect the development work of the partnership within their own internal programmes
- Assurances had been received that water supply and drainage could be managed.
- A deregulated market for the supply of water may encourage other providers into the county
- English Partnerships were a Government appointed organisation responsible for re-generation. A new remit recently added to their portfolio was to help development in growth areas. They had significant funding to distribute within these areas.
- The SCDC contribution of £30,000 per year was a voluntary contribution that was proportional to the amount of housing required in each district. All partners would contribute.

Infrastructure Partnership Board membership

Board members would be named directors of a company. This would make direct

substitutes for absent board members legally impossible. It was possible to have substitutes to attend but not vote at meetings but this would need to be verified at the inaugural meeting of the infrastructure partnership. It was noted that in some circumstances alternate directors were provided for in constitutions.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** that

- (a) The formal establishment of the Cambridge Sub-Region Infrastructure Partnership be agreed on the basis that the Council is given at least one seat on the Partnership Board.
- (b) The possibility of substitutes be investigated
- (c) Councillor Mrs DSK Spink, as leader of the Council, be the representative on this board.

4. ACCESS TO SERVICES - BEST VALUE REVIEW

The review report focussed on ways to improve face-to-face contact with services users, demonstrate that the Council was professional, had a policy in place and was customer focussed. Cabinet was asked to consider issues such as customer care standards and the Council's future strategy for improving access to services and the Policy and Performance Manager outlined the main points of the report.

Cabinet raised the following overall issues with the report:

- Some of the measures of quantity in paragraph 3.1.1 were queried as not giving a true reflection of the extent of public contact and it was requested that the paragraph should refer to examples of the service
- The use of the national average wage figure was not particularly helpful within South Cambridgeshire District due to its economic structure. It was noted that the district was said to have the highest number of people without basic skills in the county

The Policy and Performance Review Manager agreed that he would make amendments to the review document before it went into the public domain notably:

- 3.1.1 "The main examples of services concerned are:"
- The rent collection figure would be verified by the Finance and Resources Director
- 3.3.7 Teversham would be included in the list of villages as the Health Authority presentation showed this to be the district's most deprived village

Cabinet then considered the recommendations regarding core Corporate Customer Service standards (paragraph 8.4.4). Concern was expressed about item b) that "voicemail will not be used during office hours" and calls would be forwarded to ensure they were always answered. There was dissent about this item:

On the one hand it was frustrating and, for some, worrying not to be able to talk to someone; even more so if a message were not returned. On the other, there could be resource implications if offices had to be staffed at all times and some officers were lone specialists where it could be unhelpful for someone else to attempt to answer their calls. It was noted that the purpose of the contact centre was to minimise the number of calls to the back offices.

In response to accusations about the length of time the review had taken and the resources it was seeking, the Chief Executive commented that the review was started in

August 2002 and had been fitted around existing work. Apart from the two new posts recommended, which would be considered in the CIP process, there was no significant cost to taking up the recommendations in this report; it was more about changing the ways of working. It was unrealistic to assume that the use of voicemail could be abandoned entirely but it must be used properly. There was also a need for consistent standards throughout the Council. Management Team supported the general thrust of the report.

Councillor Mrs GJ Smith was invited to comment as a member of the review team and emphasised that the report contained only what the team felt to be realistic.

Cabinet, with five votes in favour and two against,

AGREED

- (a) That the proposed critical success factors be supported in the introduction and monitoring of the Contact Centre, Cambridge Office and Cambourne HQ (Para 4.2.4 and following).
- (b) That the proposed corporate customer service standards (Para 8.4.4) be supported, including the following amendment to 8.4.4 b) proposed by Councillor RF Collinson: "Voicemail will not be used where ever possible or practical. When away from their desk, officers will normally use forwarding or hunt groups to ensure their calls will be answered
- (c) The importance of a co-ordinated approach to customer care across the Council.
- (d) The importance of working with the Local Strategic Partnership in the development of improved access to services in villages through village hubs and support in principle to exploring video conferencing as a means of making the Council more accessible.
- (e) That the Improvement Plan and proposed Performance Indicators (Appendices 1 and 2) be supported, subject to the outcome of the Cabinets CIP's meeting on the 8th of January 2004.
- (f) That the request for priority in paragraph 4.5.2 c) of the report be excluded from the decision pending the Cabinet meeting of the 8th of January.

5. CONSULTATION STRATEGY

It was noted that it was increasingly important for the Council to adopt a more consistent and joined up approach to consultation so that: -

- The results of consultation are shared and used
- The results can be brought together to show common threads and changes over time
- Consistent standards are applied
- Opportunities can be taken to carry out joint consultation to achieve cost savings and avoid duplication.

A draft consultation strategy was presented and Cabinet

RESOLVED that the Consultation Strategy as presented in the Appendix be adopted.

The request to support a CIP bid of £20,000 to support a corporate approach to customer satisfaction surveys and the reporting of the results was deferred to the Cabinet meeting of the 8th January 2004.

6. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY 2004 - 2007

The proposed communications strategy was presented, the purpose of which was to maximise the contribution that communications makes to achieving Council objectives and in particular to:

- Develop awareness of the Council's objectives and values within the Council and with the Council and stakeholders.
- Build a strong image and identity for the Council to enable it to develop effective partnerships to work in the interests of the district.
- To encourage people to see the Council as relevant to their lives and to be involved in democratic processes.
- To achieve increased levels of satisfaction of the public, organisations, parish councils and staff with the quality, honesty, timing and accessibility of the information they receive from the Council and about its services.
- To be innovative in the use of new technology and means of communication to achieve the Council's communication aims cost-effectively.

Cabinet **RESOLVED**

that the Communications Strategy 2004 – 2007 be adopted.

7. CAPITAL AND REVENUE ESTIMATES FOR THE STAFFING AND CENTRAL OVERHEAD ACCOUNTS

These estimates were presented for approval, subject to additional adjustments arising from consideration of the Continuous Improvement Plans. The Resources and Staffing Portfolio Holder reported that he and the Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee had discussed these in detail with the Finance and Resources Director. He commented that the staffing and central overhead estimates represented 70% of the total budget and that this year expenditure should be within £80,000 of the estimate.

Cabinet raised the following overall issues with the report:

- In paragraph 34 there was inconsistency in the naming of the Depot. For clarity, the Commercial Services Director wished the site to be referred to as the Waterbeach Depot, even though it was located in Landbeach parish.
- Concern that an individually recorded voting system was not part of the new specification at Cambourne: this would be a matter for Council to decide as the contract allowed for replacement like for like

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to:

- (a) Approve the inflation figure of 2.5% generally and 3.5% for pay awards, on which all the estimates are being prepared (paragraph 8)
- (b) Approve the revenue estimates and recharges as presented and shown at Appendix A and Appendix B; and
- (c) Approve the capital programme up to 2006/07 as shown at Appendix C.

8. MONITORING OF COUNCIL 03/04 PRIORITIES SECOND QUARTER - APRIL TO SEPTEMBER 2003

Cabinet considered the position at December 2003 of those priority performance indicators that it appeared were likely to fail to meet their target. Several comments were made:

- Some targets were hard to achieve as many factors which govern them were external to the Council,

- Targets could not be changed this year but the Council could look to build on its' experience when the priorities were set the following year
- The Housing Portfolio Holder noted that the B&B figures were not truly reflective of each year as they could refer to accommodation provided up to two years previously
- BV8 was for undisputed invoices only

The Deputy Leader asked portfolio holders to concentrate their efforts on the PIs where targets would not be met.

9. COLLECTIVE CABINET RESPONSIBILITY

At the inception of Cabinet, it had been agreed that "Cabinet members must not disagree with agreed Cabinet policy outside Cabinet meetings." The CPA peer review team had raised concerns with this policy being applied to matters that were recommendations to Council. They feared that it could deny Council, when making the final decision, access to the most informed opposing. Cabinet was requested by the Constitution Review Working party to review this decision.

Councillor CC Barker proposed on behalf of the Leader Councillor Mrs DSK Spink, seconded by Councillor Bard, that the item be deferred until she could be present.

Deferral to the first possible meeting in the New Year was **AGREED** with four in favour and two against and one abstention.

10. INTEGRATED RECYCLING AND REFUSE COLLECTION SERVICE - KITCHEN BIN ARRANGEMENTS

The delivery of kitchen bins had been delayed following publication of the Animal By-Products Order in July, which prohibited the inclusion of kitchen waste in the green bins pending a licence being granted to enable the composting of kitchen waste. The Council had purchased 27,500 kitchen bins already, on which it was currently paying insurance, but had suspended its order for a further 28,500. The Waste Management Advisory Group had considered the options and supported the distribution of the 27,500 bins through collection sites, with a decision on purchasing further bins being made at a later date if the demand necessitated.

The Chief Environmental Health officer explained that:

- The bins would be provided at no cost to householders but could only be distributed after the Veterinary Service had approved the Donarbon site.
- There would be many distribution points
- Any members who know of specific sheltered housing sites or specific families that would benefit from the bins to contact Environmental Health who will deliver them
- The Council would own the two additional lorries that would be purchased with the money not used to fund kitchen bins for every household and Clean away and SCDC would each pay for the maintenance costs of one vehicle.
- The Donarbon decision relating to the Animal By-Products Order was expected in the New Year. If the decision was delayed until after the move to Cambourne, contingency plans were in place for the continued storage of the bins although it was hoped the decision would come before May 2004.

Cabinet **RESOLVED** to:

- (a) Reverse the decision to provide all households with a kitchen bin and

- (b) Once kitchen waste can be included in the green bin, arrange to distribute the existing stock of 27,500 kitchen bins to South Cambridgeshire residents from a suitable number of publicised collection points in the district at no charge, on a first come/first served basis, one kitchen bin per household, until the existing stock is used.
- (c) Postpone a decision on the purchase of the remaining 28,500 bins until the demand for kitchen bins can be assessed.

11. SHIRE HOMES CONTRACTS

Cabinet was advised of the decision to re-let housing service and works contracts and

RESOLVED that delegated authority be given to the Portfolio Holders for Housing and Resources and Staffing to:

- (a) Let housing service and works contracts in accordance with legal requirements, and contractual evaluation terms appropriate to ensure a price/ quality balance when the work is awarded to the successful contractor.
- (b) Decide whether or not, in regard to the gas and oil heating contract to opt for a negotiated contract renewal, in line with OJEC legislative requirements, in place of a traditional competitive process.

12. ARTS CAPITAL GRANT AID 2003-2004 (SAWSTON VILLAGE COLLEGE)

Cabinet was asked to approve capital grant aid to provide:

- A visual arts work exhibition space, to a professional standard, managed and programmed by users of the College.
- New stage curtains, lighting and sound equipment for the Assembly Hall
- A fully sprung dance floor in the new building.
- The building programme will be complete by March 2004.

RESOLVED to award an arts capital grant of £50,000 to Sawston Village College, subject to the submission of an approved business plan in accordance with the terms of the Arts Dual Use Strategy and the commitment of the Village College to a service level agreement.

Councillor Dr DR Bard did not vote.

13. REPRESENTATIVE TO EAST OF ENGLAND TOURISM COUNCIL

Noting that the Cambridgeshire Councils Association had recently appointed Councillor RF Collinson as its representative on the Tourist Board, Cabinet

AGREED that Councillor Collinson, as the portfolio holder with responsibility for tourism, be appointed as the Council's representative on the East of England Regional Tourism Council forthwith.

Information Item

14. BUILDING CONTROL SERVICES - INTERIM POLICY MEASURES - STATUS REPORT

The Building Control Manager gave an update on the Building Control Service following the suspension of the Building Control Policy and the successful implementation of interim measures in January 2003 during an extended period of severe understaffing.

Members commented that the implication in the report was that Building Control was still understaffed and that the volume of work might mean not 100% of plans were checked fully

The Building Control Manager stated that the district was dealing with high growth but that the Building Control service was competitive and that there was an ongoing review of the workload. The role of Building Control in new developments such as Northstowe would depend on the developers, as all work was open to a free market.

Cabinet **NOTED** the report

[N.B. the 8th bullet point in paragraph 6 should read "private sector companies"]

Standing Items

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

Nothing to report.

16. **RE-LOCATION OF OFFICES TO CAMBOURNE**

Nothing to report.

17. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Chief Executive reminded Cabinet of the next meeting on the 8th January 2004 that was for consideration of the CIPS bids. The Management Team had placed the options into three broad groups for Cabinet to consider but it was clear that demand would outstrip supply. One of the options for consideration would be to reduce existing areas of lower priority spending to fund essential new spending. Management Team requested that Cabinet members contribute to the process by identifying any areas where they felt existing spending could be challenged and reductions made even if that fell outside of their Portfolio area. Any proposed low priority areas to be notified to the Chief Executive by email before the meeting if possible.

18. **PLAN ACCESS**

A demonstration was given of a system combining the GIS information and the local land and property gazetteer to give property information. This could be put on the Council's web site so that many queries could be self-service.

19. **NEW STAFF MEMBERS**

The Chief Executive reported on two new appointments:

- Housing and Environmental Services Director: Steve Hampson
- Head of Policy and Information: Tim Wetherfield

The Meeting ended at 12.25 p.m.
