

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 9 November 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 |

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

| | |
|-----------------|------------------------------------|
| Holly Adams | Democratic Services Officer |
| Steve Hampson | Executive Director |
| Greg Harlock | Chief Executive |
| Debbie Lewis | Senior Revenues Officer |
| Simon McIntosh | Head of Community Services |
| Dale Robinson | Chief Environmental Health Officer |
| Jane Thompson | Cultural Services Manager |
| Tim Wetherfield | Head of Policy and Communication |

Councillors RF Bryant, Mrs SJO Doggett, R Hall, Mrs SA Hatton, Mrs EM Heazell, Mrs CA Hunt, SGM Kindersley, MJ Mason, Mrs CAED Murfitt, CR Nightingale, NJ Scarr, Mrs HM Smith, RT Summerfield and RJ Turner were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors JD Batchelor and Mrs A Elsby. Councillor JA Hockney apologised in advance for having to leave the meeting early to attend a funeral.

Procedural Items

1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 12 October 2006.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following personal interests were declared:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Councillor SGM Kindersley | As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (item 4) |
| Councillor RJ Turner | As an elected Cambridgeshire County Councillor (item 4) |

Recommendations to Council

3. GAMBLING ACT 2005 - POLICY

The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder, explaining that the draft policy had been considered thoroughly by the Licensing Committee, commended it to Cabinet and Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that the Gambling Act 2005 Policy be adopted.

4. FULBOURN: WINDMILL ESTATE REDEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

The Housing Portfolio Holder welcomed Mr John Walton from Nene Housing Association to the meeting and expressed her gratitude to the previous portfolio holder, officers, Nene Housing, members of the Windmill Estate Steering Group and residents of the Windmill Estate, all of whom had been involved in the project over the previous years. She confirmed that Nene and officers had resolved to the satisfaction of the majority of residents the previous concerns about bungalow requirements, and commended the recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Mrs SJO Doggett, local member for Fulbourn, said the scheme did not address concerns from those homeowners who did not participate should there be any damage to their properties or other disturbance during the redevelopment works. The Head of Housing Strategic Services confirmed that the recommendations sought to include sufficient flexibility to adapt the scale of development and negotiations based on original conveyances would be undertaken with individual residents and through planning permission. The Council would work with tenants and owner-occupiers as much as possible if and when any such situations arose and Mr Walton understood that Nene Housing Association would bear any related legal costs incurred by the Council, including those as result of resolution of issues of non-participating residents.

Councillor NJ Scarr, local member, stated that he was happy to go along with the recommendations provided that it was always remembered that there were some residents who did not and might never wish to participate. The Housing Portfolio Holder assured the local members that the tender process for a contractor would ensure the needs of all residents would be met. It was imperative to begin the project for the benefit of the majority of residents, to remove the state of uncertainty over the redevelopment proposals under which they had been living. The redevelopment proposals had been initiated by the concerns of residents themselves, who had expressed their unhappiness with the existing dwellings which had limited, if any, potential for expansion and adaptation.

Negotiations were underway with Cambridgeshire County Council over the best use for their adjoining site and that owned by the Primary Care Trust, but if these were unable to be included, Nene could deliver 238 units across the footprint of the site of the Windmill Estate.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** that:

- (a) formal approval be given for a redevelopment scheme for the Windmill Estate, subject to necessary planning consents and Secretary of State approval;
- (b) the existing Council-owned properties and land be transferred to Nene Housing Association at nil cost;
- (c) the scope of any redevelopment scheme should, as far as possible, include all the existing area of the estate **subject to** existing tenants and owner-occupiers

- being willing and / or able to participate. Where necessary, plans should be amended over time to cater for changing needs and to provide flexibility to accommodate as far as possible the wishes of all the existing residents;
- (d) the preferred tenure mix and house types be as outlined in Option A which will provide 65% as affordable housing (comprising 124 rented and 52 shared ownership units) together with 35% as open market sales within an overall target of 270 homes;
- (e) the following conditions be attached to the approval of a redevelopment scheme:
- (i) that Nene Housing Association meet all legal costs and home loss / disturbance payments incurred by the Council in respect of the Windmill Estate since 2004/05 to date as well as any future payments and liabilities;
 - (ii) that any amendments to the scheme mix in terms of tenure and / or house types / sizes be agreed in consultation with the Council;
 - (iii) that the Council be entitled to receive nomination rights of 100% of initial lets and 75% of subsequent lettings of all social rented units provided through refurbished and new build affordable housing on the sites and that the Council receive 100% nomination rights in perpetuity to any shared ownership and / or other intermediate tenures;
 - (iv) that the Council not seek to use compulsory purchase powers to facilitate the redevelopment and that as far as possible the wishes of all residents (tenants, owner-occupiers and leaseholders) should be accommodated without compromising the wishes of others on the Windmill Estate;
 - (v) that Nene confirm and make provision to meet contributions previously agreed in principle to the Special Projects Officer role for 2006/07 and 2007/08 and consider future contributions if this post were to be considered essential by both Nene and the Council to delivery of the project beyond 31 March 2008; and
 - (vi) that an acceptable "construction code of practice" be agreed with the contractor that takes regard of non-participating residents; and
- (f) the Council exercise its discretion to waive any discount repayment liability in respect of any Right to Buy sales caught within such provisions if this would enable affected owners to participate in the redevelopment scheme.

**Recommendations to
Council and Decisions
made by Cabinet**

5. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY TO 2011

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder presented the report, which focussed on the General Fund, and highlighted the approach towards achieving a balanced strategy, as agreed by Cabinet on 12 October 2006. Future spending pressures had been examined and it would be possible to meet the target of £400,000 in 2007/08, although there would be additional work to identify pressures in future years; necessary savings had been identified, with every effort taken to avoid impacting on front-line services.

Confirmations were sought and given:

- additional funding did not exist currently to extend the plastics recycling bank scheme to include growth areas, and that officers would be seeking to secure section 106 funding from developers to increase bank provision;
- the Internal Drainage Boards, Interest and Financing Charges in Appendix 3B did not allow for a substantial increase in the levy on account of Northstowe;

- contributions to Arts Development Officer posts in Village Colleges had always been phased to decrease over time.

Cabinet was asked to choose between two options for the basis for the MTFS, as set out in Appendices 3A and 3B. The first, 3A, with a further £793,000 savings to be identified in 2007/08, would result in the General Fund balances achieving their target reduction to £1.5 million by 2011/12, with the Council Tax levied equalling the underlying spend per household the following year; however, an additional £1.4 million savings would be required in 2012/13 to maintain the minimum General Fund balance. This option would see the amount of council tax collected meet the level of underlying council tax, or average spend per household, by 2012/13.

The other option, 3B, required £1.133 million savings to be identified in 2007/08, and would achieve the target reduction of General Fund balances to £1.5 million by 2012/13 without further savings to be identified during that time, but the council tax collected would not meet the underlying council tax until the following year and balances would be affected from 2013/14 onwards. Option 3B, however, allowed for greater flexibility in future years and the Portfolio Holder commended it to Cabinet, citing the number of unknowns during the life of the MTFS such as the forthcoming White Paper on local government, the outcome of the Lyons review and possibly a general election.

Councillor SM Edwards proposed, seconded by Councillor Mrs DSK Spink, that Option 3B be recommended to Council as the basis for the Medium Term Financial Strategy to 2011, and that the MTFS be reviewed twice annually, in the autumn and in February / March as part of the final budget. On a show of hands this motion was **CARRIED**.

Growth Area Delivery Arrangements

Although not strictly related to the Medium Term Financial Strategy, the Leader allowed discussion of this issue at this time. He clarified that the recent article in the *Cambridge Evening News* had been incorrect and the Council was not having its powers of determination removed. A proposal was being considered through which planning powers would be shared between the relevant authorities, thereby retaining democratic input. This situation was not unique to South Cambridgeshire and did not represent an inability to cope with the planning demands; rather, it proposed to join planning services between local authorities as was common practice elsewhere in the country. If this proposed joint planning structure proved acceptable to the minister, Cambridgeshire Horizons would serve as the delivery vehicle to prepare a bid which it was hoped would cover the majority of the growth area development. All members had been e-mailed on 8 November Cambridgeshire Horizon's proposed response to the minister and Council would consider the issue on 23 November 2006.

Cabinet RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

- (a) approval of a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) based on Appendix 3B, the full savings in Appendix 2 and the following issues:
 - (i) the financial context for the strategy and the future issues facing the Council, in particular the growth agenda;
 - (ii) how the Council compares with other councils in terms of spending, performance and value for money;
 - (iii) how well the Council manages its finances;
 - (iv) clear objectives for the strategy;
 - (v) how the Council will deliver a balanced MTFS;
 - (vi) how it will improve future planning and link planning with its priorities;
 - (vii) the future policy for the level of the Council Tax;
 - (viii) the future policy for the use of capital receipts;

- (ix) how the Council will continue to seek efficiency savings and value for money;
- (x) how the Transformation Project will contribute to the delivery of the MTFS;
- (xi) how the workforce plan will be linked to the MTFS; and
- (xii) how the Council will monitor the MTFS and take action where financial targets are at risk;
- (b) approval of the spending plans in Appendix 1 for 2007/08 (based on the justifications in Appendix 5) for inclusion in the budget and to approve the spending plans for 2008/09 onwards as the basis for future planning;
- (c) approval of the capital programme in Appendix 5;
- (d) that officers be requested to investigate and report back on the "Other initiatives to be pursued / possible avenues for additional sources of finance" in Appendix 2 by June 2007, for consideration in the budget for 2008/09;
- (e) approval of the arrangements for consultation in paragraph 28; and
- (f) that the MTFS be reviewed formally twice a year (in the autumn and in February / March, in the light of the final budget), but that reports be made as part of the quarterly monitoring process at other times of the year when issues affecting the deliverability of the MTFS occur.

Cabinet **AGREED** to authorise the Chief Executive and Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder to prepare the final strategy for submission to Council.

Cabinet commended staff and portfolio holders for identifying substantial savings without significant impact on services.

6. DISABLED FACILITIES GRANT POLICY AND FUNDING

Additional funding was required for mandatory Disabled Facilities Grants and the Housing Portfolio Holder, at her 8 November 2006 meeting, had agreed to vire £81,000 from underspends. She undertook to investigate adaptation timescales to ensure equality between all service users, whether private homeowners or tenants. The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder commended the Housing Portfolio Holder for the virement as an excellent example of joined-up working.

Members with concerns about individual cases were encouraged to speak to the Portfolio Holder and Executive Director after the meeting.

Cabinet **RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL** to support further approval for up to £100,000 to be released if required to cover priority cases and cases where statutory duty may not be met, the release of the additional £100,000 to be delegated to the Environmental Health and Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holders.

Cabinet **AGREED:**

- (a) to restrict the discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant costs for adult clients to £15,000;
- (b) to limit Disabled Facilities Grants for housing association tenants to £25,000 mandatory limit;
- (c) to charge Home Improvement Agency fees to housing associations on grant-aided housing association adaptations; and
- (d) the use of means-tested discretionary Disabled Facilities Grant monies to provide disabled clients' access to their home and / or parking for it, from outside of the curtilage of the property, to include waiver of property charge.

Decisions made by Cabinet

7. DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder updated members on the work in progress on the Disability Equality Scheme, for which he would be happy to serve as lead member. The full scheme would be brought to Council on 23 November 2006.

Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) that paragraph (w) of the provisional action plan be re-worded to read “Run a Member training session for all councillors, using speakers from local disability groups”; and
- (b) that the Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder be lead member for the Disability Equality Scheme.

Cabinet **NOTED** the preparations being made to present a full draft Disability Equality Scheme to the Council on 23 November 2006.

8. LOCAL MANAGEMENT ORGANISATION FOR NORTHSTOWE

The Northstowe Development Trust Working Group had recommended establishment of a Local Management Organisation as the way forward to help meet the needs of the new settlement and make it a vibrant and sustainable community, and the Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder encouraged Cabinet to support the principle of a trust and the proposed action plan.

Councillor Mrs VG Ford asserted that the responsibility to develop a fully vibrant community rested with the Council and, whilst she believed that a trust could be successful, it was imperative that it be democratically accountable and not an unelected bureaucratic quango. The Leader confirmed that the trust would be accountable to electors, and that work was underway to establish a sound financial basis for it.

Cabinet **AGREED**, in principle, to the establishment of a Northstowe trust, including representation from the surrounding villages, in 2007/08 and **ENDORSED** the following further steps now required:

- (a) commissioning detailed financial advice including the development of a business plan for the trust;
- (b) commissioning legal advice on establishment and running of the trust;
- (c) engagement with existing communities in and around the site to consider the benefits to the wider area and to identify key individuals who may become involved in the trust;
- (d) further work on a number of key areas such as the Energy Supply Company and IT Networks and their potential links to the trust;
- (e) a visit to Milton Keynes to learn more about the Trusts there and the relationship with English Partnerships and possibly a visit to Caterham Barracks; and
- (f) production of a plan for establishing the Northstowe Town Council.

Cabinet **NOTED** that it was proposed to bring a further report to Cabinet in spring 2007, once the outcomes of the next steps have been considered by the Northstowe Development Trust Working Group.

9. OPTIONS APPRAISAL FOR RESIDUAL AIREY UNITS

Council had approved the Airey redevelopment programme in October 2004, leaving only small pockets of stock outstanding, and the Housing Portfolio Holder commended the Head of Housing Strategic Services for the options proposed to take forward modernisation and / or improvements for these properties. The redevelopment would take place within the existing planned maintenance programme and officers would liaise with affected tenants as soon as possible.

Cabinet **AGREED** that

- (a) a pilot refurbishment programme be agreed for the following Airey homes:

| Location | Number of Units | Shared Ownership | Rented |
|---------------|-----------------|------------------|----------|
| Teversham | 8 | 3 | 5 |
| Sawston | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Elsworth | 1 | 1 | |
| Totals | 12 | 6 | 6 |

- (b) if the Capital Finance Regulations are not amended to allow for a retention of 100% of the capital receipts from shared ownership sales then this matter be referred back to Cabinet at a later date for further consideration of the available options, including open market sales; and
- (c) if the shared ownership model should prove successful within the pilot programme then, subject to the outcome of further local consultation, a wider programme for the remaining 17 Airey units at Bassingbourn, Fulbourn, Coton, Gamlingay and Impington be approved.

10. CAMBRIDGE CHALLENGE - AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The Cambridge Challenge initiative was imperative to ensure provision of affordable housing on the larger sites in and around Cambridge and at Northstowe. Concerns were expressed at the difficulty first-time buyers faced to get on the property ladder and it was hoped that this approach could help more young people become homeowners.

Cabinet **AGREED** that

- (a) the approach to Registered Social Landlord selection as proposed through the Cambridge Challenge be supported in principle;
- (b) the selection criteria and proposed weightings be endorsed on behalf of the Council by the Housing Portfolio Holder in consultation with the Leader and Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder; and
- (c) a further report on the outcome of the Cambridge Challenge be brought to Cabinet for consideration upon conclusion of the project in March / April 2007 prior to approval of any preferred lead development partner for the three strategic sites included in the scope of the project.

11. PLANNING SERVICES INSPECTION ACTION PLANS

The Audit Commission, following its inspection of the planning service, had included five recommendations, work on which already had begun. The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder congratulated the planning section for the outstanding achievement of being the first authority to have its Local Development Framework Core Strategy approved and attention was drawn to the letter from Baroness Andrews describing the Council's progress as "excellent". The Leader added congratulations to officers for doubling the within a year the number of major applications dealt with within thirteen weeks. Members expressed dismay that, in light of these substantial achievements by a lean section compared to that of most authorities, there had been

suggestions that the government wanted to take over the Council's planning powers, implying that the government's own new planning system had failed. The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder reported that Chris Elliott of the *Cambridge Evening News* had expressed his view that the Council's expertise gained at Cambourne and Arbury Camps would be wasted if the government intervened.

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder also noted that the number of planning applications coming before the Planning Committee was dropping and it was hoped to rationalise that body in the future, for example, moving to half-day meetings to reduce costs. The procedures governing members of the public speaking at Planning Committee were being reviewed and consultations were underway with other authorities on their experiences of residents making representations at meetings.

The Resources, Staffing, Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder explained that the Planning Advisory Service was unable to provide planning training as intended and that Democratic Services were sourcing another trainer.

Cabinet, acknowledging that work on the majority of the key actions identified was already underway, **AGREED** that the following summary conclusions be adopted as an action plan to address the key actions required in response to the audit reports:

- (a) that a revised workforce plan be produced;
- (b) that a service recruitment strategy be prepared;
- (c) that the transformation plan address the capacity of senior management;
- (d) that an officer working group be put in place to identify alternative areas of funding;
- (e) that a local agents' panel / forum be established;
- (f) that a wider satisfaction survey of service users be carried out;
- (g) that householder advice be made more accessible through the web and through other means including leaflets and use of *South Cambs Magazine*;
- (h) that Service First customer service standards be introduced;
- (i) that an officer / member working party be established to recommend on revised Planning Committee arrangements including public / applicants addressing the Committee;
- (j) that the Service Plan properly addresses maximising service delivery of corporate priorities and objectives;
- (k) that results of Premier Division on comparative costs be reported to Cabinet;
- (l) that benchmarking comparisons within the Premier Division be reported to Planning Committee;
- (m) that delegation protocol be reviewed at the end of the year; and
- (n) that the conclusion of both reports about the financial uncertainties threatening service delivery be made part of the Council's case in respect of next year's Council tax.

12. JOINT PLANNING SERVICES

The Leader explained that, prior to the recent article in the *Cambridge Evening News*, the local authorities had been negotiating joint planning services, but that the situation was changing daily and the report to Cabinet had been withdrawn from the agenda and would instead be presented to full Council on 23 November 2006.

Standing Items

13. MATTERS REFERRED BY SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

None.

14. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Councillor Mrs DSK Spink reported that West Anglia Crossroads recently had moved to St Ives from Huntingdon and undertook to provide Democratic Services with the new address.

**The Meeting ended at 12.22
p.m.**
