

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 12 March 2009

PRESENT: Councillor RMA Manning (Leader of the Council)
Councillor SM Edwards (Deputy Leader of the Council and Housing Portfolio Holder)

Councillors:	Dr DR Bard	New Communities Portfolio Holder
	Mrs SM Ellington	Environmental Services Portfolio Holder
	MP Howell	Staffing Portfolio Holder
	AG Orgee	Finance Portfolio Holder
	TJ Wotherspoon	Policy, Improvement and Communications Portfolio Holder
	NIC Wright	Planning Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Holly Adams	Democratic Services Officer
Philip Aldis	Community Safety Officer
Gemma Barron	Partnerships Manager
Steve Hampson	Executive Director
Greg Harlock	Chief Executive
Jackie Sayers	Scrutiny Development Officer

Councillors JD Batchelor, Mrs EM Heazell, JA Hockney, Mrs CAED Murfitt, Mrs BZD Smith and RT Summerfield were in attendance, by invitation.

Procedural Items

109. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors JD Batchelor and AG Orgee declared personal interests in items 6 (Neighbourhood Panels) and 8 (Local Area Agreement Annual Refresh) as elected members of Cambridgeshire County Council.

110. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None received.

Decisions made by Cabinet

111. INVESTMENT STRATEGY (TREASURY MANAGEMENT) 2009-10

Cabinet considered the Investment Strategy for 2009-10, noting that the list of approved bodies with which the Council invested had changed to take account of those which had merged, which reduced the overall number of organisations. The Finance Portfolio Holder commended the strategy to Cabinet, highlighting the good returns made and its prudential and sound approach.

The Chief Finance Officer explained that the primary aim of the strategy was security of investment rather than maximisation of returns, adding that if two organisations offered exactly the same rates and one were local, the Council would prefer to support the local institution.

Cabinet **APPROVED** the Investment Strategy 2009-10 and congratulated officers in the Accountancy service for continuing to achieve good results at minimal cost.

112. **PROCUREMENT STRATEGY**

Cabinet had approved a strategy for the procurement of goods and services in January 2004. The revised strategy took account of events since the original strategy, and the increased expectations of the outcomes from procurement activities. The Finance Portfolio Holder urged that value for money be demonstrated wherever possible, and reminded members that it was essential to have a wide-ranging strategy to ensure the best deal for the Council.

Concerns were expressed that the requirements of the strategy could discourage smaller local businesses from bidding for contracts and Cabinet urged officers to adopt a sense of proportionality and use their best judgement not to overwhelm with paperwork and procedures any such businesses bidding on contracts just over Level 1 (£5,000). Councillor NIC Wright confirmed that, as part of the work to deal with the economic downturn, the Council would be running an event to support local businesses, including advice on the Council's procurement strategy.

The Chief Executive explained that, whilst e-auctions were still being investigated and the process appeared attractive, the procedure placed significant demands on officer time as every specification entered must be extremely precise to ensure that all tendering parties were bidding on exactly the same specifications. Non-electronic procedures allowed contractors options to provide details, method statements, in their tender documents as to how they would meet the contract requirements, allowing greater flexibility and innovation than available through an e-procurement system.

Cabinet **AGREED** to adopt the updated Procurement Strategy, subject to the following minor amendments:

- clarification of "service" at 3.5.1; and
- clarification of "termination of the provision in whole or part" at 3.6.1.

113. **NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS**

Inspector Chris Savage of Cambridgeshire Constabulary was in attendance.

Cambridgeshire County Council and Cambridgeshire Constabulary both had indicated that they would like to broaden the remit of neighbourhood panels to discuss issues over and above those relating to community safety, although community safety would remain the key focus at meetings. The Scrutiny and Overview Committee had considered the proposals in detail and had recommended that each panel be consulted as to whether or not it would like to broaden its remit, and that local ward members fulfil a liaison role between the panel and the District Council instead of nominating specific Member Champions for each panel.

The work of the panels was commended, particularly the improved relationships between communities and the police. Cabinet supported the recommendations made by the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, expressing concern that the panels could lose their focus if the remit was extended too widely. Cambridgeshire Constabulary had

suggested broadening the remit of the panels as fewer local priorities were being identified as the police responded to local demands and public understanding of police work increased. The aim was to ensure that representatives from various organisations were present at panel meetings so issues raised by the public could be addressed immediately.

Cabinet **AGREED** to:

- (a) consult each panel as to whether or not it would like to broaden the remit of panel meetings;
- (b) request that ward members:
 - (i) note district council issues relating to their ward and actions arising out of panel meetings, and bring them back to the council to ensure that they are considered; and / or
 - (ii) seek progress information prior to panel meetings where an issue or action relating to their ward has been raised previously.

Cabinet **NOTED** Cambridgeshire County Council's General Operating Procedures for Neighbourhood Panels.

114. REPORT OF THE FINANCE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

Councillor JA Hockney, Chairman of the Finance Task and Finish Group, presented the interim report to Cabinet, and thanked members of the Group and officers for their work, which was on hiatus pending appointment of the new Executive Director (Corporate Services). The Finance Portfolio Holder welcomed the recommendations, stating that he had attended the Task and Finish Group meetings and found that they were conducted with the intention of providing good and useful suggestions.

Councillor JD Batchelor, Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chairman, explained that that body had expected Cabinet to receive the interim report, consider it outside the meeting, and present its views to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee on 30 April; however, members of the Cabinet preferred to discuss the recommendations and form a view during the present meeting, culminating in the preparation of an appropriate action plan by officers to be submitted to the Scrutiny and Overview Committee in time for their 30 April 2009 meeting.

There was general agreement that the Council needed to improve public understanding of, and consultation on, financial matters and performance indicators, and it was noted that the summer edition of *South Cambs magazine* would feature how the Council provided good value for money and had the lowest council tax in the area.

Cabinet **AGREED** that:

- (a) the corporate cycle illustrated at Appendix B to the report be endorsed and used to inform future budget, consultation, service and scrutiny planning;
- (b) a closer working relationship be established between the accountancy team and cost centre managers to improve on-going financial control;
- (c) a procedure be adopted for budget variances of more than +/- 5% and more than +/- £2,500 (both conditions to apply) within individual service levels whereby the relevant cost centre manager and his / her Portfolio Holder must justify the variance to the Chief Finance Officer and the Finance Portfolio Holder;
- (d) a budget roll-over from the previous year be permitted only where the budget-holder can show that the current year's budget has been fully committed and that there were no other sources of funding;
- (e) it be ensured that all budget-holding officers receive at least one core skills training session to understand the procedures and processes relevant to their

- financial management role and that this be a feature of performance appraisals;
- (f) the Council presents its financial information more clearly and concisely electronically so that it could be more easily understood by residents providing this could be accommodated within existing budgets;
 - (g) the Chief Finance Officer and Finance Portfolio Holder discuss the level of detail presented in reports to Council bodies, other than full Council which must receive comprehensive information as part of its budget-setting process, to enable members' discussions to focus on strategic consideration linked to the Council's priorities;
 - (h) the Council present financial and performance information for residents in such a way that value for money can be more readily understood, with promotion of the low council tax level and high value for money provided;
 - (i) the Council's community engagement strategy include cross-cutting public involvement in the budget process, which should aim to include all sections of the community, business, parish council and voluntary sector partners and at times when it can genuinely have an influence, likely at an early stage in the budget-setting process; and
 - (j) the annual training programme for Members include at least one refresher session for all Members regarding their role in understanding and influencing the Council's budget and financial processes and that an annual refresher session be offered for scrutiny monitors.

Cabinet **DEFERRED**, until the new Executive Director was in post, making a response to recommendation 6: that officers examine whether budget proposals could be accompanied by more performance information showing comparative data and the potential impact that budget proposals could have on performance, to ensure a more accurate way of analysing spending and outcomes.

Cabinet thanked members of the Task and Finish Group for their interim report and recommendations.

115. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT (LAA) ANNUAL REFRESH

The Leader introduced the Local Area Agreement (LAA) Annual Refresh and commended it to Cabinet.

The following comments were made:

- The reduced growth targets at NI 154 and 155 had been recommended to GO-East by Cambridgeshire Horizons to reflect the current situation, and had now been accepted by GO-East, but it was a temporary measure only and it was expected that the difference would be made up before the end of the Regional Spatial Strategy period in 2021;
- There had not been a previous target set for NI 159, so the new figures should reflect the recent Local Development Framework decisions;
- The Place Survey would add targets to many of the "to be confirmed" areas.

Cabinet acknowledged that the LAA would become more important from 1 April as the Comprehensive Area Agreement (CAA) regime took effect, but there were concerns expressed that the government's required approach focussed too much energy on processes and setting targets and not enough on providing services to improve life in South Cambridgeshire.

Cabinet **ENDORSED** the Cambridgeshire developing Local Area Agreement (LAA) annual refresh, understanding that amendments would need to be made by Cambridgeshire Together (LAA Board) before its final submission on 31 March 2009.

Standing Items

116. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Nothing to report.

117. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Nothing to report.

**The Meeting ended at 3.46
p.m.**
