

CABINET

At a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 9 September 2004

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs DSK Spink MBE (Leader of Council)

Councillors:	Dr DR Bard	Planning & Economic Development Portfolio Holder
	JD Batchelor	Information & Customer Services Portfolio Holder
	Mrs JM Healey	Conservation, Sustainability & Community Planning Portfolio Holder
	Mrs EM Heazell	Housing Portfolio Holder
	SGM Kindersley	Environmental Health Portfolio Holder
	Mrs DP Roberts	Community Development Portfolio Holder

Councillors RF Bryant, Mrs A Elsby, Mrs SA Hatton, Dr JA Heap, Mrs CAED Murfitt, A Riley, Mrs GJ Smith and Dr SEK van de Ven were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor RT Summerfield.

Procedural Items

1. MINUTES

The Leader was authorised to sign as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 20th July 2004, subject to the following amendment:

2004-05 Pay Award (Minute 4)

That paragraphs (c) and (d) be transposed and the words "beyond the above levels" be inserted into recommendation (d) as follows:

- (c) that all flexi-leave provision be capped at:
- 2004/05 – 8 days
 - 2005/06 – 6 days
 - 2006/07 – 4 days
- (d) that the accumulation of flexi-leave *beyond the above levels* be granted only in exceptional circumstances, subject to Chief Officer approval.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following declarations of interest were received:

Councillor Dr DR Bard In Item 13, Dual Use Arts Review / Strategy, a personal interest as a governor of Sawston Village College

Councillor JD Batchelor In Item 13, Dual Use Arts Review / Strategy, a personal interest as a governor of Linton Village College and as a board member of the Broadening Education Trust.

Decisions made by the Cabinet and reported for information

3. NORTHSTOWE PREFERRED OPTIONS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PAPER

The revised Northstowe Preferred Options Public Participation Paper had been the subject of extensive debate on Monday 6th September at the Northstowe Member Steering Group and the Group's recommendations were presented to Cabinet. With public consultation scheduled to begin on 1st October, the call-in process had been accelerated, with the agreement of the Chairman of Council and the Chairman of the Scrutiny and Overview Committee.

It was clarified that the decision summary from the Northstowe Member Steering Group was not a final set of minutes but record of decisions only. Councillor A Riley, who had declared a prejudicial interest and withdrawn from the Steering Group meeting, had e-mailed all members querying the wording of the proposal on Green Separation at St Michael's Mount. The wording of the proposal that was put to a vote was confirmed as correct by those members present at Cabinet who had attended the Monday meeting. The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder corrected a statement in a paper Councillor Riley had distributed to members at the Cabinet meeting: discussion on Monday regarding Rampton Drift had been curtailed until after Councillor Riley had returned to the Steering Group meeting.

Councillor SGM Kindersley, referring to the Council's Corporate Objective to preserve and enhance villages, queried whether a resolution could be worded to afford additional separation for the Conservation Area at St Michael's Mount, Longstanton. Councillor Kindersley also asked that, given their special circumstances, the residents of Rampton Drift should be consulted specifically on the effects of the Northstowe proposals on their area. The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder agreed with the latter request and asked that this should be arranged. The problem with the former was finding a form of words which would apply generally.

Members debated the need to ensure protection of the buildings at St Michael's Mount and conservation areas generally and whether differences between built and open areas were material. The Development Services Director advised that good planning required good policies which could be defended. The Planning Policy Officer (Transport) then explained that the Northstowe Member Steering Group had worked hard to apply a consistent approach and consistency of treatment of the village frameworks and conservation areas. If a 200-metre separation were applied to all conservation area boundaries, the remaining land available would not allow the Northstowe settlement to be a viable proposition. Members who had visited the site on Monday had concluded that a 50-metre separation was sufficient at Long Lane to preserve the character of the adjacent open part of the Conservation Area, and also that the amenity and setting of the property at St Michael's Mount in the Conservation Area, with around 100 metres' separation, could be enhanced with suitable treatment such as dense tree planting, reflecting the existing landscape character. He confirmed that the developable area lost through a greater separation area at Michael's Mount would not be critical.

Councillor Kindersley, seconded by Councillor Mrs DP Roberts, considered that the presence of buildings in the conservation area was the crucial factor and proposed that:

“in order to preserve and / or enhance the designated conservation areas and the dwellings therein, a 200 metre separation belt will be imposed, measured from the curtilages of the dwellings therein”.

This proposal was put to the vote and with 2 in favour and 4 against was **LOST**.

Cabinet therefore

RESOLVED that the revised Northstowe Preferred Options Paper as presented to the Northstowe Member Steering Group on 6th September 2004 and to this meeting be approved for publication for the purpose of public participation, subject to the findings of Sustainability Appraisal / Strategic Environmental Assessment, with the following amendments agreed by the Steering Group:

- (1)
 - The green areas shown on Appendix C are revised to distinguish between areas performing different functions by using different notations. Appendix C to be amended for consultation to show these different areas in separate notations as follows:
 - Green Separation – between Northstowe and the villages of Longstanton and Oakington
 - Landscape buffers – to outlying development and edges of the new town
 - Special landscape treatment - surrounding Rampton Drift.
 - Appendix A (Green Separation at Northstowe) to be amended as follows;

- (e) Page 67/2.10 Clarify in the text that the “1,000 or 2,000 dwellings” relate to site options B and C respectively
- (f) Page 75 Replace the word “discourage” with “prevent” in the penultimate bullet point
- (g) Page 75 Remove the last bullet point
- (h) Page 87/8.2 Remove the last sentence where “it states that densities of less than 30 dph will not be acceptable”
- (i) Page 96/10.8 Remove the word “police” as they are not a commercially provided service and re-add if appropriate.
- (j) Page 101/17A Remove the word “restrict” and replace with “discourage”
- (k) Page 103/NS30c Remove the word “all” and replace with “any”
- (l) Page 103 Add reference to Willingham Parish Council seeking a bypass for Willingham and the Highways Authority advice that if a bypass were justified, it would be by traffic passing to and from the fens and not just by the development of Northstowe.
- (m) Page 131/17.6 Add the word “west” to read “*and the A14 to the North West of Dry Drayton Road.*”
- (n) Page 132 Add “*NS82 Alleviating Flood Risk at Oakington – Option D*”. Add new option to show a possibility of alleviating flooding by modifications to the Bar Hill balancing pond.
- (o) Page 140/20.7 Amend the last sentence to read “*for the developers to maintain the landscaping and replace dead stock...*”
- (p) Page 142/NS97 Add “*which would not be located closer than 200 metres to any existing domestic properties*” to the end of the policy statement
- (q) Page 142/NS99 Replace the word “would” with “may” with regard to granting temporary planning permission.

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder **CONFIRMED** that an area-specific consultation letter would be delivered to all residents of Rampton Drift, in light of their special circumstances.

4. CPA IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Chief Executive explained that the Council needed to develop an improvement plan based on the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Inspectors' report, through which the Council had achieved a “Fair” rating, only three points away from a “Good” rating. A round table meeting had been scheduled for 29 September to discuss priorities with the Audit Commission Relationship Manager, external audit and senior

representatives of the Council. From this meeting an improvement programme would begin, after which the Council would determine milestones for measuring improvement and who would deliver each stage.

Members discussed:

- the priorities in the report were improvement priorities, not the Council's service priorities, which were the subject of public consultation;
- members need to be seen to be leading on priorities;
- the "Fair" rating in the report was the result of the CPA inspection, not the Council's self-assessment; and
- the Council was aiming for at least a "Good" rating on the next CPA inspection.

Cabinet **AGREED**

- (a) to request the improvement plan to be prepared to achieve an improvement in the Council's CPA category to at least "Good" by 2006;
- (b) to approve the following draft proposals as the Council's top priorities for improvement for discussion at the round table meeting with inspectors and auditors:

Service Outcome Priorities

1. To achieve a high level of customer service
2. To achieve successful, sustainable new communities at Northstowe and around Cambridge
3. To maximise the number of affordable houses available in South Cambridgeshire

Corporate Improvement / Capacity Priorities

4. To improve prioritisation
 5. To improve performance management
 6. To enhance future plans
- (c) to support the view that future best value reviews should focus on enabling the Council to make savings through efficiencies or clarifying the objectives / standards of services and that future reviews should be conducted in a way which is cost effective and targeted; and
 - (d) to support the following proposals as areas where inspection and audit could support the Council's achievement of its improvement priorities:
 - the identification of best practice and means of financing affordable housing in the context of the current housing finance regime; and
 - the identification of best practice and effective models of District Council community leadership in relation to the Community Strategy and Local Strategic Partnership (LSP).

5. RENEWABLE ENERGY

The Conservation, Sustainability and Community Planning Portfolio Holder commended the synopsis of the report's findings to members and encouraged all to read the complete report. She emphasised the importance of informing and educating people about renewable energy and the statutory targets which the Council must observe and meet.

Comments raised during discussion included:

- the new office building was an example of how the Council could lead on green issues
- the need to include power, gas and water supplies with infrastructure in new settlements;
- the need to encourage energy efficiency all housing policies, not just market

- housing, and to search for affordable ways to adapt existing housing stock to take advantage of new technologies;
- the incorporation of photo-voltaic cells in Circle 33 housing at Cambourne, reducing residents' electricity bills;
 - that sustainability was a mainstream issue vital to all Council work; and
 - it was also important to educate residents about conserving energy, as energy consumption was growing.

Cabinet **AGREED** to endorse the synopsis of the report's findings.

6. RECOMMENDATION FROM LICENSING COMMITTEE

The current conditions used by the Council addressed general requirements for licensing standard vehicles under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, but did not provide for more specialised vehicles such as stretch limousines.

Cabinet, therefore, **AGREED** that a new paragraph be introduced to the Vehicle Licence Conditions for Private Hire Vehicles and Hackney Carriages (1999-Edition (1)), entitled "Stretch Limousines" and that the following conditions be introduced as additional to those currently in place for normal vehicles. These conditions will be read as:

- (a) All stretch limousines should meet the QVM (Quality Vehicle Modifier) issued by the Ford Motor Company or the CMC (Cadillac Mastercoach Builder) or have relevant approval documentation of the originating chassis supplier approving the conversion as presented for licensing.
- (b) No vehicle will be licensed if that part of the vehicle converted exceeds a length of 10' in part or whole.
- (c) Passenger capacity will be determined by how many forward or rear-facing seatbelts are within the vehicle. (Side-facing seatbelts will not be considered for licensing purposes.)
- (d) Correct tyres as recommended by the manufacturer must be fitted to include appropriate weight loading of the converted vehicle.
- (e) That no stretch limousine over 6 years of age from the date of its first registration shall be licensed.
- (f) The maximum weight of any converted vehicle shall not exceed 7,100 lbs (3,200 Kg).

7. HOUSING ADAPTATION AND IMPROVEMENT GRANTS

The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder explained the current situation regarding housing adaptation and improvement grants handled by the Home Improvement Agency and the current year's budgetary position. The following clarifications and corrections were made to the report:

- Paragraph 9: it was unlikely that the Council would receive a contribution from GO-East, but the final response would not be known until the end of the financial year;
- Paragraph 10: a response from the South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust (PCT) was awaited;
- Paragraph 13: the amount already spent or committed against the total budget was now £678,000, with approximately £107,000 of discretionary grant money still available;
- Paragraph 22c: should refer to capital receipts, not Housing Capital Receipts;
- Paragraph 25: should read "affect" rather than "effect"; and
- Paragraph 28, recommendation (b)(ii): delete all words after General Fund Balances.

Members expressed concern about the need to assist residents within the current budgetary framework and service priorities:

- improvement grants increased the value of private homes, with the Council making a long-term investment without a realistic return of taxpayers' money as any loans over and above £25,000 were charged on the property and not realised until the property were sold;
- the number of cases needing assistance from the Home Improvement Agency was the result of the backlog of referrals by Occupational Therapists over recent years, a situation which had since been remedied. The PCT had acknowledged the backlog had now moved to the District Council and officers were encouraged that further discussion with the PCT could yield additional resources, although this would likely be on a match-funding basis;
- postponing any grants at this time would move the backlog into the next financial year as a large part of the award was mandatory, rather than discretionary;
- the Home Improvement Agency already recommended that residents move to more suitable accommodation, but it was possible that this recommendation could be introduced earlier in the process.

The Environmental Health Portfolio Holder appealed to Cabinet to approve the recommendations in the report, which it was hoped would address the backlog in the current financial year. If the recommendations were deferred, a moratorium on approvals would begin immediately. The Finance and Resources Director reminded members that the medium-term financial strategy would be presented to Cabinet in October and would give members a clearer position of the overall budgetary context.

Cabinet **DEFERRED** a decision pending receipt of the Council's medium-term financial strategy and a response from the South Cambridgeshire Primary Care Trust.

8. BUILDING CONTROL FINANCIAL STRATEGY

The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder introduced the report and reminded Cabinet that the Building Control service now had to compete with the private sector and was trying to raise its profile through advertisement. Officers were also investigating partnership working with other local authorities and members raised the possibility of extending the investigations to include the private sector.

Councillor SGM Kindersley expressed reservations about the service, preferring to see a review of the service as a whole, a view to which Cabinet was sympathetic. It was confirmed that the Council was obliged to ensure that the service was provided, but not necessarily to provide the service itself.

Cabinet **NOTED** the report and

AGREED to authorise the investigation of partnership working with adjacent Building Control authorities.

9. BENEFITS SURVEY RESULTS

The 2003 Benefits Survey was a national survey of Housing and / or Council Tax benefits claimants who had pursued a new or renewal claim during two sampling windows in 2003. Councillor Mrs EM Heazell expressed concern that only 78% of respondents had agreed that they could speak to someone in private, and felt that all financial discussions should be held in private. The Chief Executive explained that

many people declined private interviews as a matter of personal choice. Councillor Dr DR Bard queried the security of staff in private interview rooms and was advised that officers were investigating ways of improving staff security, such as relocating the panic buttons.

Cabinet **NOTED** the results of the 2003 Benefits Survey and

- AGREED**
- (a) to approve the following steps to improve satisfaction with documentation:
 - conduct a focus group of benefit claimants to explore in more detail how the documentation could be improved
 - commission the person who helped to edit the Council Tax leaflet to advise on how the benefits documentation could be made more user friendly
 - (b) to confirm proposals to undertake more frequent satisfaction surveys through the issue of satisfaction cards with benefits decisions during certain "sampling windows" each year; and
 - (c) to request the benefits service to agree and publish customer care standards, based on the corporate standards to be developed as part of a current corporate project.

10. PLANNING SURVEY RESULTS

Cabinet considered the Council's results from a national survey of planning applicants or agents of applicants, conducted in August 2003. The Planning and Economic Development Portfolio Holder commended the recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Mrs EM Heazell approved of the idea of customer satisfaction cards for on-going feedback, but noted that respondents would be self-selecting. She queried whether six-monthly agents' forum meetings would be useful, as planning agents were usually able to demand the service they required, and asked that a survey of Parish Councils and individual applicants be considered instead. Councillor SGM Kindersley suggested that the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils (CALC) could be requested to include a planning service review as part of their annual meeting of Parish Councils. It was clarified that any review focussed on the planning service, not on planning decisions.

The Development Services Director confirmed that officers took great care in discussions with applicants and that notes of meetings were maintained.

Cabinet **NOTED** the results of the 2003 Planning Survey and

- AGREED**
- (a) to initiate more regular customer satisfaction feedback through:
 - issuing a customer satisfaction card to applicants and others who come into contact with the development control service, the results of which would be regularly analysed to enable managers to track satisfaction levels;
 - establish an agents' forum and hold six-monthly meetings to provide regular users of the planning service an opportunity to feed back to the Council on how satisfaction is changing; and

- requesting that the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils (CALC) ask South Cambridgeshire Parish Councils for feedback on the planning **service** (not planning decisions) as part of CALC's annual meeting
- (b) to support the plans referred to in paragraph 13 to use ICT to improve customer service; and
- (c) to request the development control service to agree and publish customer care standards, based on the corporate standards to be developed as part of a current corporate project.

11. APPOINTMENTS

Housing Options Appraisal Working Group

Councillor Mrs EM Heazell explained that Councillor Mrs HF Kember had originally received training as a tenant member prior to her election to the District Council, as a result of which the number of tenant members dropped from six to five. As it had proven impossible to find another Councillor to volunteer for the Group, it had been agreed that there would be five Councillors and five tenant representatives.

Cabinet **CONFIRMED** the appointment of the following members to the Housing Options Appraisal Working Group:

Mrs A Elsby
Mrs HF Kember
EJ Pateman
NJ Scarr
Mrs DSK Spink
(Mrs EM Heazell attends as Housing Portfolio Holder)

Member Training Advisory Group

Cabinet **AGREED** the appointment of Councillor Dr SEK van de Ven to the Member Training Advisory Group.

12. ARTS DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP

The Scrutiny and Overview Committee, at its 12 February 2004 meeting, recommended the establishment of an Arts Development Advisory Group, which was likely to meet a maximum of three times before January 2005, to inform the next District Arts Strategy 2005-2010. Membership consisted of the Community Development Portfolio Holder and those Councillors who had been nominated as observers on the governing bodies of arts organisations funded by the Council.

Cabinet **AGREED** the following appointments to the Arts Development Advisory Group:

Mrs PS Corney
Dr SA Harangozo
JA Hockney
Mrs JA Muncey
JA Quinlan
Mrs GJ Smith
Mrs DSK Spink
(Mrs DP Roberts attends as Community Development Portfolio Holder)

Operational Items

13. HOUSING RESPONSE REPAIRS CONTRACT AWARD

The Housing Portfolio Holder explained that interviews for the three area-based contracts had been conducted on 7th September, and an additional paper was circulated with the results of those interviews. She noted that contracts had been awarded to the lowest-tendering contractor in each case, which therefore did not need Cabinet approval but was presented to Cabinet for information.

In response to a question from Councillor Mrs DP Roberts, the Head of Shire Homes explained that the review of the Shire Homes organisational structure was being conducted to streamline processes under new legislation and to improve effectiveness under new partnership agreements.

Cabinet **NOTED** the intention of the Housing and Environmental Services Director to:

- (a) award the East area housing responsive repairs contract to the Council's Direct Labour Organisation
- (b) award the West area housing responsive repairs contract to the Council's Direct Labour Organisation
- (c) award the South area housing responsive repairs contract to Cambridge City Council's City Services

in line with the evaluation of tenders carried out by the Housing responsive repairs contract evaluation panel.

14. ARTS DUAL USE REVIEW

The Community Development Portfolio Holder presented the update on the Dual Use Arts Strategy pilot scheme as approved by Cabinet on 27 March 2003 and expressed her pleasure that Linton Village College was now participating. Members commended the scheme as an excellent service for a reasonable amount of money.

Cabinet **NOTED** the findings of the Dual Use Arts Review.

15. TREASURY MANAGEMENT

The Finance and Resources Director presented the excellent results of the treasury management performance and drew members' attention to the fact that the Council was outperforming comparable and overall groups, yielding additional interest of over £210,000. Cabinet congratulated staff on the performance.

It was clarified that ethical investment was regularly discussed, but was not a strong issue as the Council was aiming for the highest rate of return. The Council did invest with major institutions, banks and building societies whose policies were widely known.

Cabinet **NOTED** the performance of the treasury management function.

The Meeting ended at 1.00 p.m.
