

CABINET: MINUTES

Date: 26th January 2010

Time: 10.00 a.m. – 12.35 p.m.

Present: Chairman: Councillor J. Tuck

Councillors: Sir P Brown, M Curtis, S. Criswell, D Harty, T Orgee, L W McGuire, R Pegram, J Reynolds and F H Yeulett

Apologies: None

Also Present: Councillors P Downes, C Hutton, D Jenkins, S van de Ven, J West and F Whelan

106. MINUTES 15th DECEMBER 2009

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on the 15th December 2009 were approved as a correct record.

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor McGuire declared a personal and potential prejudicial interest in item 8 under paragraphs 8 and 10 of the Code of Conduct in respect of his wife's employment in respect of one of the firms included in the Home Based Contract at item 8 on the agenda titled 'Personal Support (Home Based) Contract: Exemption from Contract Regulations during the Implementation of Self Directed Support (SDS)' and left the room during the discussion of the report.

Councillor Reynolds declared a personal interest under Paragraph 8 of the Code of Conduct in any issues included on the agenda as a member of the EERA board and as the chairman of Renewables East.

Councillor Curtis declared a personal interest under Paragraph 8 of the Code of Conduct in agenda item 15 'Consultation on Draft National Policy Statements (NPS) for major Infrastructure Projects for Energy and Ports' as the chairman of Planning at Fenland District Council in respect of any issues which might become a planning decision in the future. .

108. PETITION IN RESPECT OF CABINET'S CONSIDERATION OF THE FUTURE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ST NEOTS ON 26 JANUARY 2010

Cabinet received a petition with 86 signatures reading " We, the undersigned, call on the Cabinet to reject the proposal to federate St Neots Community College (SNCC) with Longsands College for all, or some, of the following reasons, and to consider alternative change management options for SNCC:

- the risk to the future improvement of Longsands College by reducing the management's focus on its students;

- the failure to properly consider a range of Options for change management at SNCC;
- the lack of any evidence of expertise within the governing body and senior management of Longsands in dealing with schools in special measures; and
- the failure to fully recognise the different characteristics and performance of both the geographic catchment areas of the two colleges and the feeder primary schools.

The spokesperson to the petition was Peter Jones a local resident who introduced it by stating that he believed that the Cabinet had been ill served by both the report on Secondary Education in St Neots and the consultation that had proceeded it, believing that they were at best incomplete and at worst disingenuous. A fuller summary of the presentation is set out at appendix 1 to these minutes.

CHANGE IN THE ORDER OF THE AGENDA

In order to allow the above petition representatives to hear the decisions as early as possible on the report which they had made representations, it was agreed to take the report at item 6 titled " Review of Secondary Educational Provision in St Neots" next in the agenda running order.

109. REVIEW OF SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL PROVISION IN ST NEOTS

As this report had been included on a late despatch the chairman agreed to take the report using her discretionary powers under Section 100B (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 and having taken account of the following reasons for lateness and urgency provided:

Reason for lateness

The meeting with the governing body of Longsands College could only be arranged for 14th January and this meeting was required to confirm (or otherwise) the commitment of Longsands to the Federation option and only after this, could the report be finalised which was after the close down of the first despatch agenda.

Reason for urgency

In order for the timescales for the various statutory processes to be met for implementation for September, the paper required to go to the January meeting of Cabinet.

The Cabinet Member for Learning in his introduction highlighted the following three challenges faced by St Neots Community College

1. The school was placed in special measures in the summer of 2009 following an inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (OfSTED). The school had been identified previously as a National Challenge school due to the low percentage of young people achieving 5 A*-C grades at GCSE including English and Mathematics.
2. The school was in severe financial difficulties and faces a significant deficit, which, even if a robust deficit recovery plan were to be in place, presents the school with a

further major challenge in addition to that of being a National Challenge School in special measures.

3. Many parents were choosing not to send their children to the school.

The combination of the above three factors had meant that the situation at St Neots Community College could no longer be considered in isolation, as it was considered to be having a direct impact on Longsands College and on the wider community. Following discussions with the Office of the Schools Commissioner at the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), the decision was taken to undertake a wide-ranging consultation and seek views on the following four potential structural options:

- St Neots Community College becomes a National Challenge Trust School
- A National Challenge Federation is formed between St Neots Community College and Longsands College
- A National Challenge Federation is formed between St Neots Community College and Longsands College and a charitable Trust is formed to provide further support and strategic direction to the schools.
- St Neots Community College is closed and alternative arrangements are put in place either by establishing an Academy or by increasing the size of Longsands College

A detailed consultation document had been produced and widely distributed making clear that the status quo was not an option and that the Authority's preference was for St Neots Community College and Longsands College to federate and for the resulting federation governing body to decide whether or not to pursue Trust status. The current report set out the results of the consultation.

It was reported that officers had been in regular dialogue with representatives from the Office of the School Commissioner at the DCSF both before and during the consultation over the options for securing improvements in the educational standards at St Neots Community College. In particular, the Authority had sought to establish whether or not the Secretary of State would be likely to approve release of the funding available to support improvement through the National Challenge Programme, should it decide to pursue its stated preferred option of a federation between Longsands College and St Neots Community College. The history concerning the advice and how this changed during the consultation process was as set out in the report. Despite further, lengthy discussions with DCSF officials, it had not proved possible to reach agreement on an approach that would enable the proposed federation to be driven by Longsands College to the extent originally envisaged. As a result, officers had taken the view that there were only three options available, namely:

1. To proceed with a National Challenge Federation between Longsands College and St Neots Community College and the creation of a Trust comprising external partners, including an outstanding educational provider.
2. To proceed with a National Challenge Trust for St Neots Community College, with Longsands as one of the partners of the Trust.
3. To proceed with a Federation between St Neots Community College and Longsands College, led by Longsands College without forming a Trust.

After giving very careful consideration to the feedback received during the consultation process and to the issues raised in recent dialogue with the Office of the Schools

Commissioner at the DSCF, officers' view was that a statutory federation between St Neots Community College and Longsands College would provide the best solution to the challenges faced by St Neots Community College. The main reasons for this were detailed in the report. In addition the recent meeting of the governing body of Longsands College had also identified 3 as the preferred option.

The Cabinet Member's view was that Longsands had the leadership potential to be successful, with both colleges understanding the social community and that Longsands would be able to provide access to its own ethos / values to colleagues in St Neots Community College and promote the necessary confidence to parents of pupils attending both colleges. In terms of the choices that had been available, federation was seen as an option that had a proven record while National Challenge Trust was still seen as a very new, untested option. It was intended that new and stretching targets would be put in place at an early stage, in order to help St Neots Community College move out of special measures. The view of Cabinet was that not only was the status quo not an option, but that due to the need to reach early resolution of the issues and to gain the confidence of the staff, deferring the decision was also not an option.

The local member for Brampton and Kimbolton who had presented a more detailed briefing to Cabinet in advance of the meeting (See appendix 2 to these minutes) indicated that he had been unaware of the earlier petition and that there had been no collusion between himself and the petition organisers. As part of his presentation, he orally expressed his concerns that Cabinet were being asked to make an important decision without having been given sufficient information / evidence in terms of:

- a detailed report on the option for SNCC to become a National Challenge Trust School and whether this was a better option. In his view this assessment had not been undertaken.
- an action plan showing how, in the event of the Federation, LC would propose to make that federation function so that SNCC would improve its results without harming the outcomes for LC pupils.
- What changes would be required at both schools

He also highlighted his concern that in addition to writing off St Neots Community College's deficit debt of nearly £1million, spending £350k extra of one off resources to support the establishment of the Federation, was a huge amount to spend on one school at any time, but particularly now at a time of severe economic restraint. In his view it was entirely appropriate to consider the decision afresh and to only delay the final decision for a short period, in order to receive the necessary detailed analysis suggested. He believed there was a need to concentrate on the quality of teaching, pastoral support and the relationships within the schools rather than on structural change.

One of the local Members for St Neots, Eaton Socon and Eynesbury (who had recently been appointed as a governor of St Neots Community College) and who was immensely concerned about the position of the College, spoke in support of the need for urgent change measures to be implemented for the sake of all pupils in St Neots, stating that the decision should not be deferred even for a short period, and while recognising that competition between two local schools could often be positive, this was not the case in this particular locality. She believed that a Federation between the two schools was the best way forward and would help alleviate the current lack of parental confidence in St Neots Community

College, but would require a great deal of support to enable any new management structure to be effective, as well as the need to ensure that there was continuous consultation and involvement of parents and the wider, local community.

The Cabinet Member for Children countered the earlier claim made by the spokesperson for the petition that the County Council was doing the Government' bidding or that the decision was mainly structural, indicating that the County Council was supporting the proposed Federation on education improvement grounds for the good of all the children of St Neots. The Cabinet Member for Learning indicated that the measures proposed were to improve the quality of teaching at St Neots Community College and this required an action plan to be developed in order to deliver the improvements through accountable and transparent targets.

It was reported that the other Members for St Neots, Eaton Socon and Eynesbury and one of the Members for Little Paxton and St Neots North also supported the recommendations included in the report.

It was resolved to:

- i) Note the consultation undertaken in St Neots in the autumn of 2009 on the structural options identified as a potential response to a range of challenges faced by St Neots Community College;
- ii) Note the discussions which have taken place with the Office of the School Commissioner at the DCSF and the views expressed; and
- iii) Endorse the proposals that the Authority should work with the governing bodies of Longsands College and St Neots Community College to:
 - Establish a federation between the schools to be operational from 1 September 2010; and
 - change the status of St Neots Community College from a community to a foundation school to be effective from 1 September 2010.

110. REPORT ON THE 2010 BUDGET CONSULTATION

This report was received as part of a third despatch with the chairman agreeing to take the report on the following grounds

Reason for lateness

In order to obtain as many views as possible a number of consultation events have taken place including the Local Liaison Committee which only met on 14th January 2010.

Reason for urgency

Cabinet should take account of the results of all the formal and informal consultation which has taken place before its meeting when considering the Integrated Plan and its supporting Budget and before making its final recommendations to the Full Council meeting in February.

As an introduction to the two reports concerning the Integrated Plan for 2010/11 together with its supporting budget and the consultation undertaken, the chairman made reference to the hard times for the economy, the people of Cambridgeshire and for individuals who used and accessed services. She pointed out that while there was hope that the economy would begin to recover in the forthcoming year, the costs of bailing out the banks would fall on both taxpayers and the public services over the next five years, expressing her concerns that the Government had still not been clear on the level of funding cuts which would be required. She indicated that unlike the Government, the County Council intended to be open and honest regarding the hard times and challenges ahead and the need when considering the Integrated Plan to look at the medium and long term interests of the people of Cambridgeshire and the requirements of those most in need of our services.

In terms of public consultation undertaken, for the 2010/11 Integrated Plan it was reported that the approach had been to continue carrying out formal, research based consultation and in addition, to collect and collate informal stakeholder views. In appreciating the hard choices required, officers had used a different more detailed approach to formal public consultation using the SIMALTO approach as detailed in the report. The benefits were that the public were able not only to identify what was important to them, but were also able to indicate the relative importance they attached to differing levels of disinvestment and investment.

Of the list of thirteen service choices and changes considered, it was highlighted that they would not wish that support to schools, helping older people remain in their own homes, roads and pathway maintenance and road improvements should be reduced or if so, as a last resort. In terms of if disinvestment was required, less concern was seen to making reductions in supporting those with special education needs being placed out of county, climate change, reducing the costs of residential care, less tailoring of foster care and reductions in grants to the voluntary sector. If additional funding could be found, the public preference was for investment in new school buildings, helping people stay in their own homes and further path and roadway maintenance. In general, the public would support increasing council tax to prevent service disinvestment, particularly if there was a clear link between the increase and services being protected.

It was resolved:

To note the results of the survey which helped contribute to the consideration of the priorities being proposed in the following report on the Integrated Plan.

111. COUNCIL'S INTEGRATED PLAN 2010 (INCLUDING PRIORITIES, BUDGET AND COUNCIL TAX)

This report was received as part of a second despatch with the chairman agreeing to take the report on the following grounds:

Reason for lateness

The Tax base figures were only received from the districts after the despatch of the first Cabinet agenda. In addition, consultations were still being undertaken with Executive Directors / other partners in order to finalise the paper.

Reason for urgency

Legislation requires Councils to set a Council Tax by the 11th March. However, as a precepting authority, the County Council needs to set it earlier, to allow the District Councils to set their Council Tax before the above deadline and therefore Cabinet needed to agree the detail of the recommendations it wished to refer on to the full Council meeting on 16th February, the appropriate decision making body regarding making the final decisions on the Integrated Plan / budget.

In introducing the Integrated Plan attached to the report, The Leader of the Council drew attention to the County Council Vision, the five strategic objectives and Service Delivery principles and the Council's values as set out in the Action Plan section of the report, all of which remained unchanged despite the current and future economic uncertainties. In the current climate of uncertainty, it was considered important that a vision was in place in order to undertake what was considered right for the long terms interest of the public. The objectives were essentially built around protecting and nurturing the most vulnerable, whilst preparing individuals and the community for the benefits of sustainable growth and improvement.

Attention was drawn to how the Plan had been formed over the previous seven months, stressing that the aim of the Plan was to clearly demonstrate the golden thread between the plans for all public bodies in Cambridgeshire, the role of the authority in delivering the plans and the particular resources and service decisions taken. Cabinet was reminded that the general approach to the Integrated Plan was to bring together consideration of what required to be undertaken, the resources available to undertake the activities, the outcomes of the activities and how service change and transformation would be delivered.

In terms of funding it was highlighted that of the County Council's non-schools core funding, approximately one third came from the formula Government grant (confirmation had been received that the grant uplift would be 2.2%) and two thirds came from council tax receipts totalling some £337m for 2010/11. In addition, Government provided specific non-school grants to the value of approximately £90m (with Direct Schools Grant amounting to a further £321m). It was highlighted that Cambridgeshire's settlements had been considerably worse than many other shire authorities with the increase of 2% for 2008/09 being the lowest in a decade, whilst the increase for 2009-10 was even lower. The 2010-11 increase percentage was well below the shire average of 4%, and as a result, ranking the County as 27 out of 34. The Government formula grant settlement had failed to recognise the costs of growth in the County (while still seeing the area as a major engine of economic growth), the impact of an ageing population, the specific needs of deprivation or the increasing burdens placed on the county by Government. The point was made later in the meeting that had the County received the average settlement in each of the last three years, it would have had in the region of £10m more to spend.

In addition, the Government's programme of a rolling settlement had also come to an end, constraining future planning. As a result, the plans beyond 2010/11 had been based on an assumption that funding in real terms would reduce by some 3% per year unto the end of the planning period. Cabinet Members were however warned that there was a risk that the figures might become worse and / or that specific grants would be significantly reduced to protect a small increase in formula grant.

In terms of Council Tax, attention was drawn to the fact that the authority had started the planning period with the fourth lowest Council Tax for a shire county, reflecting past

decisions and the current efficiency of the service provided. It was highlighted that Government Ministers had indicated that authorities raising their council tax by a significant amount would again face the risk of capping, a crude mechanism which took no account of current tax rates or the relative value of services offered. Fully understanding the pressures on household budgets particularly in 2010/11 but also observing the low tax and the increased demands on services, it was proposed to raise the Council Tax by 3.0% in 2010/11 with an indication that in subsequent years the rate of increase would be around 2.5% (at forecast inflation rates) which would give rise to a Band D Council tax of £1,047.78, an annual increase of £30.51p, a 2.8% increase on previous year resources taking into account decisions on formula grant and council tax funding.

It was explained that while the growth figure was well above what was being experienced in the economy at large, it required to be set against resource increases of approximately 4% in previous years and resource increase of approximately 1.5% predicated in future a years and was therefore a transition year from real growth to managed retraction in public services. The calls on the 2.8% funding increase in 2010/11 included;

- Forecast inflation of 10.4m 3.2% of budget base – during a period of low inflation this increase would be reduced significantly through better procurement and contracting and a clear expectation around public sector pay whether nationally or locally agreed of no cost of living increase,
- Forecast demand increases (as a result of changing numbers and needs) would cost £10.9m 3.3% of base budget – most of the increased demand relating to responding to the need of the most vulnerable in both Children's and Adult Services.
- The impact of identified and prioritised pressure and developments on available funding (including increased financing charges for the Capital programme) amounted to £35m 1.6% of budget base with in the main the commitments identified last year for 2010/11 being retained.

It was highlighted that:

- inflation alone outstripped the amount of additional funding available to the authority and the gap therefore required to be filled with hard choices around savings and service focus and transformation.
- The level of savings required in 2010/11 was £16m 4.9% of the budget base.
- Savings would increasingly be difficult to deliver as the authority started the planning period by already being relatively efficient and as the rate of savings also needed to increase in future years.
- The savings required would need major service transformation, further focussing on the needs outcomes further and a pronounced reduction in service and corporate management overheads.

For 2010/11 the aggregate effect of inflation, demography, development and savings adjustment on the 2009/10 recurrent base budget were set out as being:

- Children and Younger People's Services an increase of £1.4m 1.7%
- Environmental Services a decrease of £0.7m 1.9%
- Community and Adult Services an increase of £5.6m 4.0%
- Waste Private Finance Initiative a planned increase reflecting the opening of the plant of £2.6m 16.9%
- No increase to any of the corporate directorates.

The result of the above was that the pattern for the next five years indicated that cash increases would continue for Community and Adult Services, while Children's Services would have a stand still cash budget and the budget for Environmental and Corporate Services would reduce in cash terms. In real terms i.e. adjusted for inflation and demography all budgets would see a reduction in purchasing power.

Comments from the relevant Cabinet Members regarding the impact of the proposed budgets included:

- **Children's Services** - there was the need to prioritise vulnerable children and in the next five years to protect children social care, undertaking some structural changes to address the Office For Standards In Education, Children's Services And Skills (Ofsted) review (included later on the agenda as a separate report).
- **Adults Services Care** - The service was very much a 'needs led' service facing increased demographic pressure and increased 'needs led' pressure such as dementia. There were only three ways in which adult social care could control expenditure:
 - i) reducing demand by raising eligibility or preventing people having the need to enter the adult social care system in the first place – it was stressed that there were no current plans to change eligibility criteria
 - ii) working efficiently within the resources available to each service user and redesigning services so that they were cost effective and reducing the need for and amount of services in the longer term.
 - iii) addressing unit costs lowering towards and below the average of our comparators nationally.

By concentrating on reablement / the transformation agenda the aim would be to ensure service users were better placed to become more independent and to stay at home in line with the findings of the consultation process and strategic objective 2 (supporting and protecting vulnerable people). The resource allocation system and the implementation of self directed support had shown that more choice and control could lead to more cost effective solutions delivering services for which users had been assessed. Bringing people back into the county meant that they would be nearer their homes and where possible, would be able to live more independently. It was indicated that in year one there would be no change in charges, while there would be consultation on changes to the system to increase income.

- **Library Services** – this service was ready for transformation as opposed to service reduction, with 4 libraries having recently re-opened or been due to open. With the need to make savings of £2m in five years as well as reducing backroom costs, a review was being undertaken to look at other more cost effective models to protect the service, including options of a joint service with one or more local authorities through the formation of a charitable trust and consideration of possible externalisation to a third party.
- **Archive Service** – This service required improvements to be made over the next three years.
- **Communities Budget** - The Cabinet Member for Communities would be working closely with the Service Director Community Engagement (Fenland) with what was a miniscule budget to help build this area up.

- **Highways and Access** - Seen as one of the priority areas with residents, efficiency savings were being sought through the Cambridgeshire Highways contract. Removal of demand responsive transport would affect community transport and there would also need to be a reduction of contracted bus provision near the end of the five year period. Reassurance was provided that other measures such as the reduction to aids to movement signs in year 1 and in slurry seal and surface dressing in year 2 would not be in areas where their absence would be dangerous. It was highlighted that the current extreme cold spell had considerably increased the potential cost pressures due to the dramatic increase in the number of pothole directly attributed to the severe conditions and it was hoped that National Government would step in to provide extra resources on what was the second severe winter in succession. The current total additional potential cost of the continued severe cold spell had not yet been assessed but would follow in future budget update reports to Cabinet.
- Continued recycling initiatives would help contribute over £½ million savings a year.
- The need to restructure services would also involve working closer with the district councils and other partners to identify and eliminate duplication of provision.

Capital Expenditure

It was reported that over the next five year's the Authority was planning to spend £560m:

- £380m on the schools and children's programme.
- £109m on the transport programme.
- £5m on library and community facilities.
- £66m on general building and IT requirements.

The programme was to be funded by:

- £100m of supported borrowing (the costs of which are nominally contained within the formula grant)
- £153m of specific capital grants.
- £224m of developer contributions
- £43m of prudential borrowing
- £40m of asset sales

In arriving at the above, Services had reviewed and where possible pared-back capital spending but the following two areas were highlighted where the need for additional investment was pronounced:

- the school's capital programme - where changes in predicted roll numbers meant that an additional net investment in buildings of £16m would be required and £9m of land sales income needed to be foregone. (This was a national rather than just a local issue). Measure to help deal with the additional accommodation would include use of mobile classrooms and non traditional modular buildings (sectional prefabricated buildings)
- £3m of capital investment had been earmarked to highway improvements and repairs over and above previously forecast spending levels, to meet the extra demands that followed the bad winter (as alluded to earlier). In reply to a question on how this expenditure would be used, it was indicated that it was currently too early to specify, but

that more detail would follow on from a forthcoming meeting with district colleagues which had been convened before the current severe weather spell in order to help identify areas for closer co-operation. One of the areas that would be looked at would be whether extra investment was required in relevant additional capital equipment.

The slowdown in building activity would reduce the number of section 106 receipts for social capital investment and would require innovative solutions to ensure new estates were not just collections of houses and that appropriate community facilities were still provided.

Reserves

It was reported that the reserve balances of the Authority remained low and had only been accepted by the External Auditors due to the County Council's strong track-record of financial planning and management. (The relevant officers were congratulated for the way the balances had previously been managed) Consideration had been given to the release of reserves to assist with financial pressures, but this could not be safely or sensibly carried out with the Authority's minimal reserve balances.

The Plan assumed that the reserves policy of the Authority would remain unaltered and in particular that:

- The General Reserve balance would remain at 2% of non-schools turn-over.
- The Pressures and Developments (contingency) Reserve would remain at 1% of non-schools turn-over.
- The Invest to Transform Reserve would remain available for transformation projects that had a financial pay-back.
- Certain specific reserves would match their funding to known liabilities, e.g. insurance.

Cabinet's attention was drawn to the increasing risks that could lead to calls against the Pressures and Development Reserve in 2010/11 and 2011/12. In the main it was noted that the reserve set aside were to meet the in-year impacts of small variations in demand or cost that could not have been reasonably predicted at the beginning of the year. The aim was to have a financial contingency in one place that allowed the overall plan of the Authority to be delivered without supplementary in year savings decisions.

However, in addition to the local pressures that could be managed within the sums set aside, it was reported that there were recent indications that additional pressures were to be added by Government with no additional or in other cases inadequate funding to cover the extra duties proposed. Examples of these more significant pressures included: the promise of free adult care for those in the critical care category which was forecast by shires to have a net cost of between £2-4m in a full year; the unfunded impact of the concessionary travel scheme and transfer of responsibility which could have an unfunded cost of approximately £1m a year; additional economic and flood duties which could cost an average Authority £0.5m a year minimum.

Revised Tax Base Figures

Cabinet's attention was drawn to the latest collection and tax base information received with collection account figures being broadly as planned, and the predicted £22,000 deficit. The Chairman was pleased to announce that the Tax base figures were higher than expected, and this was likely to yield £2.2m of additional funding a year.

Performance and Delivery

Attention was drawn to section two of the integrated plan which set out the key actions and the plans that supported the actions as well as where appropriate, the impact on performance and outcomes of these actions. Cabinet was alerted that further reworking of this section was intended to take place before publication to Council, in order to ensure consistency and clarity and to provide a framework for monitoring progress over the coming twelve months.

A general comment was made regarding the recent Audit Commission's confirmation that the County was "performing well" and that it has strong arrangements for financial strategy and control which was expected to serve the Council well during the current difficult times. Relative to other similar authorities, performance was expected to continue to improve, as would the value for money offered by our services.

Finally the chairman wished to place on record her thanks not only to the Corporate Director: Finance, Property and Performance and his team, the service directors and their teams for working together to help create the Integrated Plan, but her Cabinet colleagues for the additional time they had spent to help understand, develop and confirm proposals for service change and transformation. She also thanked front line staff and their managers and other councillors for their ideas, observations and proposals within the plan. She recognised that the decisions they would be making in the current year were far harder than in previous years, but were being made to protect services for the future.

It was resolved to:

- i) Delegate responsibility for agreeing any further alterations to the Integrated Plan (Sections 1 and 2) to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Corporate Director: People, Policy and Law and the Corporate Director: Finance, Property and Performance taking into account additional Collection and Tax base information being provided.
- ii) Recommend to the full Council meeting on 16th February the following budget recommendations:
 - a) That approval be given to the Service/Directorate cash limits as set out in Table 4.3.1 (page 8 of Section 4 (Finance Report) of the Integrated Plan (yellow pages)).
 - b) That approval is given to a County Budget Requirement in respect of general expenses applicable to the whole County area of £337,046,000.
 - c) That approval is given to a recommended County Precept for Council Tax from District Councils of £225,991,866. (To be received in ten equal instalments in accordance with the "fall-back" provisions of the Local Authorities (Funds) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 1995)
 - d) That approval be given to a Council Tax for each Band of property, based on the number of "Band D" equivalent properties notified to the County Council by the District Councils (215,686):

Band	Council Tax	Band	Council Tax
A	£698.52	E	£1,280.62
B	£814.94	F	£1,513.46
C	£931.36	G	£1,746.30
D	£1,047.78	H	£2,095.56

e) That approval is given to the Prudential Borrowing, Prudential Indicators and Treasury Management Strategy as set out in Section 4.6 (pages 17-21 of Section 4 (Finance Report) of the Integrated Plan (yellow pages)).

f) That the report of the Corporate Director: Finance, Property and Performance on the levels of reserves and robustness of the estimates as set out in Section 4.7 (pages 22-25 of Section 4 (Finance Report) of the Integrated Plan (yellow pages)) be noted.

g) Capital Budget: That approval be given to Capital Payments in 2010-11 up to £137.7m arising from:

- i) Commitments from schemes already approved; and
- ii) The consequences of new starts (for the five years 2010-11 to 2014-15) listed within the Office reports that follow, subject to the receipt of appropriate capital resources and confirmation of individual detailed business cases.

h) Performance Indicators: Cabinet has approved the performance indicators identified in Section 2 of the plan, subject to finalising and agreeing all performance indicators, targets and actions in accordance with the process set out in paragraph 3.2 of the Cabinet report.

i) Final Adjustments: Cabinet has authorised the Corporate Director: Finance, Property and Performance, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make technical revisions to the foregoing budget recommendations to the County Council, so as to take into account any changes deemed appropriate, including information on District Council Tax Base and Collection Funds.

112. PRESCRIBED ALTERATION TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF WILLINGHAM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Cabinet received a report seeking approval to proceed with plans to increase the size of Willingham Primary School in order to provide a total of 420 places, through the addition of three permanent classrooms with effect from 1 September 2010.

Cabinet noted that there was only one school in Willingham serving the primary age range. While the total number of pupils on roll at Willingham Primary School had steadily decreased from 1999 to a low of 276 in 2005, numbers had since increased rapidly to 341

and could be explained by the fact that 124 new dwellings had been built in the village in the last three years. As a result, the County Council had developed plans to increase the size of the school to provide 60 places for children entering Reception and a total of 420 places across all seven year groups on a permanent basis through the provision of three new classrooms and ancillary accommodation. The report set out the results of the consultation exercise for which there had only been one response regarding travel and to which the school had responded directly.

The local Member provided comments supporting the proposals.

In response to a questions regarding how the proposals fitted with the Council policy installation of sprinklers in new school buildings it was explained that the existing school of 11 classrooms did not have a sprinkler system and that the addition of a small extension with three new classrooms with no sprinkler system had been approved after a risk assessment with the school insurers. The current policy was not to install sprinklers in minor, extension refurbishments.

It was resolved to:

- (i) Note the demographic forecast and breakdown of applications for reception places for September 2010 entry;
- (ii) Note the responses to the statutory notice published during the autumn term 2009; and
- (iii) Approve the enlargement of the physical capacity of Willingham Primary School to provide a total of 420 places through the addition of three permanent classrooms with effect from 1 September 2010.

113. PERSONAL SUPPORT (HOME BASED) CONTRACT: EXEMPTION FROM CONTRACT REGULATIONS DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SELF DIRECTED SUPPORT (SDS)

Cabinet received a report seeking approval for an extension on the current contract framework for personal support services until 31 March 2012, and to invite applications from home care services to join the current contract framework, to support increased choice and capacity, whilst new contract arrangements were designed and implemented to support the self directed support system.

Cabinet was reminded that in 2008 it had approved a 2 year extension to the use of the standard contract framework that secured a continuation of the basis on which the home care market had been developed and expanded. This had allowed Commissioners to build on the positive relationships developed with local providers and to continue to strengthen the market within the framework of continuous improvement and collaboration to deliver on the Council's strategy to support more people in their own homes. The extension had been due to expire on 31 March 2010.

Cabinet agreed with the contention that, until officers were able to develop new ways of contracting, there was still the need to maintain the stability of the existing home care

market based on the existing contract framework and it was agreed that the use of the current contract framework should be extended as requested

In answer to a question regarding how the hourly rates charged for home care services compared with other comparator authorities, it was indicated that they were comparable in that the current contract only paid one flat rate and did not pay enhanced rates for bank holidays or for evening or weekend shifts which was the case in some other authorities (who charged double and even triple rates in respect of some holidays e.g. Christmas / Easter) who might otherwise appear initially to be charging less per hour. The relevant staff were congratulated on being a leader in the field with the current work they were undertaking with providers, to develop new ways of contracting to fit with the new system of self directed support.

It was resolved:

- i) To approve the extension of the current contract framework for Personal Support Services until 31 March 2012, using the power to dispense with any provision of the Contract Regulations, as set out in clause 3.7 of the Contract Regulations.
- ii) To approve the invitation for applications for home care providers to join the Preferred Providers' List to increase choice and capacity in the Personal Support Services market.

114. INTEGRATED RESOURCES AND PERFORMANCE REPORT – NOVEMBER 2009

This report presented financial and performance information in order for Cabinet to assess the progress in delivering the Council's Integrated Plan.

Section 3 of the report set out a summary of the performance issues highlighting those indicators which were off target or were predicted to miss their targets by the end of the financial year and the actions being undertaken / reasons for the shortfall position.

In terms of resources the main issues highlighted were as follows:

- Overall the budget position was showing a forecast year-end overspend of £391k (0.1%) a decrease of £650k from last month and was the third successive month that the forecast overspend had reduced, following the implementation of Service action plans.
- In Environment Services (ES) an underspend of -£630k was being predicted, which was mainly due to savings in Environment & Regulation and on the Waste PFI Contract.
- In Community and Adult Services (CAS) an overspend of £2.9m was being predicted, which was mainly due to pressures within Adult Social Services. Further examination of the factors behind this overspend were being examined with the Primary Care Trust (PCT) and there were indications that the forecast overspend could be significantly reduced through efficiency savings and the recovery plan currently being implemented with some of the overspend attributed to unexpected changes in demand. Additional allowance for demography pressures had been built into future year budgets.
- In Children and Young People's Services (CYPS) an overspend of £247k was being predicted, which was mainly due to pressures within Strategy and Commissioning.

- In Corporate Directorates (CD) an underspend of -£78k was being predicted, which was mainly due to savings identified within People, Policy and Law.
- In Corporate Directorates – Financing, an underspend of £2m was being predicted due to savings on Debt Charges.
- Spending on the council's capital programme was currently proceeding slower than estimated.
- There were no significant debt problems to report and there were no noticeable effects arising from the economic downturn.

It was noted that the general economic forecast for the UK remained poor and it was probable that growth would not be evident until 2010. The most significant implication for the Authority was that as already reported, in order to restore the nation's finances and services borrowing and benefit requirements there would be significant pressures on public funding, certainly for five years and probably for a decade. The implications of the funding constraints had been considered separately as part of the 2010 / 11 Integrated Plan and budget report. It was orally reported that inflation had begun to rise and was now at 2.9% which could, if it continued, have an impact on final expenditure / borrowing costs.

Updates were provided at the meeting in respect of:

- The Children and Young People Services overspend and the measures being taken to mitigate them. Confidence was expressed that the Placements - Education overspend of £209K referred to in paragraph 4.4.4 would be brought under control by year end.
- Monitoring the Adult Social Care overspend, it was reported that agreement had been reached that the Cambridgeshire Care Partnership members should receive monthly update reports which would be more detailed than just being budget sheet figures and in would include details of efficiency savings made to date against the agreed action plan.
- Updating the out of date reference in paragraph 4.5.1 of the report on the Shared Services Programme, it was explained that it had not been possible to provide a separate report to the current meeting, as the agreement was still subject to significant legal discussions and it was therefore hoped that they could be resolved in time for a report to be presented to the February Cabinet meeting.

Cabinet was also asked to consider and either approve / reject one Section 106 deferral request as detailed in appendix 6 of the report. Cabinet requested that the resolution should be made clearer in terms of it agreeing that the payment should be undertaken in two instalments.

It was resolved:

- i) To note the resources and performance information and the remedial action being taken in cases of identified predicted budget overspends.
- ii) To approve the deferral request (due at the current time with 50% occupation of the development of 24 Units – South East of 30 Kirkgate Street, Wisbech – £16,350 Primary Education Contribution) on the basis that payment was made in two instalments, one at 50% occupation and the final 50% instalment on reaching 75% occupation.

115. PHASE 3 JOINT STRATEGIC NEEDS ASSESSMENT

The purpose of this report was to present to Cabinet the draft Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Phase 3 with the full document (due to its size and the expense of printing in colour) being provided separately to Cabinet Members in a limited run information pack.

Cabinet were reminded that In Cambridgeshire, officers had so far carried out three phases of Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), working in partnership across the National Health Service (NHS) and Local Authorities to gather the relevant information. In phase 1 a public health and health inequalities data set was produced, which included the data recommended in national JSNA guidance leading to the production of the following six JSNAs, which had focussed on different groups within the population. These were:

- Children and Young People.
- Adults of Working Age including:
 - Adults with mental health problems.
 - Adults with learning disabilities.
 - Adults with sensory or physical impairment and long term conditions.
- Older People.

It was noted that Phase 2, had reviewed existing surveys and consultation with service users, carers and the public, to provide qualitative information on local health needs. In phase 3, officers had produced two further JSNAs which looked at the needs of groups at particular risk of social exclusion within Cambridgeshire – people who were homeless or at risk of homelessness; and migrant workers. The document also compared key health outcomes for Cambridgeshire against national averages and against other areas with similar socio-demographic characteristics to Cambridgeshire and each of the Local Authority Districts.

Cabinet thanked Dr Liz Robin for what was another excellent and very important document which would be used by Cabinet and other public sector organisations to help prioritise expenditure based on the level of need and deprivation identified and the demographic forecasts provided.

In response to a question raised regarding how the information could reach an even wider audience, it was reported that the relevant officer had been asked to prepare a Communications Plan under phase 4, with distribution of information expected to include amongst others, members of neighbourhood panels and the Community and Well Being Thematic Partnership. Officers were also exploring the mechanisms for undertaking more joint working with key partners, taking into account their relevant remits.

There was a discussion regarding Killed and Seriously Injured statistics and the information produced as set out on page 29. Doctor Robin indicated that the figures in the report were calculated on a different basis from those produced by the County Council and agreed that the County Council's lower figures were more up to date.

It was agreed that the resolution should add the word "all" to the words "service planning" to reflect that the information could be applied to all services in the County Council.

It was resolved;

To agree to the use of the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment Phase 3 as an information source for strategy development and all service planning on health, care and wellbeing issues.

116. HILLS ROAD BRIDGE SAFETY SCHEME

Cabinet received a report on the results of the trial of hybrid cycleways in both directions across Hills Road Bridge, Cambridge, as part of the Cycling Town programme. Detailed coloured maps had been provided as part of the separate Cabinet Information Pack.

Cabinet was reminded that at its meeting on the 29th September 2009, it had given approval for the development and implementation of the Cycling Town programme. As a result, one of the infrastructure schemes brought forward had been the introduction of hybrid cycle lanes within the existing structure across Hills Road Bridge. In order to ensure that the proposed scheme was fully understood, and to demonstrate the effects on motor traffic, a trial of the layout had been implemented from September, accompanied by a full public consultation.

Cabinet was advised that the analysis of the public consultation showed that there was strong support for this safety scheme from both motorists and cyclists, with much work been undertaken by the officers to evaluate all comments and where possible, incorporating practicable new ideas within the scheme. Detailed evaluation of traffic modelling supported the introduction of the new layout detailed in the Cabinet report which was supported by both the trial layout monitoring data and feedback from the public and stakeholders.

Reassurance was provided that in terms of safety, the new layout would better cater for all movements, particularly in terms of drivers and cyclists going straight ahead with a dedicated 2.1 m wide cycle lane (which was wider than on many other similar schemes) with its surface to be marked clearly in red and with cyclists being given priority.

The Members for Trumpington and Coleridge had indicated their support / acceptance of the proposals.

It was resolved to:

- i) Note the results of the consultation; and
- ii) Agree the implementation of Hills Road Bridge Safety Scheme, including advertising the traffic regulation orders associated with the scheme and asking the April 2010 meeting of the Cambridge Traffic Management Area Joint Committee to resolve any objections to the advertised traffic regulation orders.

117. COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT RESULTS

The chairman welcomed Nigel Smith from the Audit Commission who was attending to co-present the report. The report provided Cabinet with the results of the first Comprehensive

Area Assessment (CAA) inspection for both the County Council and Cambridgeshire as a place, indicating how they compared to other authorities across the region and nationally. The report also provided details of the requirements and considerably tighter timescale for the second year.

Cabinet noted that:

- The Comprehensive Area Assessment, or CAA, had become the formal inspection methodology for local authorities and other public bodies within defined geographic areas with effect from 1 April 2009 replacing the previous regime of Comprehensive Performance Assessments.
- A Comprehensive Area Assessment consisted of two separate elements of inspection activity. The first element was an Organisational Assessment of the County Council as an individual authority. The second element of the CAA methodology related to an assessment of Cambridgeshire at a County, or area level, and assessed the collective activity across the key public authorities including local authorities, police, fire and health undertaken on behalf of the communities of Cambridgeshire.

Cabinet was pleased to note that Cambridgeshire County Council had received an overall Organisational Assessment score of 3 out of a possible 4, and was therefore judged by the Inspectorates to be 'performing well'. For the two underpinning elements of the Organisational Assessment judgement, the County Council had also achieved scores of 3 out of 4 for Managing Performance and Use of Resources, the latter of which was harder to achieve and therefore provided a very strong overall score. The assessment showed that most service areas were improving despite increasing financial restraint and that the County Council was working well with its partners and had with their help, helped alleviate the worst effects of the current recession. Both assessments not only reflected current performance, but also that there was confidence that services could improve further.

Attention was drawn to the organisational assessment's identified areas for improvement as set out in section 2.10 of the report with opportunities to improve them being considered through the Integrated Planning cycle for 2010 / 11.

In response to question, it was indicated that no specific reasons could be given why no authority on the East of England had received the top score of 4, but that there was no guarantees that an authority receiving a 4 score in the current year would maintain this in future years.

It was resolved:

- i) Note the positive outcomes arising from the first CAA judgements and the opportunities for further improvements to be achieved in the future.
- ii) Note the arrangements already underway to prepare for CAA during 2010.

118. ANNUAL PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL CARE SERVICES FOR ADULTS SERVICES FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE AND ACTION PLAN

Cabinet received a report setting out:

- The Summary Report of the 2008/09 Annual Performance Assessment for Adult Social Care Services by the Care Quality Commission
- The work to be undertaken to address the areas for improvement set out in the Summary Report.

Cabinet noted that the Care Quality Commission (CQC) made an annual assessment and judgement on Adult Social Care Services drawing from the following information collected throughout the year:

- Regular meetings with the Area Manager
- The annual Self Assessment Survey, which contains quantitative (including the formal performance indicators (PIs)) and qualitative information, submitted in May
- Any fieldwork inspections
- Annual Review Meeting, held in July 2009.

The assessment was made up of two components:

- Delivery of Outcomes Assessment: a grading scale of “poor, adequate, well and excellent”, on the delivery of the seven outcomes,
- A written assessment for Leadership and Commissioning and use of resources.

Cabinet was extremely pleased to note that the Care Quality Commission had judged that overall Cambridgeshire County Council was performing ‘Well’ in its delivery of outcomes for people using Adult Social Care services and acknowledged that the last year had been a positive year for Adult social care across Cambridgeshire, delivering improved services for the people of Cambridgeshire, and being recognised for this through the “2 star” rating for 2007 / 08 and the performing “Well” assessment for 2008 – 09. Cabinet wished to record its praise and pass on its congratulations to all the staff involved in the service.

It was noted that progress against all the actions in the action plan would be overseen by the Quality for Adults Programme Board on an exception reporting basis at their monthly meetings. Currently the service was performing well in six out of the seven outcome areas. Progress against the action plan would be presented to Cabinet and the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee at a minimum of six monthly intervals.

It was resolved:

- i) To note and comment on the content of the 2008/09 Annual Performance Assessment of Adult Social Care Services for Cambridgeshire.
- ii) To approve the action plan set out in Appendix 2 to the Cabinet report to address the areas for development identified by the Care Quality Commission.
- iii) To confirm that updates on progress against the Action Plan would be received by Cabinet and Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny at a minimum of six monthly intervals.

119. OFFICE FOR STANDARDS IN EDUCATION, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SKILLS (OFSTED) INSPECTION OF SAFEGUARDING AND SERVICES FOR LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN 2009 – IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Cabinet received a report presenting the Improvement Plan following on from the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Inspection of Safeguarding and Services for Looked After Children which had taken place in September 2009 in order to evaluate how well children and young people are safeguarded and the quality of service and outcomes for looked after children and care leavers. The final judgement made was that Cambridgeshire was considered adequate for safeguarding and adequate for Looked After Children, with good capacity to improve and good features. The inspection report confirmed the ongoing improvements that were being made within the service and that all statutory requirements relating to safeguarding were being met. Inspectors have recognised the considerable efforts that had been made towards establishing clear vision, structures and detailed operational arrangements for the service.

The Improvement Plan was attached as Appendix A with Cabinet noting and congratulating staff on the fact that work on many of the actions had been progressed, as outlined in the Plan, with a number of key actions having been completed. Particular priority had been given to the recommendations suggested for completion within 3 months.

It was noted that several of the formal recommendations requiring action as set out in section 2 of the report relied on improvements to the dedicated IT system and it was confirmed that IT officers had been involved in streamlining the system to improve the exemplars. This had the effect of reducing the amount of time social workers were required to be in front of IT screens and had resulted in an increased number of assessments being undertaken.

Cabinet noted that the Improvement plan was to be monitored on a regular basis by the Social Care Management Team.

It was resolved:

To welcome and approve the Improvement Plan.

120. CONSULTATION ON DRAFT NATIONAL POLICY STATEMENTS (NPS) FOR MAJOR INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS FOR ENERGY AND PORTS

Cabinet received a report to consider a proposed consultation response to the Government on the following draft National Policy Statements (NPS)s:

- National Policy Statement for Energy (EN-1)
- National Policy Statement for Fossil Fuel Electricity Generating Infrastructure (EN-2)
- National Policy Statement for Renewable Energy Infrastructure (EN-3)
- National Policy Statement for Gas Supply Infrastructure and Gas and Oil Pipelines (EN-4)
- National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks Infrastructure (EN-5)
- National Policy Statement for Nuclear Power Generation (EN-6)
- National Policy Statement for Ports.

Cabinet noted that the Government had introduced changes to the planning system, through the Planning Act 2008, designed to reform the system as it related to proposals for nationally significant infrastructure. The Government was arguing that the current process for obtaining planning permission for large infrastructure projects was an inefficient and slow process, involving many different consenting regimes. The intention was that in the future, permission for nationally significant infrastructure would be administered by a new independent body, the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) under a single system of consent.

Significant concerns were expressed about the draft NPSs in the officer report as they appeared to pay little regard to the existing regional and local planning policy framework that local authorities and other partners had put considerable resources into establishing. In addition, the pre-application process seemed to be focused more on informing local people of the proposals, than on refining the scheme with the expert knowledge of local stakeholders. This gave rise to serious concerns that the system would result in applications that did not take account of local circumstances and conditions. There was considerable concern expressed that while local authorities could highlight planning policies and local considerations in their local impact reports, this would in future be at a stage when the application was largely finalised and could lead to significant and unnecessary adverse impacts. The comments provided by the relevant Policy Development Group were orally brought to Cabinet's attention at the meeting.

Cabinet Members considered the proposals to be another example of the erosion of local democracy in terms of planning autonomy etc. It was suggested that if time allowed, it would be appropriate to seek district councils' support to the proposed response and making it a joint response, to add greater weight to the strength of feelings / concerns being expressed.

It was suggested and agreed that in respect of response 1 (decisions being made on increasing the size of a port without reference to the capacity of the regional and local road and rail network infrastructure to accommodate the resulting increase in freight traffic) providing a specific example to illustrate the point of the knock on affect to regional roads (such as the A 47 which was already at its traffic capacity and could not accommodate additional traffic) would provide an effective illustration of the points being made.

It was resolved:

- i) To agree the draft responses set out in Appendix 1 subject to response 1 providing a specific example to illustrate the point e.g. the A 47.
- ii) To delegate to the Portfolio Holder for Growth, Infrastructure and Strategic Planning in consultation with the Executive Director: Environment Services the authority to amend the response in line with comments made by both the Policy Development Group and Cabinet for submission to Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) by 22 February 2010 and Department for Transport (DfT) by 15 February 2010
- iii) To seek, if practicable and time allowed, a joint response with the involvement of the district councils.

121. QUARTERLY UPDATE REPORT ON KEY PARTNERSHIPS

Cabinet received the latest quarterly update report on the following six partnerships:

- Cambridgeshire Together
- Cambridgeshire Children's Trust
- Cambridgeshire Care Partnership
- Cambridgeshire Horizons
- Safer and Stronger Thematic Partnership (formerly Community Safety Strategic Partnership)
- Greater Cambridge Partnership

Updates reported to the text included:

- That the Environmental Sustainability Partnership had now met, and that Councillor Orgee had been elected its chairman. This partnership would also in future report to Cabinet as part of the future quarterly partnership update report.
- The Cambridgeshire Children's Trust Executive had met the previous week to discuss joint commissioning issues and how to move forward with them.
- Cambridgeshire Horizons had expressed their disappointment to the Government regarding the Housing Growth Fund cuts.

It was resolved:

To note the content of the report.

122. DELEGATIONS FROM CABINET TO CABINET MEMBERS / OFFICERS

Cabinet received a report on the progress of the actions delegated to individual Cabinet Members and / or to officers to make decisions on behalf of the Cabinet at previous Cabinet meetings up to the 15th December 2009 Cabinet meeting.

An update in respect of item 13 titled 'Building Schools for the Future - Appointment of Selected Bidder' confirmed that the selected bidder letter with Equitix Learning Community Partnerships had been signed the previous week.

123. DRAFT CABINET AGENDA 23rd FEBRUARY 2010

The draft agenda for the 23RD February was noted with the following amendments since the agenda was published:

Moving to the March Cabinet Meeting Item 12 titled 'Joint Municipal Waste Management Strategies - Consultation Response and item 13. Controlled Waste Regulations Draft Response'

Moved to the April Cabinet meeting Item 10 'Accident Remedies and Traffic Management Programme Update'

New key decision item for the February meeting: Section 106 Deferral requests

Chairman
23rd February 2010

SUMMARY OF POINTS MADE IN RESPECT OF A PETITION TO THE CABINET OF CAMBRIDGESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL IN RESPECT OF ITS CONSIDERATION OF THE FUTURE OF SECONDARY EDUCATION IN ST NEOTS ON 26TH JANUARY 2010

The spokesperson Mr Jones wished to counter the claim of the officers' report that the consultation had been wide ranging and detailed, as his contention was that it had relied on two public meetings which had only been advertised in the main to parents of the students with no public adverts or attempts to engage key agencies or employees in the town. In his view the issue was about the future of the town's economic prosperity which depended on a well educated workforce. He indicated that he believed the consultation document focussed more on the town's growth than on the issues facing St Neots Community College and the proposed solutions and did not consider in detail a number of change management options which had been utilised successfully at other failing schools. His contention was that the report outlined some of the consultation responses but ignored most, which had overwhelmingly rejected the notion of federating the two schools. He suggested that the officer's judgement appeared to have been suspended in terms of seeking favour with a government with a discredited schools policy rather than seeking to secure the interests of thousands of young people.

He countered the suggestion that Longsands was an outstanding school suggesting it had only performed well in the previous year after three years of continuous decline, at a time when county and national standards were rising. He also questioned the evidence to support that Longsands management or governors had the expertise to turn around a failing school or that the concerns of parents, from Longsands and its feeder primary schools had been reassured, which he did not believe would be possible, as he believed the focus of continuing to improve Longsands would be lost through federation.

He also questioned where in the report was the detailed evaluation of other change management options citing the example of Huntingdon where St Peters was in a worse position four years ago than St Neots Community College was now, but had improved its performance significantly through sound leadership and focus with both Huntingdon schools having positive added value scores which neither St Neots schools had. He also believed the towns the size of St Neots and Huntingdon needed two schools.

In his view turning around a failing school required focus from an experienced and skilled schools change manager, working alongside the school management team, identifying strengths to build on and weaknesses to overcome, (including any individuals in the management structure) and believing the current report was all about structure and nothing about management. He made the point that the feeder primary schools to Longsands showed them performing at a level 18% points higher than those feeding into St Neots and therefore in view suggesting that primary school education in and around St Neots should be the focus of the school improvement team.

DETAILED NOTE FOR CABINET FROM CLLR PETER DOWNES IN RESPECT OF THE REVIEW OF SECONDARY EDUCATION PROVISION IN ST. NEOTS

1. As a Local Member and as Liberal Democrat Lead Member for Schools, I have attended two consultation events, met with officers and fellow councillors, read all the papers and reports, been lobbied by parents and residents from St. Neots and have had one-to-one conversations with the Principals of Longsands College (LC) and St. Neots Community College (SNCC). (When setting up these meetings with the Principals, I suggested to Cllr Harty that we should go together so that we could send a strong message that we all want to work cross-party in the best interests of the young people in St. Neots. He rejected my suggestion)
2. SNCC is in a very difficult position, with low GCSE results, poor parental perception, a special measures designation and a deficit expected to be approaching £900,000 in March 2010. We cannot be other than dismayed that one of our schools is in this position. I have asked the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee to set up a Member-Led review into how this situation has arisen. CCC is proposing to write off the deficit and this is most worrying at a time when there are so many other financial pressures. It also sets a dangerous precedent – *‘if we get into financial difficulties, the County Council will help us out of the hole’* might be a reaction from other schools.
3. However, we are where we are and have to look forward. The DCSF is expecting decisive action and a range of options have been presented. The papers you have received give a fair and balanced picture of the dilemma faced by the Council and I do not propose to repeat what has been said.
4. You are being asked to make a decision which, in my opinion, is not grounded in sufficient evidence to allow you to move forward with confidence. What your Executive Member for Learning 0 - 19 needed to have was:
 - a. a detailed report on the option for SNCC to become a National Challenge Trust School. This would enable the college to retain its independence, receive financial help from the DCSF and practical help from one or more external providers, possibly a University department with a specialism in teacher development (there are three such providers within 20 miles of St. Neots) and from Longsands College as a partner.
 - b. an action plan showing how, in the event of the Federation proposed by CCC, LC would propose to make that federation function so that SNCC would improve its results without harming the outcomes for LC pupils. What was needed was a costed programme showing what curricular structures would be used, how the pastoral system would operate, how senior and middle management might be re-structured and how economies of scale would be used to good effect. I recognise that it would be necessary to avoid designating individuals but even so, a re-organisation of this scope needs more than just an act of faith that federation will allow good practice in LC to spread as if by magic to SNCC.
5. Federation is not a panacea. The CCC papers refer to the Parkside/Coleridge Federation but that is a much smaller operation than the proposed LC/SNCC federation. Although there is a perception that the Parkside Federation has been a ‘success’ because parental preference for Coleridge has stabilised, the hoped-for improvement is only slowly feeding through into academic results and, paradoxically, Parkside has just had its worst results for 5 years. Parkside’s Value Added score remains good but Coleridge’s is still low. The jury is out.

6. The argument around competition v. collaboration i.e. that one school rather than two is better for a town (para 5.2), is specious. Huntingdon has two schools with different intakes and different raw scores at GCSE but both have a positive Value Added score. Huntingdon pupils are not being disadvantaged by having two schools in the same town.
7. LC is clearly a good school but is not rated outstanding. Its results are good but its Value Added score has not been positive for the last two years. The recent survey of parental views, piloted by CCC for the DCSF, gives LC a happy/very happy score of 58%, one of the lowest in the county. The officers' report correctly identifies the concern felt by LC parents that the school, though generally doing well, may not have the spare capacity to take on an extra load without harming the prospects of LC students.
8. Now that the DCSF has refused to give National Challenge funding (see para 4.3) there is not the same urgency to come to a rushed decision. A more detailed consideration of the National Challenge School Trust option might be worth the time and effort, especially as it would bring in £377,000 of DCSF funding (see para 4.2) and obviate the need for the County Council to find a further £350,000 (see para 6.3).
9. I would therefore urge the Cabinet to defer this decision and to make further investigation of the option of National Challenge Trust status for SNCC. If properly managed, this would allow SNCC to retain its integrity as an autonomous establishment, relieve LC from the burden of rescuing a failing school, release funding from the DCSF and save £350,000 of County Council funds.
10. Whatever decision is reached, it will be necessary for both schools, the County Council and the local community to work very hard to make a success of it. There is a serious need for both schools to pay more attention to community outreach and to creating stronger partnerships within the town and within the parent community of the schools.