

CABINET: MINUTES

Date: 1st March 2005

Time: 10.00 a.m. – 11.25 a.m.

Present: Councillor J K Walters (Chairman)

Councillors: S F Johnstone, A K Melton, L J Oliver,
D R Pegram, J A Powley, J E Reynolds F H Yeulett and
R Wilkinson

Also in Attendance

Councillors J L Gluza, A C Kent and P L Stroude

Apologies: Councillor V H Lucas

616. MINUTES 25TH JANUARY 2005

The minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 25th January 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

617. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor S F Johnstone declared a prejudicial interest under Paragraph 10 of the Code of Conduct in relation to agenda item three, as a Non-Executive Director at Addenbrooke's Hospital, and then left the meeting whilst this item was discussed.

618. REFERENCE FROM ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2ND FEBRUARY – ADDENBROOKE'S ACCESS ROAD

Cabinet received a report detailing the outcome of the call-in of its decision taken on 25th January 2005 on the Addenbrooke's access road. The decision had been called in due to the apparent confusion over the cost of the new road. The Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee had agreed not to refer the decision back to Cabinet following consideration of the issues relating to the call-in, covering route costs, the advice given to Members about different options and changes to costs, and the basis of the Cabinet's decision. Cabinet acknowledged the issues raised by the Committee and welcomed the recommendation that for its future meetings, care be taken to ensure that all necessary financial and other information be available before or at the time of the meeting.

It was resolved:

To note the Committee's comments.

619. CORPORATE PLAN 2005-09 AND POLICY FRAMEWORK STATEMENTS

Cabinet considered the Council's Corporate Plan and the Policy Framework statements. There had been a number of changes to the Plan following the

consultation, which included removing one sixth of the words and amendments using guidelines from the Plain English Campaign, to make it easier to read. The “Framework Statements”, which were core components of the Corporate Plan, did not purport to summarise the long and detailed Plans, but served to highlight for Council approval the key development priorities for the year ahead. These “Framework Statements” were an addition to the Policy Framework as represented by the Statutory Plan and could not override it.

Cabinet welcomed a proposal to add an additional bullet point to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults were supported and safeguarded within their homes and communities so they could grow in confidence, taking advantage of opportunities to develop, thrive and contribute to society.

It was resolved:

To approve the Corporate Plan and the Policy Framework statements and recommend their adoption by Council on 29th March 2005.

620. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN (BVPP) 2005/06

As required by the Local Government Act 1999, Cabinet considered the draft Best Value Performance Plan (BVPP) ahead of final publication before the end of June. The need for the same Cabinet and Council to consider the Plan had brought it forward six weeks earlier than usual. At this stage, it therefore contained more estimates than would normally be the case.

It was noted that the affordable housing topic, which formed part of the Council's Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA), was proving particularly difficult to negotiate with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). During discussion, Cabinet expressed concern about the considerable reduction in Government funding available to Cambridgeshire for affordable and social housing, which would impact on the Council's performance in the future and the aspirations of the Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs). It also ran contrary to the ODPM's aim of encouraging this type of housing.

There was continued concern about the impact of Government targets set in 2001/02, which had been considered too stretching. Although, Cambridgeshire had failed to achieve the 87% target for Key Stage 2 English, it had still managed to record one of the highest scores in the country. It was hoped that targets in the future would provide a more accurate reflection of the Council's performance.

It was resolved:

To recommend that Council approve the draft Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06 subject to any minor changes and final figures which might be added before the publication date: and note performance to date or expected performance for 2004/05.

621. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA) IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Council's draft CPA Improvement Plan comprised the Council's priorities, the ongoing work programme associated with the priorities and a review programme. It sought to address the weaknesses identified in the corporate assessment and better align itself to the Council's draft corporate plan and emerging CPA methodology. The review programme contained fewer 'best value' reviews covering a two-year period only. It allowed for additional reviews to be scheduled if the need to make changes to strategically important services became evident after the approval of the review programme.

Cabinet noted changes proposed to the CPA methodology in relation to the revised service block scoring system. Authorities could drop a CPA category because of missing the new threshold score for services even though performance had improved. During discussion, Cabinet requested further information on the decision to delete assessment in integrated teams review (2006/07) before approving the draft Plan.

It was resolved:

To approve the Council's draft CPA Improvement Plan, subject to clarification of the statement in the report that "assessment in integrated teams review (2006/07) to be deleted as this will be covered within the ongoing work programme".

622. MINI LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES FUND

Safer and Stronger Communities funding was being incorporated into a mini-Local Area Agreement (LAA) framework from April 2005. All areas within Cambridgeshire would have a mini-LAA but Fenland, unlike other districts in the County, would not have its agreement led by the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRP). These agreements would only include CDRP targets and objectives. The arrangement for Fenland was different as it received both ODPM and Home Office funding in relation to the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund funding streams.

Since the publication of the Cabinet report, final guidance had been received from ODPM. The agreements should cover 2005-08 and set out:

- The national and local outcomes which were to be achieved for the area
- The performance targets that would be used to track progress
- Milestones
- Responsibility of individual partners for delivery of outcomes
- Statement of how funding was to be distributed amongst partners

The guidance required the agreement to include a statement of involvement of the voluntary and community sector. Cabinet requested that action be taken to ensure that this was included.

It was resolved:

- (i) To note the emerging guidance on the Safer and Stronger Communities Fund.
- (ii) To delegate to the Leader of the Council in consultation with the Chief Executive, the authority to approve the Mini Local Area Agreement for the Fenland area.

623. GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY ORGANISATIONS

Cabinet considered the proposed allocation of the 2005/06 grants to voluntary organisations. Reviews of grants made to these organisations managed by Social Services, Economic and Community Development and the Youth Service had resulted in the establishment of a new policy framework. In 2004/05, this had involved allocating a total of £960,167 to four funding blocks comprising: local development agencies; small community groups; services; and legal advice services. In noting the process for considering grant applications for 2005/06, Cabinet was informed that the level of grant funding for those voluntary organisations supported would be maintained at current levels despite budget reductions across other areas of Council expenditure.

During discussion, Cabinet queried whether a change in the service level agreement had resulted in a £20,000 reduction in funding to Cambridge Women's Aid. It also queried the increase in the funding for Sexyouality, which had also received a sizeable increase last year. There was concern that the funding was not in balance with the support the Council received from voluntary organisations with some hard working organisations receiving no increase. Cabinet would receive a written response to these questions. It was suggested that the expansion of Sexyouality's responsibilities to cover the County could be the reason for the increase.

In conclusion, Cabinet asked for future reports to include columns in the appendices detailing last year's figures adjusted for inflation, last year's figures unchanged, and the reasons for increases or decreases.

It was resolved:

To approve the allocation of the grants to voluntary organisations in 2005/06, as outlined in the appendices to the report, subject to an explanation on the changes in the grants to Sexyouality and Cambridge Women's Aid.

624. PROPOSED CHANGES TO ASSISTANCE WITH SECONDARY SCHOOL CLOTHING FOR FAMILIES ON LOW INCOMES

The budget for secondary school clothing vouchers had been reduced by 31% from £145,365 in 2004/05 to £100,000 for 2005/06 due to financial constraints. Therefore it was necessary to review the support offered to low income families receiving assistance for secondary school clothing. The Children in Need Service Development Group (SDG) had considered four options for changing policy at its meeting on 9th February 2005, and its preference was reflected in the recommendations.

Cabinet discussed the need to provide the Director of Education, Libraries and Heritage with the flexibility to deal with cases, which he considered gave rise to exceptional hardship. It was noted that the moving of children to other schools in years 8-11 as of result of domestic violence constituted the majority of cases where discretion would be needed.

It was resolved to adopt the change in policy as follows:

- (i) the cash value of the vouchers for year 7 students remain at £52 per annum (p.a.);
- (ii) the cash value of vouchers for other years be reduced from £40 to £21;
- (iii) in cases where the Director considered that there had been exceptional hardship, e.g. where a child had to move school in years 8 to 11 as a result of domestic violence (i.e. where mother and children flee from a violent partner), officers had the discretion to issue vouchers to the value of £52 .

625. LANDFILL ALLOWANCE TRADING SCHEME – INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS

The Council needed to set up a system to regulate the trading of allowances. The decision to buy or sell at an agreed price and to a particular authority needed to be sanctioned by two senior officers (the Directors of Environment and Regulation and Finance and Performance), in conjunction with Lead Members. It was proposed to keep the emerging market under close review and make trades within the first six months if circumstances appeared favourable. The Head of Waste Management and the Waste Team Business Manager had been proposed for authorisation to register trades with the Environment Agency.

Unlike many other authorities, Cambridgeshire was likely to have spare allowances as one of the highest recycling authorities in the country. An interim policy and procedure for the early stages of the trading system was suggested with a review of the first six months to be taken in October together with an updated assessment of allowances available for trading in the remainder of 2005/06. This approach had been endorsed by the Transport and Waste SDG at its meeting on 27th January 2005.

In discussion, Cabinet queried whether the Council would need to buy allowances and was informed that it currently had a surplus of in excess of 23,000 tonnes. Members asked that any decision to buy should be reported back to Cabinet.

It was resolved that an interim trading policy be approved, covering:

- (i) A flexible approach to the first six months including the possibility of selling allowances;
- (ii) Appointment of authorising officers;
- (iii) Appointment of trading officers;
- (iv) Holding income in a specific fund;
- (v) Reviewing this policy and longer term issues after 6 months.

626. CAMBRIDGESHIRE GUIDED BUS - PROCUREMENT

Cabinet considered a report detailing the form of contract for construction maintenance and operation of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway. It noted the procurement process, which included early contractor involvement, defects liability, maintenance and operations, the process for managing the risks and controlling the price of constructing the guideway, and tendering. The contractor would be taking all the risks associated with design and construction so these were included in the capped target price. However, there was no restriction on changes to the target price as a result of employer's risks occurring. These came in two broad groupings:

- completely external events outside of the Council's control, such as war or changes in national legislation; and
- changes in scope or specification.

As client, the management of changes in scope or specification was firmly in the Council's control. An allowance would be made in the budget for employer's risks. The current budget included £6.7m on top of the estimated construction cost of £65m for risks and contingencies. This project was relatively low risk with no complex technology or significant earthworks. The Council was not building anything that had not been built before and had passed on all the risks on design and construction to the contractor. Although, exposure to risk had been minimised, it was not possible to eliminate it altogether. The remaining risks would be managed by ensuring an absolutely clear specification, taking a disciplined approach to changes in scope and including a significant contingency in all estimates.

In discussion, Cabinet queried the risks associated with other project issues particularly environmental programme constraints. It was noted that a delay in the Secretary of State's announcement could delay the project by twelve months. However, the Department for Transport had made it clear that there was a possibility of negotiating a revised Annex E, following the announcement, to include additional costs.

It was resolved to:

- (i) Confirm the use of an early contractor involvement target price contract for the construction of the Cambridgeshire Guided Busway with maintenance and operations of the guideway included as an option; and
- (ii) Note the process for resolving other key project issues.

627. CONSULTATION ON EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN: DRAFT REVISION TO THE REGIONAL SPATIAL STRATEGY (RSS) FOR THE EAST OF ENGLAND AND EAST OF ENGLAND PLAN

Cabinet received a report detailing the key issues arising from the consultation on the East of England Plan (Draft RSS 14). In considering the Council's proposed response to the consultation, it was noted that there was a need for an early review to consider whether the strategy could be sustained post 2012 to 2026, which included the need for a large new settlement. It was

proposed that the review should consider the whole of the eastern region and not preclude more than one settlement.

The level of affordable housing provision was an important policy issue and it was therefore essential that the criteria used to count the number of homes in the system were applied consistently across the whole country. Cabinet was reminded that the Cambridge Sub Region faced a substantial demand in the need for affordable housing. Government therefore needed to provide the necessary funding as early as possible. There was strong support for the proposal for no further review of the Cambridge Green Belt until 2021. It was important to make sure that the Green Belt was maintained for the protection of Cambridge and the benefit of the local community.

There was a particular need for basic infrastructure to be provided in advance of houses and jobs. The Government needed to give a detailed account of how it proposed to properly fund essential infrastructure for the region. It was noted that Primary Care Trusts in growth areas would be receiving additional funding. Cabinet was reminded of the impact of Government cuts to the 'Supporting People' programme, which would have a direct impact on affordable housing.

Members expressed serious concerns about the infrastructure deficit across the whole county, and the need for this to be reflected strongly in the Council's response. Infrastructure did not just include roads and health but also the capacity of utilities, and drainage issues in north Cambridgeshire. The £3billion proposed nationally for infrastructure by the ODPM was woefully inadequate. It was suggested that a covering letter highlighting these concerns and expressing support for the East of England Regional Assembly's decision to suspend its endorsement of the plan due to lack of commitment by central government to provide funding for essential infrastructure for the region should be included with the response.

It was resolved:

To endorse the proposed County Council response to the consultation.

628. DEVOLVING DECISION MAKING: A CONSULTATION ON REGIONAL FUNDING ALLOCATIONS

Cabinet considered a response to the Government's Consultation on the "Devolving Decision Making" on transport, housing and economic development spending to the regional level. The Government's proposals included establishing regional transport funding allocations and suggested planning assumptions for the regional distribution of allocations in future Spending Reviews. It was noted that the Government did not intend to prescribe institutional arrangements for how regions should co-ordinate and prepare advice on regional priorities. The DfT had published reports of two pilot boards set up in early 2004 to trial transport priority setting for advising Ministers on transport budget allocation. The Government had already taken steps locally to effect these changes before confirming how details of regional decisions would be reached and determining guidance for regional boards. It was noted that the Council would also be working with other strategic authorities in the region to prepare a joint response to the consultation.

During discussion, Cabinet raised concerns about the public accountability of the pilot boards, which did not contain any local authority elected members. It was acknowledged that the extensive growth areas in the East of England region could benefit from these changes at the expense of other areas. There was concern about the timescales for delivery and the process of bidding for funding. It was suggested that the Government should allow local authorities to use population forecasts instead of out of date population data to help improve the quality of bids. Cabinet was particularly concerned about the possible increase in bureaucracy and delay resulting from greater integration of financial planning.

It was resolved:

To authorise the Director of Environment & Transport to respond on behalf of the County Council to the Government's consultation, subject to consultation with the Lead Member for Strategic Planning; and to consult with the other strategic authorities in the eastern region.

629. CROMWELL MUSEUM ACQUISITION AND DISPOSAL POLICY REVIEW

Cabinet considered a revised Acquisition and Disposal Policy for the Cromwell Museum. The revision of the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) national standards scheme now renamed Accreditation had necessitated the need for a review. The new policy had been discussed at meetings of the Cromwell Museum Management Committee and the Lifelong Learning SDG.

It was resolved:

To agree the revised policy.

630. CAMBRIDGESHIRE CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY

The Council was required to produce a climate change strategy, as a signatory to the Nottingham Declaration on Climate Change. It was noted that the Local Government Association would be using the Council's strategy and the scrutiny arrangements for monitoring the action plan as the base for a case study and model at a conference on climate change. An officer was currently investigating external funding for an Energy Management Unit. Cabinet congratulated all those involved in producing the Plan on an excellent document.

It was resolved:

To approve the Cambridgeshire Climate Change Strategy 2005.

631. ANNUAL ADOPTION & PERMANENCE REPORT 2003/04

Cabinet considered a report outlining the achievements, developments and changes in adoption and permanent fostering during 2003/04. There had been a 25% increase in the number of children for whom adoption was decided as in their best interests, which included twice as many school age

children as in the previous year. There was also an increase in the number of children matched with adoptive families with all but one child placed with adopters approved by Cambridgeshire. The number of adoption orders had increased by almost 30%. Although fewer families were approved as prospective adopters, a high proportion were able to consider children often viewed as harder to place.

There had been a 25% increase in the number of children considered in need of permanent fostering with almost all children aged over eight years old. There was an increase of 50% on the previous year in the number of children matched with families for permanent fostering. It was noted that the recent Commission for Social Care Inspection had acknowledged that the potential for continuing to develop services in this way was limited due to the increasing demands being made on the service, and the size of the service. The Council was on target to achieve 21 adoptions for this year.

Cabinet congratulated staff in the Adoption and Fostering Service for a successful year and praised the work of the Adoption and Permanence Panel. In discussing the report, Members queried the high 1999/00 figure, for the number of children presented to the Panel for whom adoption was considered in their best interests, compared to later years. It was noted that there had been a move towards promoting adoption following a change in the leadership of Social Services. This trend was continuing in 2004/05 following the introduction of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.

It was resolved:

To endorse the annual Adoption and Permanence Report of the County Council in its function as an adoption agency.

632. BUDGET MONITORING 2004/05

Cabinet received a report summarising the financial results for revenue, capital and trading units to the end of December 2004, including forecast outturn results for the current year. The forecast outturn for Social Services was an overspending outturn variance of £1.2m, which was a slight variation to the recovery plan. The pooled budget would continue to manage Integrated Community Equipment Services overspend over a three year period. There was still a significant pressure on Children's Services with new packages and the increased costs of existing packages. However, the Service was making every effort to contain expenditure.

It was noted that there had been an increase from £325,000 to £400,000 in Information Technology Accounts relating to the decommissioning of the legacy network. A business case was currently being prepared to quantify the overspend with a view to absorbing it within the Cambridgeshire Community Network project.

It was resolved:

To note the forecast outturn for the end of the year 2004-05.

633. DELEGATIONS FROM CABINET TO CABINET MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

Cabinet received a progress report on matters delegated to individual Cabinet members or to officers on behalf of the Cabinet.

It was resolved:

To note the delegations from Cabinet to individual Cabinet Members or to officers to make decisions/take actions on behalf of the Cabinet, which had been, or were still to be discharged.

634. CABINET DRAFT AGENDA – 12TH APRIL 2005

Cabinet asked officers to review the number of decision items scheduled for the next meeting

It was resolved:

To note the outline agenda for the meeting of Cabinet on 12th April.

635. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was resolved:

That under section 100 (A) 4 of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following report on the grounds that it was likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information under paragraph 8 and 9 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by virtue of:

Report referring to the amount of expenditure proposed to be incurred by the authority under any particular contract for the supply of goods and services and referring to any terms proposed or to be proposed by or in the course of negotiations for a contract for the acquisition or disposal of property or the supply of goods and services.

636. CAMBRIDGE CENTRAL LIBRARY - OPTIONS

Cabinet considered a report on the way forward given the two options, which had been discussed for refurbishing or partially relocating the Central Library, now that further information was available on the relocation option. It was acknowledged that the Central Library was a flagship building for Cambridge City and it was important that its presence was maintained in Lion Yard. Cabinet was reassured that both options contained arrangements for protecting the Cambridgeshire Collection.

It was resolved:

To confirm the proposed approach for Cambridge Central Library, subject to the project being delivered within the cash limits set out in the new County Council Capital Programme.

Chairman