

CABINET: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 6th January 2004

Time: 10.00 – 11.44 a.m.

Present: Councillor K. Walters (Chairman)

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

Also in Attendance:

Councillors: M Ballard S Brinton J Eddy M Farrar J Gluza
A Kent S King P Stroude and Professor A Milton.

Apologies: None

420. MINUTES

It was resolved:

To agree the minutes of the meeting held on 9th December 2003
as a correct record.

421. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

422. WASTE MANAGEMENT PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVE (PFI)

With the requirements of new legislation there will be considerable changes in the way municipal waste is handled that will require significant capital investment, and to facilitate this, the Waste Partnership has investigated and prepared a bid for PFI finance. The submission of a bid for PFI credits represents the first stage in a process for procuring waste management facilities and services for the next 25 years to deliver integrated waste services across several authorities.

All district Councils and Peterborough City Council had confirmed that they supported the Joint PFI bid. It was noted that arrangements for contract management had not yet been formalised, as such details did not require to be considered until a later stage. A successful bid could attract as much as £40m and support an integrated waste management contract that would meet the Council's financial and environmental objectives and obligations.

With such an agreement, critical risks such as the achievement of targets would be transferred to the contractor, who would be able to benefit from economies of scale and also gain from being involved at an earlier stage in the planning and integration of collection, recycling and waste treatment services.

The risks associated with the joint procurement process were set out in the report. In terms of any difficulty in the affordability gap between current resources directed to waste and the anticipated cost of a contract delivering the outline business case reference project, it was highlighted that the gap would be less than the current model shows. The line of text stating this had disappeared from the bottom of the page in the printed version of the report. It was commented that emphasis needed to be given that doing nothing and maintaining the status quo was not an option, particularly with the recent government introduction of penalties for local authorities that did not meet their recycling targets.

Cabinet supported a timely bid, in order to have the best chance of producing a cohesive approach to waste disposal.

It was resolved:

- i) To approve the draft Outline Business Case and delegate to the Director of Environment and Transport the authority to make final amendments, in consultation with the Lead Member.
- ii) To approve the submission of the Outline Business Case to Government.

423. TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

The existing approach to procurement has been reviewed as part of the Best Value Review of Highways Maintenance and Network Management. Their recommendations had taken on board the Egan report recommendations for longer-term relationships between construction partners as well as the evidence that Modern Framework contracts would provide a more efficient and effective approach for construction procurement, both for facilitating the earlier delivery of projects and in increasing cost certainty.

The report sought Cabinet's approval for the development of framework contracts for the procurement of transport infrastructure, including a long term partnership contract with two contractors for up to 10 years in duration to procure the construction of major schemes over 0.5m and adopt similar shorter contracts for the annual resurfacing and reconstruction schemes and bridges and drainage projects. It was commented that within practical limits, sufficiently robust monitoring system should be in place to monitor the performance on these contracts.

It was resolved:

To approve the development and implementation of framework contracts to secure the future delivery of transport infrastructure for:

- Major transport infrastructure schemes
- Resurfacing and reconstruction schemes
- Bridges and drainage projects.

424. MARKET TOWN TRANSPORT STRATEGIES - HUNTINGDON AND GODMANCHESTER AND WISBECH

Cabinet received a detailed report in order to consider transport strategies for Huntingdon and Godmanchester and Wisbech.

The Market Town Strategies had been developed after close consultation with the relevant local communities and had received widespread support in all three Market towns. The Transport Strategies will form an important part of the delivery of the Local Transport Plan for Cambridgeshire and will play a key role in achieving the targets in the Plan, as well as the wider health, social inclusion and economic objectives.

Councillor King as a local member spoke in support of the strategy proposed for Wisbech and particularly emphasised the importance of the proposals for managed traffic in the Market Place area which would provide a pedestrianised area that could be used flexibly allowing one way vehicular access as well as providing adjacent short term and disabled parking. In terms of the options for improving parking management in this area, the important consideration would be to ensure that it was the right option for the particular area.

In terms of the Huntingdon and Godmanchester Transport Strategy this had also received strong local support and would be integrated with the Town Centre Improvements Scheme. Attention was drawn to concerns expressed by the Hertford Conservation Group in terms of the possible significant local impact in respect of proposals for an eastern bypass.

It was Resolved:

To approve the Market Town Transport Strategies for Huntingdon and Godmanchester and Wisbech.

425. BEST VALUE REVIEW OF HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE AND NETWORK MANAGEMENT

Cabinet were presented with the findings from the Best Value Review of Highways Maintenance and Network Management which Cabinet, before signing off, required to be satisfied had achieved its aims and that the action plan was robust and focussed on key outcomes and targets, that there would be an adequate system for monitoring progress and managing outstanding issues or problem areas.

The executive summary identified specific improvements arising from the review's findings to include:

- Better road conditions
- Better maintained and safer footways
- Reduction of negative environmental impact of heavy commercial vehicles
- More environmentally sustainable solutions which will support the locally economy

- Regular in-depth testing of public opinion
- Increased community ownership of traffic calming schemes
- Improved public satisfaction with the service throughout the County and particularly in Fenland
- Increased accountability to the public
- More integrated planning for housing growth
- Improved service delivery through smarter procurement methods
- Improved street-lighting leading to increased community safety
- Increased income and cost and efficiency.

In order to bring about some of these improvements and the full implementation of the improvement plan, cabinet decisions would be required in a number of areas including the extended use of commuted sums, the reconsideration of the existing District Highway Agency Agreements with Cambridge City Council, Huntingdonshire District Council and the Partnership with Fenland District Council. These areas were to be the subject of future reports to Cabinet. It was confirmed that the specific improvements could only be delivered if the appropriate identified investments and savings were undertaken in the three-year period.

Cabinet had been asked to sign off the review rather than the function being delegated to the appropriate portfolio holder, in view of the scale of the review and also as it was the only one of the Council's Best Value Reviews due to be inspected by the Audit Commission.

Cabinet welcomed the review and the clear recommendations set out in the Improvement Plan to improve highways maintenance and network management.

It was resolved

To agree to signing off the Best Value Review of Highways Maintenance and Network Management and the Improvement Plan set out in Appendix 1 which had circulated separately.

426. PERSISTENT COMPLAINTS POLICY

The County Council, whilst having an established policy and procedures for responding to complaints, did not have a policy for dealing with persistent complainants. The suggested policy drew on the experience of other authorities best practice for dealing with persistent complainants, in order to prevent unnecessary use of resources for repetitive correspondence.

Following a wide ranging debate, a further resolution was agreed to be added, subject to legal opinion, suggesting additional wording should be included in final letters, to emphasise that no further time would be spent by officers and elected members on complaints, which had effectively been closed.

It was resolved:

- i) To approve the adoption of the policy on persistent complaints.

- ii) To request that the Head of Democratic, Legal and Registration Services consider whether it would be legally appropriate to amend the wording of the authority's final response making it clear that the Council will not prolong correspondence/contact on the same matter, after the complaint had been fully investigated and responded to.

427. ANNUAL ADOPTION AND PERMANENCE REPORT APRIL 2002 – MARCH 2003

The Adoption Agencies Regulations requires that an annual report is made available of the County Council's activity in its function as an adoption agency. Sections 2 and 3 of the officers' report provided an overview of the key performance figures, both for children being placed and adoptive and permanent foster carers being recruited and matched to children requiring placement.

The number of Adoption Orders expressed as a percentage of the children looked after by a local authority, is a government key performance indicator. While Cambridgeshire's figure of 5.7% was lower than the previous year, this reflected factors such as the complexity of placing older children, contested cases and pressures for time in the court system. Other detailed figures showed that an active professional and effective service was delivered in Cambridgeshire and that children continued to be placed and maintained successfully in placement.

Attention was drawn to the fact that while full use was being made of the new national Adoption Register, due to the mismatch existing between the needs of children and the hopes, expectations and abilities of the approved adoptive families, the register had not generated families for any of the County's children. On the contrary, Cambridgeshire as a relatively affluent and desirable area, had become a net provider of families for children from other parts of the country. This was a concern to members of Cabinet as currently other areas of the County were benefiting at the County's expense.

It was resolved:

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

428. AD-HOC SCRUTINY PANEL ON FOSTER CARE – FINAL REPORT

This Panel had been set up to consider the needs of children in foster care, including the ways in which their needs are currently met through foster placements, the costs of fostering and the implications for future provision. The panel had reported on priority areas for action, particularly in the light of budget overspends caused by payments to Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). It was indicated that the County Council was spending significantly more for each child placed in the independent sector. As a result, the panel were recommending changes that included a better package of support and remuneration for in-house foster carers.

The Panel's findings were grouped under four main headings:

- Support for children
- Support for foster carers
- Management
- Finance and recruitment and retention of carers.

Councillor Ballard as the Chairman of the Panel was invited to introduce the report. The key issue from the report was that IFA placements were many times more expensive than those made with in-house carers and the current rate of growth in the IFA budget was unsustainable. The report indicated that:

- In 2002/03, no budgetary provision was made for the use of IFA, but the actual cost was £1,147,539.
- A sum of £1,898,394 had been projected for the current year-end, against a budget of £875,000. At the meeting, this expenditure figure was updated to a projected spend of £2,300,000.

In the Panel's view, unless urgent action was taken, expenditure would continue to rise.

Members of the Panel had agreed with the conclusions of the Joint Review of Social Services that 'there needed to be a better package of support and rewards for in-house foster carers'. An important consideration was also that many carers would shortly reach retirement age and a new generation required to be recruited to take their place. The current seriousness was exacerbated by the loss of 33 foster parents in the last three years.

The Panel highlighted that:

- This year's increases in remuneration while welcome, should be further raised, at least to the Fostering Network's recommended level.
- Support structures for both children and carers should be overhauled in the light of detailed recommendations contained in the report.
- High priority should be given to carer recruitment and that £10,000 more should be spent on marketing and advertising to recruit in-house and the need to improve.

The Panel considered that successful action would improve children's and carers' quality of life. Initial investment would lead to savings for the Council on the longer term.

The initial responses from the officers to the Panel recommendations (appendix 2 of the officers' report) were set out in the final column of the table. The responses and subsequent action plan required further consideration and discussion with the other relevant agencies/ parts of the County Council to whom they were made, in order to check capacity and their ability to implement.

The Director of Social Services provided assurances that all the recommendations of the Panel would be considered seriously and the

majority would be agreed in due course, and accepted the panel's findings of the requirement to increase in-house foster carers.

The Cabinet thanked Councillor Ballard and the Panel for the thorough non-political report, but indicated that it would be inappropriate to agree recommendations until the further discussions had taken place and that officers would look to reporting back by the end of the month. In addition, any agreement to raise allowances would have to be taken as part of the overall Budget strategy, as current budget limitations prevented raising allowance in the current year to the full Fostering Network's recommended level. It was also suggested that even if it was raised to this level, many fosterers were still likely to remain in the independent sector, where the allowances were still higher.

It was resolved:

- i) To note the points raised in the 'Key issues' section of the report and the conclusion that there needed to be a better package of support and rewards for in-house foster carers and that additional in-house foster carers required to be recruited.
- ii) To agree in principle to the recommendations 42, 43 and 44 but to recognize that there were issues around their affordability and these affordability questions would be considered as part of the budget setting process over the next few weeks, taking into account Social Services budget constraints.
- iii) To note that other recommendations also needed to be costed.
- iv) To instruct officers to respond to the detailed recommendations set out in Appendix 2 of the officers report by the end of January 2004.

429. SHIRE HALL CLUB

This report was in response to the current financial situation of the Shire Hall Club Management Committee (SHC MC) and the debt owed to the County Council.

The Shire Hall Club Management Committee (SHC MC) had built up an outstanding debt of £103,7000 as a result of arrears on invoices for the cost of payroll services and for accounts undertaken for VAT submitted on their behalf to the Inland Revenue. For most of 2003 it had traded at a loss and a proposed repayment plan, even as revised and submitted to Cabinet Members the previous evening, did not, in the officers' view, meet the Council's reasonable expectations in terms of providing upfront payment of a proportion of the debt, with repayment of the balance over 3-5 years.

Councillor King as the Chairman of the Financial Recovery Sub-Committee was invited to present the case for SHC MC. He requested that no decision be taken at the present meeting to reject the repayment plan and that the MC

be given until February to finalise the details of a recovery plan, including the possibility of going into partnership with Cambridgeshire Catering Service. In advance of this request he indicated that:

- A new treasurer had been appointed who was actively working to establish a realistic repayment plan
- The club had for the first time made a profit of £2,000 in December and was confident of making a profit in January
- That negotiations with Cambridgeshire Community Catering had not been completed due to a lack of staffing capacity as a result of Christmas leave arrangements
- That a months' extension would not result in additional cost to the Council.

The Cabinet, in response to questions raised, noted that the December profit was no longer available as it has been used to offset claims from September and October and that no interest was currently being paid on the outstanding debt.

It was noted that the business plan was to have previously been considered at the December Cabinet meeting, but the Leader, having received a previous request, had agreed a further one-month extension to firm up the business plan. As indicated the details of the revised business plan had only been e-mailed to Cabinet members the evening before the current meeting. From the information provided there was still no firm evidence that the December profit was the start of a continuous improvement trend, as in many clubs, December was the most profitable month of the year.

The majority view was that there was no guarantee that a further month would provide a viable business plan that would be able to pay off the current debt over a period of between 3 to 5 years. There was also the contention that if this had been a commercial venture financed by high street banks, the business would have been forced to close due to insolvency.

The Director of Resources provided brief details of the steps that would need to be taken for a managed closure of the facility should Cabinet agree the officer recommendations. In answer to questions raised, he indicated that little use was currently made of club facilities by staff, but that they would wish to have a facility to enjoy refreshments offsite. The Cabinet indicated that it did wish to ensure, if at all possible, that an alternative facility for Council staff was developed.

It was resolved to:

- i) Reject the repayment plan proposed by the SHC MC;
- ii) Authorise the Director of Resources to pursue appropriate debt recovery action leading to the winding-up of the Shire Hall Club Management Committee (SHC MC), but stopping short of taking any action against individual members of the SHC MC.
- ii) Approve the write-off of the amount that was eventually unrecoverable from the wind-up.

- iv) Authorise the Director of Resources to negotiate interim arrangements to ensure staff could still use the facilities, with the longer-term aim of the Council providing some type of facility for staff to enjoy refreshments away from the workplace.

430. BUS SERVICE CHANGES IN THE MELDRETH AND SHEPRETH AREAS AND PUBLIC TRANSPORT SERVICE PRESSURES

This report was in response to petitions submitted to the previous meeting requesting that the Council consider alternative provision following Stagecoach's withdrawal of commercial service x46/146. The report set out the reasons for not providing alternative bus provision.

Councillor Professor Milton local member for Melbourn was invited to speak on this item in support of the original request to provide a replacement bus service following the withdrawal of the above service, having previously handed in one of the petitions on behalf of the organiser.

It was indicated that while the County Council had the greatest sympathy for people living within the A10 corridor who were suffering a number of service reductions, the continued pattern of withdrawals by commercial operators from the rural commercial network and the 20% increase in bus tender prices in the previous two years had exhausted the ability to provide alternatives to maintain levels of accessibility to services in rural areas.

In this particular case, alternative rail provision did exist and given this alternative public transport provision and the continuing and increasing constraints on the budget, it was not considered appropriate to support the replacement of the bus service.

Resolved to note:

- i) The circumstances surrounding the bus service withdrawals in Meldreth and Shepreth; and
- ii) The problems associated with supporting public transport services across the county with limited budgetary resources.

431. COMPREHENSIVE PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT (CPA) – REFRESHED SCORE FOR 2003

This report set out the results of the updated CPA score for 2003 as well as providing details of Audit Commission advice that eligible Councils could apply for a corporate assessment where they were confident that they would have improved sufficiently to achieve a score that will take them to a higher CPA category.

On the issue of whether to request a further inspection, this would be considered further by the CPA Member Working Party before any final decision was taken, and would take into account the officer resources required and the other change priorities currently requiring officer attention.

The Chairman requested that Cabinet should be provided with more information regarding the decrease in the planning score which had decreased from 2 to 1 out of 4. It was explained that this was due to a change in the way that the Audit Commission rated the planning performance of authorities, rather than an actual change in performance. Officers undertook to provide more detail outside of the meeting.

It was resolved:

- i) To note the revised score indicating that the Council had been classed as “good” overall, the same score as in the previous year, and
- ii) To delegate to the Leader of the Council, in consultation with the Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Member Working Group, the authority to request a new CPA corporate inspection during 2004 if appropriate.

432. PERFORMANCE ON LOCAL PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT (LPSA) AND KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS FOR 2ND QUARTER 2003/04

Cabinet received a summary of the Council performance against Cambridgeshire’s Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets and other Key Performance Indicators for the second quarter of 2003/04.

Second quarter results suggested that out of a possible £8,918,000 Reward Grant, the County Council might expect to receive between £2,229,500 and £3,464,300.

Specific points within the report were as follows:

- Libraries were less optimistic about their indicators but were still hopeful of reaching at least 60% threshold in most cases.
- Continued assessment suggested Education targets were unlikely to be met (as in other parts of the Country).
- Some Environment and Transport indicators were on track, but the waste target would not be met while the performance of road safety was that it would be extremely close to its target.
- Some Social Services targets were on track, but others were unlikely to be met.

In respect of the remainder of the top 30 key performance indicators (non-PSA) set out in appendix 2 of the officers’ report, of the remaining 13 indicators, for 5 there was a slight under performance, for 5 it was too early to analyse and for 3, there was evidence that they were on or over target.

Following the quarter’s figures, further investigation was underway to see what action could be taken to improve performance on two indicators, namely reviews of children on the Child Protection Register (BV 162) and the percentage of children looked after adopted from local authority care (BV 163).

Attention was drawn to the unrealistic targets for school performance set by the government, which did not reflect the remarkable achievements in recent county-wide examination results. It was hoped that realistic targets would be set in future as a result of the County Council being in the position of being able to set its own targets.

It was resolved to:

- i) Note the current performance against Local Public Service Agreement and other headline indicators.
- ii) Note the key areas of under-performance as set out in the report.

433. CABINET OUTLINE AGENDA – 27TH JANUARY 2004

It was resolved:

To note the draft list of reports included on the outline agenda for the Cabinet meeting to be held on Tuesday 27th January and the update on the following items:

Since publication, the following reports have been re-arranged to go to the February meeting due to the need to devote greater time to major reports such as the County Council Budget and guided Bus (Rapid Transit) Approval to TWA Submission at the next meeting:

Item 10. Provision of Youth Facilities in St Neots

Item 14 Local Public Service Agreement Outline

It was also likely that item 14 and 15 “Cambridgeshire’s Second Local Public Service Agreement 2004/07” would be combined

Item 16. Monitoring of recommendations of Joint Review Social Services

Other changes:

Item 6 “Improving and Integrating Older Peoples Services” and item 12 “Adult Services – to consider integration and Governance Arrangements” would be one report.

Note

Additionally since the meeting Item 11 Oxmoor Opportunities: Neighbourhood Management Action Plan and Single Regeneration Budget Delivery Plan 2004/05 and item 13 Heritage Policy have also been rescheduled to February Cabinet.

Chairman

