

COUNTY COUNCIL: MINUTES

Date: Wednesday 17th December 2003

Time: 10.30 a.m. – 3.20 p.m.

Place: Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: Councillor: R Driver (Chairman)

Councillors: C M Ballard, R S G Barnwell, I C Bates, T J Bear, B S Bhalla, A J Bowen, S V Brinton, J Broadway, C Carter, R L Clarke, J E Coston, P J Downes, J A P Eddy, M Farrar, H J Fitch, S A Giles, J L Gluza, A Hansard, G F Harper, V A Hearne-Casapieri, G J Heathcock, W G M Hensley, J L Huppert, S F Johnstone, J D Jones, A C Kent, I C Kidman, S J Kime, S J E King, M L Leeke, V H Lucas, A R Mair, R B Martlew, L W McGuire, A K Melton, A S Milton, S B Normington, M K Ogden, L J Oliver, A G Orgee, D R Pegram, J A Powley, P A E Read, A A Reid, J E Reynolds, R C Speechley, A B Stenner, P L Stroude, J M Tuck, J K Walters, R Wilkinson, L J Wilson and F H Yeulett

Apologies: Councillors: P D Bailey, B Hardy, C E Shaw and P W Silby

171. MINUTES: 22nd OCTOBER 2003

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 22nd October 2003 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

172. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Deaths of former Councillors

The Chairman announced with sadness the deaths of former Councillor K Aspinall, who had represented the Queen Edith's ward from 1985 to 1989, and former Councillor J Schicker, who had represented the Abbey ward on the former Cambridgeshire and Isle of Ely Council and on the County Council from 1970 to 1993. Members observed a minute's silence in their memory.

Chairman of the EERA's Regional Planning Panel

The Chairman congratulated Councillor J E Reynolds on his appointment as the Chairman of the East of England Regional Assembly's Regional Planning Panel.

Assistant Director (Children), Social Services

Members noted that Colin Green, the Assistant Director (Children) in Social Services, would be leaving the Council in February 2004 to work for the Children, Families and Young People's Directorate of the Department for Education and Skills. The Chairman and the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, paid tribute to Mr Green's achievements during his time with the County Council and wished him well for his future career.

Green Apple award for 50-year Wildlife Vision Map for Cambridgeshire

The Chairman congratulated all those who had contributed to the achievement by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership of a Green Apple award for its 50-year Wildlife Vision Map for Cambridgeshire.

173. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor S F Johnstone declared a prejudicial interest under Paragraph 10 of the Code of Conduct as a Non-Executive Director of Addenbrooke's NHS Trust in relation to the discussion recorded under Minute 174 a), item 15, on the response to consultation by Addenbrooke's NHS Trust and Papworth Hospital NHS Trust on their applications for Foundation Trust status.

174. REPORTS OF THE CABINET

a) Report of the meetings of Cabinet held on 28th October 2003 and 25th November 2003

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, moved receipt of the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 28th October 2003 and 25th November 2003.

Key decisions for information

- 1) 'Prospects' – Corporate Plan 2004-08
- 2) Neighbourhood Management Pathfinder: Fenland Rural Area Proposal
- 3) Accident Remedies and Traffic Management Programme – Medium-Sized Schemes
- 4) Improving Disability Services

Councillor R B Martlew warned of the risks associated with partnership working and commented that adult disability services had been delivered satisfactorily under previous structures. He suggested that the increasing emphasis by Government on partnership delivery was part of a longer-term agenda to abolish shire counties. If this were the case, Government should be open about it, to enable appropriate arrangements to be made.

The Lead Member for Vulnerable Adults, Councillor D R Pegram, explained that the purpose of the proposed standalone structure within Social Services was to provide additional support to adults with a disability, promoting independent living. Consultation on the proposed arrangements would continue into January 2004.

- 5) Revenue Support Grant Settlement 2004/05

Other decisions

6) Joint Review of Social Services

Councillor C M Ballard expressed concern that the press releases issued by the Council following the publication of the Joint Review report had been more positive than the findings of the Review merited. He emphasised that the report included serious comments on older people's services, including consistently low performance on help to live at home, and children's services, particularly foster care. He welcomed the recognition in the report of the work of the member led reviews of delayed discharges and welfare benefits take-up, but suggested that more could be done within the Council to develop the findings and recommendations of these reviews. He noted that in 'Prospects', the Council committed itself to a strategic refocusing of Social Services in conjunction with partners, especially the Primary Care Trusts, and hoped that this would prove an effective vehicle for implementing the recommendations of the Joint Review.

Councillor S V Brinton echoed Councillor Ballard's concerns that press releases on the report had been unduly positive. She also noted that the financial position in Social Services had worsened since the Review, intensifying the concerns highlighted in the report.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, emphasised that overall the Social Services Directorate was performing well. He congratulated the Director and staff for the recent renewal of the Directorate's two-star performance rating. He accepted that both the Joint Review and the annual report of the Social Services Inspectorate had highlighted areas in which improvements could be made and assured members that these were being addressed.

7) Social Services Inspectorate Annual Review of Performance

8) Charges for Services Provided Under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act 1983

Councillor C M Ballard commented that the requirement for local authorities to reimburse social care charges made to people sectioned under the Mental Health Act highlighted the problems potentially associated with bringing together free health services and charged social care. The Social Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee had been concerned at the financial consequences for the Council of making these reimbursements. However, Councillor Ballard emphasised that there was also a human aspect to this issue, as some of the people to whom money was owed were living in real hardship.

Councillor R B Martlew expressed concern at the Cabinet's decision to defer seeking out potential claimants until all known claimants had been reimbursed. He urged that all eligible people be reimbursed as quickly as possible.

The Lead Member for Vulnerable Adults, Councillor D R Pegram, noted that an additional officer was being appointed to help identify all those

eligible for reimbursement. To date, thirteen people had been identified, to whom a total of £239,000 was due, plus interest at a rate to be agreed. Further reports would be brought to members as the full extent of the Council's liability became known.

- 9) Archives Service: Adoption of the National Archives Standard and a Collecting Policy
- 10) 'Implementing Electronic Government' Statement – Third Year
- 11) Registration Services Best Value Improvement Plan – Outstations
- 12) Dispensation from Contract Regulations – Use of Alternative Contractors to Cover Building Repairs and Maintenance
- 13) Further Dispensation from Contract Regulations

Other matters

- 14) Issues Arising from Scrutiny Committees

The Chairman of the Policy Scrutiny and Audit Committee (PSAC), Councillor P J Downes, highlighted the Committee's concern that the 'Prospects' consultation document should make clear to the public the full range of options available to the Council. He asked whether the Committee would be able to comment on the final version of the document before it was published.

Councillor S V Brinton commented that, in the past, Group Leaders had been able to see the final version before it went to print. She sought assurance that this would continue.

Councillor S J E King noted that PSAC had recognised the constraints placed on the Council by the tight timescale set by Government funding announcements. He asked that the role of PSAC in commenting on 'Prospects' be clarified for future years.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, commented that the final version of the Council Tax consultation leaflet was due to be printed imminently and that there was therefore not time for PSAC to meet. However, if individual members were able to submit comments within the printing timescale, he would welcome these.

- 15) Response to Consultation by Addenbrooke's NHS Trust and Papworth Hospital NHS Trust on Applications for Foundation Trust Status

Councillor T J Bear commented that, in his view, the comments of the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee on the applications by Addenbrooke's and Papworth for Foundation Trust status had not been 'unduly negative', as suggested in the Cabinet report. The Scrutiny Committee had recognised the potential benefits associated with Foundation Trust status. However, scrutiny members had been concerned that the presentations they had received from the Trusts had focussed on the process of acquiring Foundation Trust status, and had

not been very strong on how Foundation Trust status would actually improve patient care. In particular, the Trusts had not been specific as to how they would use their increased freedom to borrow to develop services.

Councillor J M Tuck emphasised that the health scrutiny legislation enabled the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee to respond in its own right to consultations such as these. The Scrutiny Committee had submitted its comments after careful consideration of the evidence received.

Councillor S V Brinton noted that the Scrutiny Committee's main concerns had been about the Foundation Trust structures, not the delivery of services. Despite detailed consideration, it had not been clear to the Committee how the structures would benefit patients and the wider community.

Councillor J L Gluza expressed concern that Foundation Trust arrangements might give pressure groups undue influence, resulting in the neglect of less high profile services. He was also concerned that the governance arrangements might prove to be unwieldy and unworkable.

The Lead Member for Vulnerable Adults, Councillor D R Pegram, commented that acquiring Foundation Trust status was likely to enable Trusts to develop local services better, leading to an enhanced level of care for patients. His comments were echoed by Councillor I C Bates, who expressed regret that the extent of the financial freedoms available to Foundation Trusts might not now be as great as previously anticipated. Councillor S J E King noted that Foundation Trust status would help to make Trusts more accountable to patients for the services they provided.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, noted that he had been involved in the consultation processes of both Addenbrooke's and Papworth. He emphasised that the key concern in considering the proposals was whether they would benefit patients. He believed that they would, as Foundation Trusts would be subject to reduced Government control and have greater flexibility to develop their services, staff and research. He welcomed the Trusts' aspirations to modernise their services.

Councillor S F Johnstone left the chamber whilst this item was discussed.

16) Budget Monitoring 2003/04

Councillor S V Brinton congratulated the Director of Resources and his team on resolving the difficulties in carrying out the bank reconciliation on the new IT system. She drew attention to comments made by the Audit Commission in their Audit of Accounts for 2002/03 on the difficulties with the bank reconciliation and with financial management in Social Services and sought assurance that these would not recur in future years.

17) Delegations to Individual Cabinet Members

b) Report of the meeting of Cabinet held on 9th December 2003

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, moved receipt of the report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 9th December 2003.

Key decisions for determination

1) Revenue Budget Cash Limits for 2004/05

The Chairman reminded members that since the meeting of Cabinet on 9th December 2003, the Government had announced additional funding for local authorities in 2004/05. To assist members' discussion of the proposed cash limits for 2004/05, the report to Cabinet from the Director of Resources had been updated to reflect the additional funding and had been circulated in advance of this meeting.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, moved the following recommendations, which were seconded by the Deputy Leader of the Council, Councillor J E Reynolds:

- a) To approve the revised cash limits, as set out in Appendix 1 of the updated report of the Director of Resources, as a basis for:
 - Public consultation on the Council's proposed budgetary strategy, based on a Council Tax increase of 6%
 - Directors and Cabinet Members to present detailed budget proposals to Budget Advisory Panels in January
 - The submission of the Council's proposed 'Schools Budget' to the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by 31st December 2003;

- b) To delegate to the Leader of the Council, following e-mail consultation with Cabinet Members, the authority to:
 - Make any changes to cash limits and the 'Schools Budget' that may be required as a result of any additional information that emerges during December
 - Approve the consultation process and the content of consultation materials.

The Chairman stated that he would also take item 5) on the agenda, the report of the Education, Libraries and Heritage Scrutiny Committee on the proposed cash limits, in conjunction with this item. The Chairman of the Education, Libraries and Heritage Scrutiny Committee, Councillor J L Gluza, moved receipt of the Committee's report.

In speaking to the recommendation, the Leader of the Council noted that the late announcement of additional funding had led to considerable additional work for officers, to a very compressed timescale. He expressed concern that it was likely that the Government had known when the provisional Revenue Support Grant (RSG) settlement was announced on 19th November 2003 that this additional funding would be available, and that the late announcement was a political move, unhelpful to local authorities. The Council was still required to submit its schools

budget to the Department for Education and Skills by 31st December 2003. Public consultation on the budget proposals would start on 13th January 2004.

The Leader of the Council restated his commitment to a 6% Council Tax increase as this was, in his view, the maximum that people could reasonably be asked to pay. He reminded members that under the provisional RSG settlement announced on 19th November 2003, £12.5 million due to Cambridgeshire had been held back by the ceiling on funding increases. The Chancellor's subsequent announcement had slightly revised the ceiling, but had also made additional RSG available to local authorities. The overall effect for Cambridgeshire was that:

- The Council's Formula Spending Share (FSS), the Government's assessment of its spending needs, was unchanged
- The Council's entitlement to formula grant (RSG) had increased by £3.4 million, before the ceiling was applied
- Revisions to the ceiling would mean that Cambridgeshire would actually receive an additional £4.8 million in grant
- The effect of these changes reduces the loss of grant as a result of the ceiling to £11.1 million (£12.5m + £3.4m - £4.8m).

The Leader of the Council commented particularly on the requirements set by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills for schools budgets. These included achieving the national 4% per pupil minimum increase guarantee and 'full' passporting, i.e. passing on to schools the full amount of funding they had been assessed as needing according to the Formula Spending Share (FSS), as opposed to the lesser level of funding actually received through the ceiling applied to formula grant (RSG).

The Leader of the Council explained that the cash limits now proposed would allow the 4% per pupil increase to be achieved. They would not enable 'full' passporting to schools, but would slightly exceed 'partial' passporting, i.e. passing on that element of schools funding for which money had actually been received. Spending on schools would still exceed the Government's assessment of need (Schools FSS), but not to as greater an extent as in previous years.

The Chairman of the Education, Libraries and Heritage Scrutiny Committee, Councillor J L Gluza, reported that the Committee welcomed the additional money being made available to schools. However, the Committee continued to have a number of concerns, as set out in its report. These centred on the effect that limited funding increases and the requirement to make cashable efficiency savings would have on schools. It was anticipated that schools with existing deficits would see these deepen, more schools would go into deficit and financial recovery would become harder.

Councillor J L Huppert shared the concern of the Leader of the Council at the late announcement of the additional funding and commended the officers for their rapid work in recalculating the figures. He expressed concern at two assumptions made in the calculations: the level of income that would be generated by achieving Local Public Service Agreement

targets and the assumed savings on debt charges. He asked the Leader of the Council what his spending priorities were, given that the Council would be spending at 20% over FSS on personal social services and at 0.8% below FSS on Education. This would be the first time that the Council's spending had been below FSS for Education. With regard to the schools budget, he asked to be advised of the cost to the Council of achieving the 4% per pupil increase. He expressed concern that the failure to achieve 'full' passporting to schools might mean that the Council would receive a direction on its schools budget from the Secretary for Education and Skills. He asked that public consultation on the budget include a range of options for Council Tax increases and suggested 6%, 8% and 10%. He urged the Leader to take account of the comments received and to alter his stated position on the Council Tax increase if the results indicated that this was appropriate.

Councillor A C Kent recognised the difficulties caused by inadequate Government funding for schools and noted that she would shortly be presenting a petition with over 1,000 signatures to the Minister for Local Government and the Regions. However, she expressed concern that with the cash limits now proposed, the Council would be still spending significantly less per pupil than its statistical neighbours. More than half of the County's secondary schools already had deficits. Funding to develop 14-19 initiatives would be very limited. Achieving the 4% per pupil increase would still mean that schools had to make 1% efficiency savings. The Secretary of State's definition of passporting would not be met, and it was likely that schools would lobby for a direction from him. Councillor Kent also highlighted concern at the impact that 2% cashable efficiency savings would have on other parts of Education, Libraries and Heritage, including the Youth Service, which continued to receive only half the funding recommended by the FSS, and central school support services. Echoing Councillor Huppert, she also questioned the Administration's priorities, noting its stated intention in 'Prospects' to spend at or above FSS on Social Services and Education, whereas in fact expenditure on Education would be £2 million below.

Councillor J L Gluza expressed concern that the Administration no longer aspired to bring Cambridgeshire's Council Tax into line with the shire county average and that it in fact appeared that it would be falling further behind. Whilst he recognised that not all parts of the County were prosperous and that some people were on fixed incomes, he suggested that residents did have the ability to pay a higher Council Tax than at present, to bring Cambridgeshire more closely into line with its neighbours. He noted that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister was expecting local authorities to set 'low single figure' Council Tax increases, but argued that the main determinant for the size of the increase should be the size of the budget needed to provide proper services for the people of Cambridgeshire.

Councillor A J Bowen shared Councillor Gluza's concerns that Cambridgeshire's Council Tax had been kept deliberately low for a long time. He suggested that the Council, as well as central Government, should take steps to address Cambridgeshire's funding position.

Councillor A R Mair commented that the key issue was the adequacy of Government funding. Despite the additional £4.8 million now announced, Cambridgeshire was still £11.1 million short of its full RSG. It was therefore up to the Council to determine how best to distribute the financial burden between Council Tax payers and spending departments.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Councillor R Wilkinson, gave the costs of the 4% per pupil increase, as requested by Councillor J L Huppert. He emphasised that the 4% increase would be met and slightly exceeded. He recognised that there were competing needs within the Council and noted that with the additional funding, schools would still be £4.8 million short of 'full' passporting. Schools' budgets would be discussed more fully with the Schools Forum in January.

Councillor J Broadway welcomed the increase of the Environment and Transport cash limit by £400,000 in light of the additional funding announced. She noted that this money would now not have to be taken from the budget for highways maintenance. However, she expressed concern that cuts to the support the Council gave to Parish Councils for tree and hedge planting, which had been discussed at the November Environment and Transport Budget Advisory Panel, now appeared to have been implemented without due consideration through the rest of the budget process.

Councillor P J Downes commented on the need for clear and consistent information about the Council's position to be given. In the Director's report, it had been stated that although Cambridgeshire's Council Tax had been the third lowest of all County Councils in 2003/04, it had increased by an average of 9% per year in the last five years. Councillor Downes emphasised that other County Councils' Council Taxes had also increased significantly during this period. He also questioned the evidence for the assertion that public support for large increases was reducing, as he did not believe that it was possible consistently to benchmark the consultation responses. In addition, the Policy Scrutiny and Audit Committee had been advised in the previous year that the option of a 12% increase was the one that had received greatest support. He also commented that because of the Council's relatively low Council Tax, small percentage increases did not bring a large yield. He therefore asked for consultation documents to indicate the actual sums that would be generated, as well as possible percentage Council Tax increases.

Councillor I C Kidman recognised that the Labour Government was holding back £11.1 million of funding that Cambridgeshire had been assessed as needing. However, he noted that there had been similar discrepancies between assessed need and actual funding of local authorities under the previous Conservative Government. He also commented that historically there had been a low assessment of levels of need in Cambridgeshire, on which funding assumptions had been based. He urged the County to seek a fairer assessment of its levels of need and deprivation.

Councillor S V Brinton noted that the present local government finance system had been discredited in an Audit Commission report and needed

fundamental review. She noted that the Minister for Local Government and the Regions had indicated that he would consider local authorities' overall positions before deciding whether to cap proposed Council Tax increases. Given the imposition of the RSG ceiling and the challenge of meeting the Secretary of State for Education and Skills requirements for the schools budget, she urged the Administration to consider setting a Council Tax increase higher than the 6% previously stated. Otherwise, she was concerned that cuts to essential services would ensue. Councillor Brinton also called on the Leader of the Council to approve the budget consultation process and the content of consultation materials after consultation with Group Leaders, as well as Cabinet members.

Councillor F H Yeulett, the Lead Member for Education Resources, thanked the Education, Libraries and Heritage Scrutiny Committee for its comments. He noted that the Council would now be meeting two of the three tests of the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on schools budgets. He emphasised that the shortages in the schools budget were due to the Government withholding funding, the need for which they had recognised, for the second year running.

Councillor S J E King commented that few members seemed willing to suggest a Council Tax increase higher than the 6% proposed. He challenged members, if they were not willing to countenance a higher increase, to put forward alternative budgetary measures to those currently proposed.

Summing up, the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, commented that no definite decision on the Council Tax increase had yet been taken. However, he would be making it clear during consultation that his preferred option was a 6% increase. He echoed Councillor King's comment that Opposition members had not to date proposed an alternative increase. With regard to the schools budget, he noted that he was not seeking a direction from the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and, now that the 4% per pupil increase was being met, thought that this was less likely to be received. Responding to Councillor Kent's question about the statement made in 'Prospects', he noted that the schools budget would be above FSS but that, because of the settlement announced by Government since the publication of 'Prospects', it would not be possible to spend at FSS across the whole of Education.

A vote was then taken and both recommendations were approved.

[Voting pattern: a) Conservatives in favour, Liberal Democrat and Labour Groups against, no abstentions; b) unanimous.]

2) Structure Plan Delivery

It was moved by the Lead Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor J E Reynolds, and seconded by the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor S F Johnstone, that:

- a) The County Council becomes a member of the Infrastructure Partnership; and

- b) The current Lead Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor J E Reynolds, be nominated as the County Council's board member on the Partnership.

On being put to the vote, the proposal was carried.

[Voting pattern: unanimous]

Key decisions for information

- 3) Huntingdon Town Centre

Councillor P J Downes welcomed the involvement of Huntingdonshire District Council in the development of plans for services in Huntingdon. He emphasised the importance of partnership working to deliver local authority services across organisational boundaries.

Other matters

- 4) Local Education Authority Strategy for Developing 14-19 Phase in Cambridgeshire
- 5) Examination and Test Performance in Cambridgeshire Schools 2003

175. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES: REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL

It was proposed by the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, and seconded by the Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Councillor S V Brinton,

- a) To receive the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel (Appendix 1 to the report to Council) and endorse the recommendations contained therein;
- b) To agree that, as required under the new Regulations, the existing Members' Allowances Scheme be revoked and a new scheme be introduced from 31st December 2003 to remain in force until 31st March 2004. This Scheme shall be identical to the Council's current Members' Allowances Scheme, with the exception of the payment of a Special Responsibility Allowance to the Council's Fire Authority Spokesmen, which shall cease from such time as the Fire Authority's introduces its own Allowances Scheme;
- c) That a new Members' Allowances Scheme, amended to take account of the Panel's recommendations, be introduced from 1st April 2004 (Appendix 3);
- d) That from 1st April 2004, all Councillors be eligible to join the Local Government Pension Scheme and that Basic and Special Responsibility Allowances count as 'income' for this purpose. However, given the Panel's comments about the suitability of the scheme, Members are urged to seek independent financial advice before applying to join.

Councillor M K Ogden spoke of the need for members' allowances to be sufficiently high to attract more younger people to stand for election as Councillors. He expressed concern that the rates now proposed would encourage only those who had sources of income other than from employment to stand for election.

On being put to the vote, the recommendations were approved.

[Voting pattern: all political Groups in favour; four abstentions – Councillors I C Bates, R L Clarke, P J Downes and M Farrar.]

176. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Members noted that two written questions had been submitted under Rule 9 of the Council Procedure Rules:

- Councillor J L Huppert had asked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor S F Johnstone, and the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, about the links between the widening of the A14 and the guided bus proposals and about funding for guided bus. Their response advised that although the widening of the A14 and the development of guided bus would be considered at separate public inquiries, both were part of an integrated package of measures being developed from the Cambridge to Huntingdon Multi-Modal Study. The Council would be brought detailed information on the funding of guided bus when asked to approve the Transport and Works Act application on 10th February 2004. However, the Leader had emphasised that the scheme would be funded through Government grant and developers' contributions, with no use made of the Council's revenue budget or reserves.
- Councillor M L Leeke had asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, how much additional income would be generated if the Council were to levy the average level of Council Tax for shire counties, and how many additional teachers or social workers or how much additional road maintenance this would pay for. The response advised that a levy at the average level would generate an additional £15 million, and showed how this could be spent on additional services. However, it was noted that if the Council Tax for the current year had been set at the county average, this would have required an increase of almost 20%, rather than the 9.2% increase actually levied. An increase of this scale was unlikely to be acceptable to the Government.

Copies of the questions and responses are available from Democratic Services.

177. ORAL QUESTIONS

Three oral questions were asked under Rule 9 of the Council Procedure Rules:

- Councillor P J Downes asked the Lead Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor J E Reynolds about the Government's recent announcement on airports in the East of England and in particular, the suggestion that Marshalls could relocate from Cambridge to Alconbury. Councillor J E Reynolds noted that the announcement had not referred specifically to Marshalls, but to a servicing facility; it would be up to Marshalls to determine

its own future arrangements.

- [Councillor M L Leeke asked the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, about the plans being made by Social Services to respond to new legislation on asylum seekers, which included the possible withdrawal of benefits from them and the taking of their children into local authority care. As Councillor Powley had had to leave the meeting, the Leader of the Council undertook to ask him to respond to Councillor Leeke in writing.](#)
- Councillor J L Huppert asked the Lead Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor J E Reynolds, for his views on possible development on Clay Farm and the former show ground in Cambridge and about comments made by Cambridge City Councillors about these sites. Councillor J E Reynolds stated that the Council's policies were set out in the Structure Plan.

A full transcript of the questions and responses is available from the Democratic Services Division.

178. MOTIONS

Two motions had been submitted under Rule 10 of the Council Procedure Rules.

Motion from Councillor C M Ballard on behalf of the Labour Group

Councillor C M Ballard proposed the following, which was seconded by Councillor J D Jones:

This Council requests Cabinet to collaborate with health and other partners in setting up a high profile campaign to publicise the range of available family benefits, along the lines of the Local Government Association's 'Quids for Kids' initiative. The objective is to minimise the impact of child poverty in our county, with a side benefit of maximising the funding base of our schools.

A number of members spoke of the importance of encouraging the take-up of welfare benefits by those people eligible to them. There was clear evidence of a correlation between household income and quality of life. Increased take-up of benefits would also lead to an increase in the Council's Formula Spending Share (FSS), as the level of benefits claimed was used as a measure of deprivation, which the FSS reflected. Members emphasised the importance of working with partner agencies who were already active in the field of benefits advice, such as the Citizens Advice Bureaux.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

[Voting pattern: agreed unanimously.]

Motion from Councillor J L Huppert

Councillor J L Huppert proposed the following, which was seconded by Councillor S V Brinton:

Cambridgeshire County Council

1. Recalls that the Council Tax was brought in by the Conservative Government in 1993 on short notice to replace the unsuccessful Poll Tax, itself a product of a Conservative Government.
2. Notes that the national average Band D Council Tax bill has risen by £455, or 70%, since the Labour Government came into office in 1997;
3. Notes further that the average Cambridgeshire Band D Council Tax bill has risen by £326 or 69% since the Labour Government came into power nationally and the Conservatives locally in 1997;
4. Notes with great concern the major and unfair impact that these successive Council Tax increases have on many citizens, and recognises that this is substantially due to the way the Government has managed its grants to local authorities;
5. Regrets that the present system of local taxation takes no direct account of ability to pay;
6. Recognises that Council Tax therefore places a disproportionately high burden on residents with low incomes, such as many public service workers and pensioners;
7. Notes that the national cost of administering Council Tax in 2002/03 was £569 million and that it costs almost four times as much to collect £1 in Council Tax as it costs to collect £1 in income tax;
8. Recognises that the huge increase in the role of direct and ring-fenced grants, combined with rising costs and additional duties imposed by Government on local councils, has left many authorities, such as Cambridgeshire, with stark choices of huge cuts in services or massive increases in Council Tax, or a combination of the two;
9. Regrets that the present system of local government finance is so confusing and lacking in transparency that accountability for the tax levied is obscured, with very few citizens able to penetrate the Government's portrayal of every settlement as 'generous', regardless of the facts;
10. Notes that the forthcoming Cambridgeshire County Council budget will be affected strongly by the inconsistencies and obfuscation of the Government grant-making process, with an unforeseeable ceiling significantly reducing the level of grant to the County, in a manner more extreme than elsewhere in the country;
11. Welcomes the willingness of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in its initial response to the local authorities 'Balance of Funding' consultation, to investigate seriously alternative methods of financing local government.

Cambridgeshire County Council therefore calls on the Deputy Prime Minister:

- a) To establish future funding settlements which provide sufficient mainstream grant for local authorities to ensure the provision of high quality, locally accountable public services;
- b) To replace the Council Tax system with a fairer system including a local tax based on income, consistent with the principle of progressive taxation, that the more one earns, the more one pays;
- c) To ensure that any future funding and taxation system has a high level of transparency, so that citizens can understand who is responsible for making budgetary decisions.

The following amended wording was proposed by Councillor J A P Eddy and seconded by Councillor V A Hearne-Casapieri:

Cambridgeshire County Council calls on the Deputy Prime Minister:

- a) To establish future funding settlements which provide sufficient mainstream grant for local authorities to ensure the provision of high quality, locally accountable public services; and
- b) To ensure that any future funding and taxation system has a high level of transparency, so that citizens can understand who is responsible for making budgetary decisions.

Members discussed the challenge of ensuring that local government taxes were simple, cheap to collect and fair. A number of differing views on previous, the present and possible future models were expressed.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was carried.

[Voting pattern: Conservative and Labour Groups in favour; Liberal Democrats against.]

The amendment therefore became the substantive motion and on being put to the vote was carried.

[Voting pattern: no one voting against.]

179. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

The following membership changes were proposed by the Chairman of Council, Councillor R Driver, seconded by the Vice-Chairman, Councillor S B Normington, and agreed:

- Councillor A G Orgee to be appointed as a substitute member on the Education, Libraries and Heritage Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor A R Mair to replace Councillor V A Hearne-Casapieri on the Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor V A Hearne-Casapieri to replace Councillor A R Mair as a substitute member on the Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee

- Councillor J A P Eddy to replace Councillor A B Stenner on the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Fire Authority.

[Voting pattern: unanimous]

Chairman: