

COUNTY COUNCIL: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 29th March 2005

Time: 10.30 a.m. – 2.40 p.m.

Place: Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: Councillor: R Driver (Chairman)

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

Apologies: Councillors P D Bailey, C C Barker, T J Bear, C Carter, P D Gooden, G J Heathcock, S A Giles, A S Milton and D R Pegram

264. MINUTES: 15th FEBRUARY 2005

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 15th February 2005 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

265. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Deputy Chief Executive – Children and Young People's Services

The Chairman welcomed to his first meeting of the Council Gordon Jeyes, the new Deputy Chief Executive – Children and Young People's Services.

Awards and achievements

The Chairman led members in congratulating:

- Jim Short on being named as Employee of the Year in the British Parking Awards
- All involved in the County Council's electronic purchasing and payment system, which had won the Procurement section of the Local Government Chronicle awards. The Chairman also congratulated the joint e-government partnership, which included the County Council, for being the runner-up and highly commended in the e-government category of the awards
- The whole Council on being awarded corporate Investors in People accreditation
- Staff in the Environment and Transport Directorate on the Council becoming one of seventeen Local Transport Authorities awarded Centre of Excellence status by the Department for Transport

- All who had contributed to the Council's successful application for Beacon Council status under the theme asset management.

Presentation

Councillor G F Harper presented to the Chairman a gift he had received on behalf of the Council during a recent visit to China.

Last meeting of the Council

As this was the last meeting of the Council before the County Council elections on 5th May 2005, the Chairman paid tribute to all those members who would not be returning. In particular, he thanked Councillor J D Jones, who would be standing down after 35 years' service, for her contribution to the work of the Council.

266. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The following members declared personal interests under Paragraph 8 of the Code of Conduct in relation to item 6 on the Cabinet report of 1st March 2005 (Grants to Voluntary Organisations):

- Councillors J Broadway and D White as Trustees of the Cambridge and County Folk Museum
- Councillor P J Downes because a member of his family worked for a Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Councillor M Farrar as a Trustee of Cambridgeshire ACRE and a member of the Executive Committee of the Cambridgeshire Association of Local Councils (CALC)
- Councillor V A Hearne-Casapieri as the Chairman of the Ely Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Councillor S J E King as the Chairman of the Bowthorpe Centre in Wisbech and a Trustee of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, Drinksense and a Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Councillor R B Martlew as a Trustee of a Citizens' Advice Bureau
- Councillor S B Normington as a member of the Volunteer Bureau and Gauntlet
- Councillor A B Stenner as the Chairman of the Huntingdon Society for the Blind
- Councillor P L Stroude as a Trustee of Drinksense
- Councillor L J Wilson as a member of Homestart (Royston and South Cambridgeshire)
- Councillor F H Yeulett as a Trustee of the Isle of Ely Society of the Blind.

Councillor H J Fitch declared a prejudicial interest under Paragraph 10 of the Code of Conduct in relation to item 3 on the Cabinet report of 1st March 2005 (Proposed Changes to Assistance with Secondary School Clothing for Families on Low Incomes), as he had a grandchild who might be affected. He left the Council Chamber whilst this item was discussed.

Councillor S F Johnstone declared a prejudicial interest under Paragraph 10 of the Code of Conduct in relation to item 16 on the Cabinet report of 1st March 2005 (Reference from Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee – Addenbrooke's Access Road). There was no discussion of this item.

267. COUNCIL CONSTITUTION – SCHEME OF DELEGATION AND APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

It was moved by the Chairman of the Council, Councillor R Driver, seconded by the Vice-Chairman, Councillor S B Normington, and agreed unanimously that the Council:

- i) Approve the amendments to the Constitution as set out in Appendix 1 to the report:
- ii) Authorise the Chief Executive to delegate authority for those matters identified in the Scheme of Specific Delegations [Constitution: Part 3, Responsibility for Functions, Appendix A] to the Appropriate Deputy Chief Executives, Directors and Heads of Service, until such time as a new Constitution is approved by the Council at its annual meeting on 17th May 2005; and
- iii) Approve the amendment to the membership of the Appointments Committee, as set out in paragraph 2.2 of the report.

In response to a query from Councillor J L Huppert, it was noted that Joy Postings was named personally in the document as she would be fulfilling the responsibilities of the Head of Legal Services until this post was filled.

268. REPORT OF THE CABINET – 1st MARCH 2005

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, moved receipt of the report of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 1st March 2005.

Key decisions for determination

- 1) Corporate Plan 2005-09 and Policy Framework Statements

It was moved by the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, and seconded by the Deputy Leader, Councillor J E Reynolds,

That Council approve the Corporate Plan and the Policy Framework Statements.

Councillor J L Huppert welcomed the content of the Plan and Policy Frameworks, but emphasised the need for adequate funding and management expertise to deliver against the aspirations they contained.

Councillor I C Kidman commented that the Plan and Policy Frameworks reflected much constructive collaboration between the political groups and set out a positive legacy for the new Council and Offices. He particularly welcomed the intention to improve the consistency of early years care across the County. However, he expressed concern that some of the aims set out, such as improvements to the libraries' book stock and the development of cultural services, would not be achievable given the Council's budget for 2005/06. He expressed concern that the whole Council's budget was at risk of being undermined by rapidly increasing costs in children's social services.

Councillor C M Ballard highlighted the need for improved support for carers and improved consultation with adults and older people in receipt of social services. He noted that the Adult Services Strategic Plan contained specific objectives on early intervention that were likely to be achievable only if eligibility criteria were lowered. He emphasised that the Council should be working towards a three-star rating for Social Services, to demonstrate that it was serving all people well.

Councillor P J Downes urged that greater priority be given to smoking prevention, particularly in young people, as smoking was not only detrimental to health but could also be a gateway to the use of illegal drugs.

Councillor J M Tuck commented that the Corporate Plan and Policy Frameworks rightly set high expectations as to how the Council would tackle difficult circumstances. She emphasised the importance of partnership working, especially with the voluntary sector, to deliver effective services.

The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, and the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, acknowledged that the Plan and Policy Frameworks contained ambitious targets, but highlighted some of the Council's recent successes as evidence of its ability to achieve: an 'excellent' CPA rating, corporate Investors in People accreditation and a two-star rating for Social Services for a fourth consecutive year. These achievements had been made during a period of considerable financial pressure, with £22.2 million withheld from Cambridgeshire over three years. The Plan and Policy Frameworks set out aspirations for the next five years on the basis of reasonable budget projections.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried. [Voting pattern: Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in favour, Labour Group abstained.]

2) Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06

It was moved by the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, and seconded by the Deputy Leader, Councillor J E Reynolds,

That Council approve the draft Best Value Performance Plan 2005/06, subject to any minor changes and final figures which may be added before the publication date, to be agreed by the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

Councillor J L Huppert expressed concern that of the top thirty indicators, performance targets for only eleven had been met, with two still to be confirmed. He particularly highlighted prompt payment of invoices, which was of major importance to small and sole traders.

Councillor C M Ballard commented on the importance of the Best Value approach in ensuring that services were obtained from the best possible source, whether in-house or external. However, he also noted the need

for effective follow-through of recommendations. For example, the Best Value review of day care services for the elderly had identified considerable differences in take-up between providers, but Social Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee had found that, two years after the review, no action had yet been taken. Councillors C M Ballard and I C Kidman also drew attention to the ad hoc scrutiny panel on foster care, which had made recommendations in January 2004 on ways of reducing the use of expensive independent fostering agencies. However, it was only now that Invest to Save bids were being made to the Council's Good Housekeeping Fund.

Councillor P L Stroude commented that it was likely always to be necessary to make some placements through independent fostering agencies for children with very high levels of need that could not be met within the County. The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, commented that payments to foster carers had been brought up to the rate recommended nationally by the Fostering Network, and considerable recruitment activity had already been carried out. Most local authorities were experiencing difficulties similar to Cambridgeshire's in attracting new carers. Financial reward was not and should not be the main consideration for people considering whether to become carers.

The Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Councillor R Wilkinson, and the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, commented on the importance of the direction of travel against performance targets as well as actual results. Significant progress had been made against most of the targets in the top 30, some of which had been had been very stretching.

Several members commented on the challenge of presenting the Best Value Performance Plan in a format that was accessible to the public, but contained sufficient detail to make it clear what was being measured and what had been achieved. The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, agreed to send Councillor J L Huppert written clarification of the target on sales of alcohol to underage drinkers.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried. [Voting pattern: Conservatives and Liberal Democrats in favour, Labour Group abstained.]

3) Proposed Changes to Assistance with Secondary School Clothing for Families on Low Incomes

It was moved by the Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Councillor R Wilkinson, and seconded by the Lead Member for Education Resources, Councillor F H Yeulett, that Council adopt the following changes to its policy on assistance with secondary school clothing for families on low incomes:

- i) The cash value of the vouchers for Year 7 students remain at £52 per annum;

- ii) The cash value of vouchers for other Years be reduced from £40 to £21; and
- iii) In cases where the Director considers that there has been exceptional hardship, e.g. where a child has 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 have discretion to issue vouchers to the value of £52.

In proposing the motion, the Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage drew attention to the unavoidable pressures that the requirement to meet full passporting to schools had placed on the non-schools element of the Education, Libraries and Heritage budget. Some parts of this element such as home to school transport and provision for educational needs could not be reduced, exposing remaining parts to cuts.

Councillor I C Kidman expressed his opposition to the reduction in value of vouchers for Years other than Year 7, as this would achieve a relatively small saving, whilst affecting some of the most vulnerable families in the County.

Councillor J L Huppert also expressed his concern at the impact that the reduction would have on vulnerable families, but accepted that savings were necessary given the Council's difficult financial position.

On being put to the vote, the motion was carried. [Voting pattern: Conservatives in favour, Labour Group against, Liberal Democrats abstained.]

Key decisions for information

4) Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Improvement Plan

Councillor J Broadway asked how proposed changes to the CPA scoring methodology might affect the Council's current 'excellent' rating. The Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, noted that the changes to the methodology had not yet been confirmed. However, it was possible that some local authorities might improve on previous performance and still move down a category. It was also possible that a three-star Social Services rating would become a prerequisite of being 'excellent'.

5) Mini Local Area Agreement – Safer and Stronger Communities Fund

Councillor P J Downes expressed concern at the increasing complexity and bureaucracy involved in central Government's management of local authorities, diverting resources from service delivery. He asked the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive to make representations to Government on this matter.

6) Grants to Voluntary Organisations

Councillor A J Bowen asked for the management of Student Community Action's application for two grants from the Small Community Groups

budget, for the teaching of English as a second language and for more general social work, to be investigated. The process had resulted in Student Community Action receiving no grant for 2005/06, an outcome which Councillor Bowen asked be reconsidered.

Councillor C M Ballard noted the benefits of agreeing contractual arrangements with voluntary organisations, to help ensure that the services delivered were of a nature and quality that contributed to the Council's objectives. However, he commented that flat grants continued to be appropriate in some cases and expressed concern that it had not been possible to increase these for 2005/06 in line with inflation, at a time when the cost of living, particularly in Cambridgeshire, continued to rise. He emphasised the importance of these grants to many organisations in helping to meet their core costs and noted voluntary organisations' request for clear advice on how these should be set out in their applications.

Councillor J Broadway shared Councillor Ballard's concern about the lack of inflationary increase. She asked to be advised how many applications for grant, from previous recipients or new applicants, had been unsuccessful. She emphasised the essential role of voluntary organisations in delivering services that the Council would be unable to provide if it had to pay the full cost.

Councillor S J E King commented that there was scope to clarify the role of Councillors appointed as representatives to voluntary organisations.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, noted that the allocation of grants had been very difficult, because the value of the applications received for 2005/06 had exceeded the available budget by 50%. This meant that, regrettably, not all applications had been successful. Increasing grants for inflation would have cost an additional £50,000.

The Lead Member for Community and Economic Development, Councillor A K Melton, agreed to send written responses to Councillors Bowen and Broadway.

7) Landfill Allowance Trading Scheme (LATS)– Interim Arrangements

The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor S F Johnstone, expressed reservations about the bureaucratic complexity of LATS. However, she noted that Cambridgeshire's excellent performance on waste management meant that the Council was in a strong trading position. She and Councillor J Broadway paid tribute to Chris Brown, Assistant Director (Environment), who would be leaving on 31st March 2005, for his personal contribution to the Council's success in this area. Tribute was also paid to John Lawrance, Head of Trading Standards, who would also be leaving on 31st March 2005.

Other decisions

8) Cambridgeshire Guided Bus – Procurement

9) Consultation on East of England Plan – Draft Revision to the Regional Spatial Strategy for the East of England

Councillor C E Shaw welcomed the announcements made by the Transport Minister, Tom McNulty, at a recent Cambridgeshire Horizons meeting, of £55 million for improvements to the A428; commencement at the beginning of April 2005 of the consultation on improvements to the A14; and £432 million for affordable homes in the region, the second largest allocation nationally. He urged the East of England Regional Assembly to revoke its suspension of support for the Government's planned growth in the region until adequate provision had been made for infrastructure. He argued that the Government was not ignoring the infrastructure deficit, but that it would not be sensible to deliver full funding for improvements at the outset of a ten to fifteen year building programme.

Other members also welcomed the funding, but expressed concern that a comprehensive investment programme was needed, not piecemeal announcements. The East of England Regional Assembly had requested £1.6 billion for the Eastern Region over the next three years, including £660 million for affordable housing. On this basis, the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, and the Lead Member for Strategic Planning, Councillor J E Reynolds, noted that they continued to support the Regional Assembly's suspension of support for housebuilding until full funding for infrastructure, particularly the infrastructure backlog already notified to central Government, had been agreed.

10) Devolving Decision-Making – A Consultation on Regional Funding Allocations

Councillor A A Reid noted that he shared the Cabinet's concerns about the public accountability of the proposed regional transport boards. Neither of the two pilot boards had included any elected members, weakening the role of local authorities in determining transport policy. As the composition of the new boards would not be prescribed by Government, he urged that representations be made that the East of England board consist largely or wholly of elected members. Councillor S J E King commented that he also shared the Cabinet's view, and welcomed the cross-party support.

11) Cromwell Museum Acquisition and Disposal Policy Review

12) Cambridgeshire Climate Change Strategy

Councillor P W Silby expressed her concern about Government-required processes for the disposal of animal carcasses, which were not energy-efficient.

Councillor J Broadway reported that the Environment Service Development Group had welcomed the Strategy and particularly the targets for the County Council to reduce its emissions. The SDG was also pressing for the energy-efficient design of new schools. Councillor Broadway welcomed the LGA's adoption of Cambridgeshire's Strategy

as a model of good practice.

The Lead Member for Environment, Councillor L J Oliver, welcomed the Cabinet's approval of the Strategy. She highlighted the work being done to establish an energy efficiency unit within the Council, and to introduce a whole-life cost approach to the design and construction of new buildings. Councillor Oliver paid tribute to Chris Brown, Assistant Director (Environment), for his work on the Strategy and on other aspects of the environmental agenda.

Other matters

13) Annual Adoption and Permanence Report 2003/04

The Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, congratulated the Fostering and Adoption service and the members of the Fostering and Adoption Panels on the improvements to performance identified in this report. He emphasised that the Council was obliged to meet its statutory duties on fostering and adoption, which led to inescapable budget pressures.

Councillor P L Stroude congratulated the service on the very high success rate of the placements made.

14) Budget Monitoring 2004/05

Councillor J L Huppert drew attention to the significant overspends in Social Services and Policy. He acknowledged that the Council had previously noted the pressures in Social Services and asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, about the reasons for the overspend on Policy.

The Leader of the Council explained that the overspend on Policy was due to the need to retain a legacy IT system longer than had been anticipated. Resources Spokes had previously been briefed on this issue.

Councillor J D Jones commented that, since its inception in 1974, Social Services had been consistently underfunded, because of both national and local financial policies. She urged members to call on Government to ensure that social care was properly funded. She paid tribute to Cambridgeshire officers working in Social Services over the past 31 years for the quality of the service delivered, despite financial difficulties.

The Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, highlighted the steps taken to ensure that overspending in Social Services was not more serious, including the transfer of older people's residential homes and domiciliary care services to the independent sector.

15) Delegations from Cabinet to Cabinet Members and Officers

Councillor A J Bowen paid tribute to the Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Councillor R Wilkinson, who would be standing

down in May 2005, for his constructive approach to working with opposition members.

- 16) Reference from Environment and Transport Scrutiny Committee – Addenbrooke’s Access Road
- 17) Cambridge Central Library – Options

Councillor I C Kidman expressed serious concern that the design of the new library in Lion Yard, Cambridge, had still not been finalised, even though construction had begun on site. The Labour Group would be calling for a formal inquiry into the history of delay in determining the future of the Cambridge Central library.

269. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 18th JANUARY 2005

The Chairman of the Scrutiny Management Committee, Councillor L W McGuire, moved the report of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Committee held on 18th January 2005 and the recommendation it contained. He commented that Cambridgeshire’s scrutiny performance compared well with that of other local authorities, and thanked all members and officers who had contributed to its success. The recommendation was seconded by Councillor J M Tuck.

Councillor J L Huppert welcomed the progress made in developing the scrutiny function. He endorsed the comment made by the Scrutiny Management Committee on the importance of ensuring effective governance and scrutiny of partnerships. He also expressed support for the suggestion that all Chairmen of Scrutiny Committees should be opposition members.

Councillor P J Downes also welcomed the development of scrutiny, but noted that there was scope for further improvement. He welcomed the decision to appoint dedicated scrutiny support officers, but emphasised that the purpose of scrutiny was not only to identify efficiency savings but also to be a driver to improve the quality of services.

Councillor S J E King welcomed the use of an advance from the Good Housekeeping Fund to pay for the new scrutiny support officers, because this would ensure that their effectiveness was kept under review. He did not support the suggestion that all Scrutiny Chairmen should be opposition members, because this would lead to scrutiny becoming more politicised.

Council resolved unanimously

To agree the Scrutiny Work Programme for 2005/06 as set out in Appendices 2 and 3 to the report.

270. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

No written questions had been submitted under Council Procedure Rule 9.

271. ORAL QUESTIONS

Four oral questions were asked under Council Procedure Rule 9:

- Councillor C M Ballard asked the Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Councillor R Wilkinson, why Cambridgeshire had not responded to the Soil Association's survey of local authorities' expenditure on school meals, and how the Council would respond to the 'Feed Me Well' campaign publicised by Jamie Oliver. The Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage explained that a response had not been sent to the Soil Association because of staff sickness. One was now being sent. The cost of a school meal in Cambridgeshire was 43-47 pence, mid-range nationally. There were ongoing discussions at local and regional levels to ensure that school meals were nutritious and provided cost-effectively.
- Councillor J L Huppert asked the Leader of the Council, Councillor J K Walters, whether he shared his disappointment that a general election was likely again to be held on the same day as the County Council elections, thereby reducing the attention and debate given to County Council elections. The Leader of the Council responded that he did not share this disappointment. There were two separate votes, and County Council votes should be sought and cast on local and not national issues.
- Councillor L W McGuire asked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor S F Johnstone, about steps taken to reinstate the discretionary budget for divisional highway maintenance. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport reported that, as a result of representations made during the budget preparation process, this £146,000 budget had been reinstated by drawing in funding from elsewhere in Environment and Transport.
- Councillor M L Leeke asked the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport when Cutter Ferry bridge in Cambridge would reopen. The Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport reported that difficulties with the foundations meant that work on the new bridge was taking longer than had been anticipated. It was now expected to open in mid- to late May.

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

272. QUESTIONS ON POLICE AND FIRE AUTHORITY ISSUES

Members were invited to ask questions and comment on issues relating to the Cambridgeshire Police Authority and Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority.

Report of the Chairman of the Cambridgeshire Police Authority

- Councillor M Farrar asked about the reasons for the reduction to the opening hours for the new police station at Sawston, which had initially been advertised as 8.00 to 4.00 Monday to Friday. Councillor A G Orgee asked whether arrangements had yet been made for an open day at the police station in Sawston. Responding, Councillors J E Reynolds and J M Tuck recommended that these questions be put to the Sector Commander.

- Councillor I C Bates asked to be advised of the distribution of Police Community Support Officers across the County. Councillor J M Tuck agreed to send a written response.

Report of the Chairman of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Fire Authority

- Councillor L J Oliver asked about the withholding of information by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) from local fire authorities and regional management boards. Responding, the Chairman of the Fire Authority, Councillor L W McGuire, explained that the ODPM had restricted information about and involvement in the selection process for partners to the new regional control centres to the Chairmen of the regional management boards. He was a member of the East of England regional management board but, as he was not comfortable with this approach, had declined to attend the relevant meeting.

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

273. MOTIONS

No motions had been submitted under Council Procedure Rule 10.

274. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES AND APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

No changes to Committee memberships or appointments to outside bodies were proposed.

Chairman: