

COUNTY COUNCIL: MINUTES

Date: Tuesday 26th March 2002

Time: 10.30 a.m. – 3.30 p.m.

Place: Shire Hall, Cambridge

Present: Councillor: P W Silby (Chairman)

Councillors: R S G Barnwell, I C Bates, Dr T J Bear, B S Bhalla, A J Bowen, S V Brinton, C M Carter, M Y Chapple, R L Clarke, J E Coston, P J Downes, R Driver, J A P Eddy, M Farrar, H J Fitch, P D Gooden, A Hansard, B Hardy, G F Harper, V A Hearne-Casapieri, G J Heathcock, W G M Hensley, J L Huppert, S F Johnstone, J D Jones, 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, E Meyland-Smith, S B Normington, M K Ogden, L J Oliver, A G Orgee, D R Pegram, J A Powley, P A E Read, J E Reynolds, C E Shaw, 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, C M Ballard, S A Giles and J L Gluza

51. PROTOCOL ON THE STATE OF THE COUNTY DEBATE

It was resolved:

To approve under Rule 13 of the Council Procedure Rules the Protocol on the State of the County Debate as set out in the agenda, for immediate application.

[Voting pattern: unanimous]

52. STATE OF THE COUNTY DEBATE

At the beginning of the debate, the Council received presentations from three external speakers:

- Mark Taylor, Principal of Isle College, Wisbech and member of the Cambridgeshire Learning and Skills Council, who spoke about the challenges of providing educational opportunities for young people in rural areas such as Fenland
- Professor Bob Reeve, Director of Strategic Information Planning at Anglia Polytechnic University, board member of the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Connexions Company and member of the Cambridgeshire Learning and Skills Council, who spoke about ways of maximising opportunities for higher education, particularly through partnership working

- Walter Herriot, Managing Director of St John's Innovation Centre, who spoke about the challenges of delivering economic prosperity in the Cambridge sub-region in a sustainable manner.

Following these presentations, the debate was opened to all members. The following issues were covered during discussion:

- The need to avoid excessive bureaucracy in delivering Council services

Particular concern was expressed at the administrative requirements placed on local authorities by central Government. Members debated whether regional government or unitary authorities would help to reduce bureaucracy and increase democratic accountability

- The importance of providing coherent educational opportunities for children

Members recognised the importance of giving children the best start possible by providing adequate funding for primary education and having the resources for early intervention measures when necessary. Organisations needed to work together to assist children's progression from school to vocational training, higher education and employment. Members emphasised that, where failures occurred, these should be recognised as such and used to inform the process of improvement

- The need to develop the unrealised potential of rural areas such as Fenland

Members commented that the situation was changing and that people were beginning to have higher expectations for themselves and of public services. Significant investment was already being made in the County's rural areas and it was necessary to publicise this to ensure continuing progress

- The challenge of ensuring that the economic prosperity of the Cambridge sub-region was shared

Organisations needed to work together to ensure that economic prosperity brought choice and quality in employment and that growth took place sustainably.

At the conclusion of the debate, the three external speakers responded to the comments made. The Leader, Councillor J K Walters, then summed up on behalf of the Council and thanked everyone for the contributions they had made.

53. MINUTES: 19th FEBRUARY 2002

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 19th February 2002 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

54. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced a number of awards received by the Council.

Local Government Chronicle Award for Councillor Development

The Council had won this award in recognition of its work to help members carry out their duties more effectively. The award recognised the contribution made by a number of initiatives aimed at securing the proper induction of new members, the training and development of all members and steps taken to keep members informed and supported when carrying out their duties.

BT Vision 100 Index 2002

Members noted that the Council had been selected for the BT Vision 100 Index 2002, which singled out innovative thinking and activity. The Index identified 100 innovative UK organisations that had achieved strategic goals through visionary activities, regardless of size, age or sector of work.

Bus Award

Following on from the previous year's success in being awarded Local Authority of the Year in the National Transport Awards, this year the Council had been short-listed in the Bus Award category. The decision on the award would be announced in June.

Librarianship Award

The Chairman reported that Ciara Eastell, one of the Council's librarians, was one of two librarians in the UK selected for a national award by the Society of Chief Librarians under an initiative to develop leadership skills among potential future leaders of public library services.

The Chairman led members in congratulating everyone involved in achieving these prestigious awards.

Invitation to the Imperial War Museum at Duxford

Members had been invited by its Director to visit the Imperial War Museum at Duxford, on a date to be confirmed at the end of May. All those interested in attending were asked to contact Councillor R Driver.

55. REPORT OF THE CABINET

The Council received a report of the meetings of the Cabinet held on 13th February and 5th March 2002, covering the following:

Key decisions for determination

- 1) Prospects 2002-06

It was moved by Councillor J K Walters and seconded by Councillor J E Reynolds that the Cabinet report be received and the recommendations adopted.

At the beginning of this item, Miss Sally Milling presented a petition with 3,060 signatures, calling for Wisbech to be linked to the rail network. The petition was relevant to the Council's consideration of the Local Transport Plan Policy Framework, included within the Cabinet report. Members asked Miss Milling a number of questions about issues she had raised. The Chairman thanked her for taking the time to present the petition to the Council.

Members then considered the two sections of Prospects 2002-06, the Council's Corporate Plan and the Policy Framework as summarised in the Plan Statements.

Corporate Plan 2002-06

It was resolved

To approve the Corporate Plan for 2002-06.

[Voting pattern: unanimous.]

Statutory Plans and Policy Framework Plan Statements

a) Annual Library Plan Policy Framework

Councillor A J Bowen asked about the risk associated with approving a Plan that the Council might not have the resources to implement. The Cabinet Member for Education, Libraries and Heritage, Councillor R Wilkinson, noted that the Plan extended to 2004 but accepted that the Library service was currently experiencing financial difficulties and advised that a special group had been set up to address these issues. The Council would continue to seek innovative means of achieving its objectives. Councillor R Pegram, Lead Member for Lifelong Learning, advised that the Public Library Plan submitted to Government included a statement that resources might not be available to achieve compliance with the new national library standards. The new Plan to be submitted in September 2002 would need to include plans and actions to achieve these standards by 2004.

b) Cambridgeshire Learning Plan and Policy Framework

c) Adult Learning Plan

d) Care and Education Plan and Policy Framework

e) Children's Services Plan and Policy Framework

f) Community Care Plan Policy Framework

Councillor J M Tuck drew members' attention to the decision by the College of West Anglia to close Medigate Products in Wisbech, a packaging firm that employed fifteen adults with learning difficulties. She asked the Cabinet Member for Social Services, Councillor J A Powley, about future provision for these people. Councillor Powley advised that the Council would be working in partnership with other agencies to do the utmost to ensure that these adults had a constructive future.

g) Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies and Policy Framework

Councillors I C Bates and S J E King asked the Lead Member for Community and Economic Development, Councillor A K Melton, whether the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies were delivering real reductions in crime. Councillor Melton responded that they were reducing both crime and the fear of crime. Partnership working, not only with the police but also with the District Councils and other agencies, was central to this success.

h) Cultural Strategy and Policy Framework

i) Education Development Plan and Policy Framework

j) Information Age Government Strategy Policy Framework

k) Local Transport Plan Policy Framework

Following on from the petition presented earlier in the meeting, Councillor S J E King sought assurance from the Cabinet Member for Environment and Transport, Councillor S F Johnstone, that the Council would support the improvement of transport links to the north of the County. Councillor Johnstone reported that she had recently met with Malcolm Moss MP and the Leader of Fenland District Council to discuss this. It had been agreed that the multi-modal study of the A47 should include an investigation of the rail options, to be carried out by W S Atkins and to be independently audited. This work would be funded by the County Council and Fenland District Council, thereby removing the need for local people to raise the money for a separate study.

l) Local Agenda 21 Policy Framework

m) Structure Plan and Waste Plan Policy Frameworks

n) Youth Justice Plan and Policy Frameworks.

At the conclusion of the debate, it was resolved

To approve the Plans and Policy Frameworks as detailed at a) to n) above.

[Voting pattern: decisions on (a) to (l) and (n) were agreed without dissent; Councillors J E Coston, E Meyland-Smith and R B Martlew abstained on the decision on the Structure Plan and Waste Plan Policy Frameworks.]

Key decisions for information

- 2) Grants to Voluntary Organisations and Other Bodies
- 3) Environment Strategy and Action Plan
- 4) Supporting People Strategy.

56. REPORT OF THE STANDARDS COMMITTEE

The Council received a report of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 22nd February 2002. The Chairman of the Committee, Councillor R Driver, moved the recommendations, seconded by Councillor T J Bear.

It was resolved

- i) that the Code of Conduct for Members as set out in Appendix 1 to the report to Council be adopted by the Council for implementation from 1st May 2002;
- ii) that the Code of Corporate Governance as set out in Appendix 2 to the report to Council be adopted by the Council with effect from April 2002.

[Voting pattern: unanimous.]

57. REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT PANEL

The Council received a report of the meeting of the Scrutiny Management Panel held on 27th February 2002. The Chairman of the Panel, Councillor L W McGuire and Councillor M L Leeke, in moving and seconding the recommendations, asked that the text of the report and recommendations be varied to facilitate the possible establishment of an ad hoc scrutiny panel or panels during the course of the year.

Scrutiny work programme for 2002/03

It was resolved

- i) to endorse the scrutiny work programme for 2002/03 as set out in Appendix 1 of the report to Council;
- ii) to endorse the proposed arrangements for the consideration of Best Value reviews to be undertaken in 2002/03;
- iii) to delegate to the Scrutiny Management Panel the authority to form ad hoc scrutiny panels and to appoint members (following

consultation with Group Leaders) to fulfil the tasks set out in Article 6.01 of the Council's Constitution.

[Voting pattern: unanimous.]

Arrangements for Health Scrutiny

Councillor I C Bates asked whether additional funding would be made available to local authorities to carry out health scrutiny. He also expressed concern that the workload of members involved in health scrutiny would be substantial and that, in some parts of the County, it might be difficult to identify members able to take on the additional responsibilities. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Management Panel responded that no additional funding had as yet been made available. Group Leaders were currently considering nominations for health scrutiny. The Chairman emphasised that the arrangements currently being proposed were developmental and would be reviewed prior to any changes to the Constitution being recommended.

It was resolved

- i) that the training and developmental arrangements for health scrutiny as set out in the report to Council be implemented from May 2002;
- ii) that the Council give further consideration in autumn 2002 to changes to its Constitution to institute appropriate scrutiny arrangements to be effective from April 2003.

[Voting pattern: unanimous.]

58. THE COUNCIL'S CONSTITUTION

The Council considered a report from the Chief Executive recommending a number of amendments to the Council's Constitution.

Financial and Contract Procedure Rules

It was resolved to approve the following revisions to the Constitution:

- i) In paragraph 1.2 (a) insert the words 'include Financial Regulations that' at the beginning of the paragraph.
- i) In paragraph 1.2 (c) delete the first reference to 'Contract Procedure Rules'.
- ii) Insert a new paragraph 6.2 (c) as follows:

'6.2 (c) Value of Contracts to be in writing

All contracts, which are subject to Contract Regulations, must be in writing or placed using FAMIS or a purchase card (as defined in the Contract Regulations).'

[Voting pattern: unanimous.]

Monitoring and Chief Financial Officers

It was resolved to approve the following revisions to Part 7 of the Council's Constitution, Management Structure, to provide for the appointment of deputy Monitoring and Chief Financial Officers:

- i) Insert the following after 'The Director of Resources is Monitoring Officer':

'The Monitoring Officer is responsible for nominating a deputy and has nominated the Head of Legal Services';
- ii) Insert the following after 'The Head of Financial Services is the Chief Financial Officer':

'The Chief Financial Officer is responsible for nominating a deputy and has nominated one of the Assistant Directors (Resources)'.

[Voting pattern: unanimous.]

59. WRITTEN QUESTIONS

Members noted that no written questions had been submitted under Rule 9 of the Council Procedure Rules.

60. ORAL QUESTIONS

No oral questions were asked under Rule 9 of the Council Procedure Rules.

61. QUESTIONS ON POLICE AND FIRE ISSUES

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

Police Authority

- Councillor J L Huppert sought assurances from the Chairman of the Police Authority, Councillor J E Reynolds, that the new approach to screening silent 999 calls was not leading to genuine calls being ignored
- Councillor P J Downes noted that Cambridgeshire Police Authority would be receiving a 2.3% increase in Government grant for 2002/03, the lowest in the country, and asked the Chairman of the Police Authority, Councillor J E Reynolds, on what basis the settlement was calculated.

Fire Authority

- No questions were asked or comments made about the Fire Authority's business.

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

62. MOTIONS

Members noted that no motions had been submitted under Rule 10 of the Council Procedure Rules.

63. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMITTEES

No changes to Committee membership were put forward for approval.

Chairman

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