

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

**Meeting held at Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City
on 12 September 2006**

Minutes

- PRESENT:** *Councillors T.W. Hone (Vice-Chairman in the Chair), Tricia Gibbs, I.J. Knighton, Mrs. L.A. Needham, Sarah Wren and A.D. Young.*
- IN ATTENDANCE:** *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services, Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services, Head of Financial Services, Head of Planning and Building Control, Head of Housing and Environmental Health, Democratic Services Manager, Regional & Strategic Sites Manager, Housing Needs Manager, Service Manager (Waste) and Committee and Member Services Officer.*
- ALSO PRESENT:** *Councillors Julian Cunningham (Chairman of PARC) and M.E. Paterson (Vice-chairman of Scrutiny Committee). Representative from the Herts on Sunday newspaper and five members of the public.*

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENT

The Chairman advised Cabinet that the Committee and Member Services Officer Patricia Wilkings was leaving the Council and that this was her last committee meeting. The Chairman thanked Mrs Wilkings for her work over the previous two years and wished her well in her new job.

51. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors F.J. Smith and R.A.C. Thake.

52. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of Cabinet held on 25 July 2006 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chairman.

53. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

The Chairman advised Cabinet that five referrals from Committees had been circulated prior to the meeting and that a replacement report to that previously issued at agenda item 8, Stevenage Area Action Plan – Joint Working with SBC had also been circulated prior to the meeting.

54. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor I.J. Knighton declared a prejudicial interest at agenda item 13, Land off Yeomanry Drive, Baldock as he had taken part in a debate and voted on this item at the meeting of the Baldock and District Committee on 14 August 2006. Councillor Knighton considered that it was inappropriate for him to take any part in the debate and left the Chamber when this item was considered and took no part in the vote.

55. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Paula Farrant had given due notice that she wished to speak at the meeting at agenda item 13, Land off Yeomanry Drive, Clothall Common and was invited to speak prior to the item being discussed.

Mr David Dixon had given due notice that he wished to speak at the meeting regarding the proposed re-siting of the Letchworth Post Office.

During his presentation, Mr Dixon questioned why the Post Office could not remain in its current position and revert to using the back of the building again as a sorting office instead of moving to another site. He advised Cabinet that he had recently had to take a bus journey to collect a card from the sorting office in Avenue One and had had great difficulty in finding a return bus stop home. He added that the current service was not suitable for residents of Letchworth and did not conform to Ebenezer Howard's design for the town.

The Chairman thanked Mr Dixon for his comments and advised him that it was the business of the Post Office to make commercial decisions and not North Herts District Council, who had no powers to intervene. He advised Mr Dixon that three Councillors from the Letchworth Committee had attended a meeting with representatives from the Heritage Foundation, North Herts Homes, Town Centre Partnership, Letchworth Garden City Town Council, Postwatch and the Post Office where these matters had been discussed and views expressed. He further suggested that Mr Dixon write to Postwatch about his concerns.

56. REFERRAL FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 SEPTEMBER 2006 – ADOPTION OF CROSS BOUNDARY CHOICE BASED LETTINGS (CBL) SCHEME

The Chairman informed Cabinet that consideration of this referral would take place in conjunction with agenda item number 14.

57. REFERRAL FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 SEPTEMBER 2006 – ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY FINANCE SUB-GROUP – 20 JULY 2006 AND 4 SEPTEMBER 2006

The Chairman informed Cabinet that consideration of this referral would take place in conjunction with agenda item number 11.

58. REFERRAL FROM SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 SEPTEMBER 2006 –QUESTION: SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE DRINKING

The Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny Committee presented an extract from the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2006 that requested information about what the Council was doing to promote social responsibility in relation to alcohol and whether it was entering schemes for the public sector award in the Responsible Drinks Retailing Awards 2006.

Scrutiny Committee requested that Cabinet and the Local Strategic Partnership investigate more innovative measures for the promotion of socially responsible drinking in the District.

A short debate took place, which included the following:

- That the results of the introduction of an Alcohol Free Zone in Royston would be reviewed to decide if this should be considered for other towns in the district;

- That there was a Local Strategic Partnership Crime and Disorder initiative looking at aspects of drinking and would be interested in any suggestions Members may have;
- That there was productive work being carried out in Hitchin with Pub Watch and local landlords regarding, for example, drink spiking and drink related problems on Windmill Hill

It was agreed that the Vice-chairman of Scrutiny take the comments of Cabinet back to the Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That the views of the Scrutiny Committee be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that Cabinet was aware of the views of the Scrutiny Committee.

59. REFERRAL FROM PERFORMANCE, AUDIT & REVIEW COMMITTEE (PARC) – 7 SEPTEMBER 2006 – ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF PARC 2005/6

The Chairman of PARC presented an extract from the draft Minutes of the meeting of PARC held on 7 September 2006 regarding his Annual Report for 2005/6. A copy of the report was included with the draft minute.

It was agreed that it was important to preserve the independence of PARC to enable the committee to continue to carry out its duties with due diligence.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the views of PARC, with particular reference to comments in respect of the governance of the Local Area Agreement and of the Local Strategic Partnership, be noted;
- (2) That the areas selected for Fundamental Service Reviews be noted and that Cabinet be prepared to act in respect of the results of those Reviews.

REASON FOR DECISION: To bring the views of PARC to the attention of Cabinet.

60. REFERRAL FROM PERFORMANCE, AUDIT & REVIEW COMMITTEE (PARC) – 7 SEPTEMBER 2006 – RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

The Chairman of PARC presented an extract from the draft Minutes of the meeting of PARC that was held on 7 September 2006 regarding Risk Management. A copy of the report was included with the draft minute.

RESOLVED: That the two new Top Risks of 'Waste management' and 'The Future of Community Meals Service' be approved.

REASON FOR DECISION: The recommendation was in accordance with the adopted risk management strategy of North Hertfordshire District Council.

61. REGIONAL & STRATEGIC PLANNING ISSUES

The Regional and Strategic Developments Manager presented a report of the Head of Planning and Building control that informed Members of the current positions regarding:

- West of the A1(M) at Stevenage and Stevenage Local Development Documents;
- The draft East of England Plan;
- Growth Area Liaison for the Luton conurbation;

- Luton & Dunstable Northern Bypasses;
- London Luton Airport and Stansted Airport.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that Cabinet was made aware of current development.

62. STEVENAGE AREA ACTION PLAN – JOINT WORKING WITH STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Regional and Strategic Developments Manager presented a report of the Head of Planning and Building Control that sought a formal resolution of Council to authorise joint working with Stevenage Borough Council in order to prepare and adopt a Stevenage Area Action Plan (AAP), in accordance with the Planning and Compensation Act 2004.

The key issues to be covered by the joint AAP include –

- i. Definition of the extent of the area covered by the AAP.
- ii. The overall scale of growth beyond the existing built-up area of Stevenage.
- iii. The allocation of that growth to specific sites.
- iv. Affordable housing policies.
- v. Design / landscape / sustainability policies and standards to be applied to new development.
- vi. Environmental protection policies for the AAP area.
- vii. Planning obligations to be sought from the development industry in relation to social and community infrastructure.
- viii. Review of Green Belt boundaries.

Cabinet were advised that the method of joint working would be agreed between officers from both North Herts District Council and Stevenage Borough Council but the decision making process would ultimately remain with Cabinet and Council.

RESOLVED: That joint working be formally undertaken with Stevenage Borough Council in order to prepare and adopt a Stevenage Joint Area Action Plan.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That joint working be formally undertaken with Stevenage Borough Council in order to prepare and adopt a Stevenage Joint Area Action Plan.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure the preparation of a Joint AAP in accordance with legal procedures.

63. DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT: PLANNING OBLIGATIONS AND ASSOCIATED SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL AND STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This item was withdrawn from the agenda.

64. SINGLE NON EMERGENCY NUMBER FOR HERTFORDSHIRE (SNEN)

The Chief Executive presented a report that updated Cabinet on the project to implement a single non emergency number for Hertfordshire (SNEN), also known as the '101 project'. The report also outlined the process that was being developed in order to submit the formal application for Home Office funding for submission by 6 October 2006.

The 2004 Police Reform White Paper commits the Home Office to providing 'A single non emergency number for the public which will deal with non-emergency issues for policing, crime and antisocial behaviour'. The package was therefore being introduced jointly across the UK by the Home Office and Department for Local Government and Communities.

The intention was that an easy to remember three digit number (101) would enable the public to access community safety advice, information and action whilst freeing up the emergency services to handle the real emergencies.

During a discussion about the project, Cabinet expressed concerns, with particular regard to;

- The resource implications regarding the handling of potentially large volume of calls;
- Maintenance costs post December 2010 when the initial grant from the Government expires;
- Possible interference with ongoing work with Customer Relationship Management system at North Hertfordshire District Council;
- Residents may perceive North Hertfordshire District Council as the responsible authority for taking any action regarding the calls, which could lead to antipathy from the public if these were not dealt with efficiently.

The Chief Executive advised Cabinet that the project was on the agenda of a forthcoming meeting he would be attending with other Chief Executives across the County, after which he would have a clearer idea about how other districts proposed to proceed. He further advised Cabinet that the Chief Constable of Hertfordshire had expressed concerns about the initiative, especially with regard to how this would impact on their crime statistics and may withdraw from it.

Cabinet agreed that far more information about the project was required before a decision could be made.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That, subject to further discussions between the Chief Executives of Hertfordshire and the Police, the Council's continued participation in the bid be agreed;
- (2) That the Chief Executive be the lead officer for the development of the scheme so that the county wide bid can proceed, but with the caveat that any agreed action must not impact on the ability of the Authority to deliver its service@north-herts programme nor commit the Authority to any additional resource implications.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure Cabinet are kept up to date with the intentions of, and progress against, this initiative, including North Herts current commitment of officer time;
- (2) To ensure that the Chief Executive can present North Herts' view and ultimately the decision of this Council to proceed with the project or not, within the constraints of current resources of our CRM and CSC.

65. APRIL TO JUNE 1ST QUARTERLY REVENUE MONITORING REPORT FOR 2006/07

A referral from Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2006 was discussed with this item.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented a report of the Head of Financial Services that informed Cabinet of the summary position on income and expenditure for the period April to June 2006 for the General Fund and the Council's only remaining trading account, Careline. The report highlighted only significant variances to members and included the progress of any carry forwards requested by officers for inclusion in the 2006/07 accounts, which were not projected to be spent, within that financial year.

The report also highlighted savings and growth agreed by members as part of 2005/06 Service and Financial Planning process, which were not projected to be spent or saved, within the financial year and updated members on the progress of the vacancy control saving, which was included within the General Fund budgets and any additional grant funding the Council receives.

In response to an enquiry, Cabinet was advised that the increased car parking charges in Royston had now been implemented. Cabinet was also advised that each submission for a staff vacancy was taken on its own merit and that if the post was considered a priority, it could be excluded from the three month rule.

Appendix A - Treasury Management was appended to the report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the views of the Scrutiny Finance Sub Group be noted;
- (2) That the report of the Head of Financial Services be noted;
- (3) That the changes to the 2006/07 General Fund budget, identified in paragraph 4.1, table 1, of £96k additional expenditure be approved;
- (4) That the reductions identified in paragraph 4.1, table 1 to the 2007/08 General Fund budget of £104k be approved;
- (5) That the additional posts of 27.5 hours per week on Careline, to be funded partly from additional income and partly from balances of £8.5k and £10.4k for 2006/07 and 2007/08 respectively (paragraph 4.8) be approved.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To enable Members to make informed decisions on service and financial planning processes;
- (2) To enable Members to monitor and request appropriate action of Directorates who did not meet the budget targets set as part of the Service and Financial Planning process;
- (3) To ensure that changes to the Council's balances were monitored and approved.

66. CAPITAL PROGRAMME – 2006/7 ONWARDS

A referral from Scrutiny Committee held on 5 September 2006 was discussed with this item.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance presented the Head of Financial Services' 1st quarterly monitoring report for 2006/07, which updated Cabinet on the capital programme for 2006/07 and indicated its impact upon the 2007/08 programme and upon available capital funding resources. The report also sought Cabinet's approval to changes to individual scheme expenditure for 2006/07 onwards.

Appendix A - Capital Programme 2006/07 onwards was appended to the report.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the views of the Scrutiny Finance Sub Group be noted;
- (2) That the £40k budget for Letchworth multi-storey car park improvements be re-instated in the Capital Programme;
- (3) That the changes to the provisional capital programme for 2006/07 onwards be approved;
- (4) That the deletion of the crematorium capital budget of £1 million in £2007/08 be approved.

REASON FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To enable Members to make informed decisions on service and financial planning processes;
- (2) Cabinet was required to approve the revisions to the capital programme for 2006/07 and onwards as detailed in appendix A.

67. LAND OFF YEOMANRY DRIVE, CLOTHALL COMMON, BALDOCK

Councillor I.J. Knighton, having declared a personal interest in this item and having pre-determined the matter at a meeting of the Baldock & District Committee, left the chamber and did not take part in the debate or vote.

The Chairman invited Mrs Farrant to speak at this item. Mrs Farrant read out a prepared statement to Cabinet and distributed copies to Members.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Farrant for her presentation.

The Head of Financial Services' report requested that Cabinet reaffirms that the land off Yeomanry Drive, Clothall Common, Baldock was surplus to the Council's requirements and should be disposed of for residential development.

A discussion took place, that included the following points:

- Councillors listen to the views of all residents, not only of Baldock but of the whole of the North Hertfordshire district;
- The disposal of assets was for the benefit of all residents in the North Hertfordshire District;
- The fact that the land had been allocated for residential development had not been hidden but had been known since 1977 and any local search would have identified it as such;

- The loss of the estimated £2 million from the sale would have a significant impact on the Capital Programme.

The following documents were appended to the report:

Appendix A – Minute 119 of Baldock & District Area Committee, 10 April 2006;

Appendix B – Site plan of Yeomanry Drive, Baldock;

Appendix C – Minutes 32 and 34 of Baldock & District Area Committee, 14 August 2006.

RESOLVED: That the land off Yeomanry Drive, Clothall Common, Baldock be reaffirmed as surplus to the Council's future requirements and be disposed of for residential development.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable disposal of land that was surplus to the Council's future requirements, which helped meet its strategic objective of sustainable communities and contributed to the Council's capital programme.

68. ADOPTION OF CROSS BOUNDARY CHOICE BASED LETTINGS SCHEME

The Housing Needs Manager presented a report of the Head of Housing and Environmental Health that described what was meant by Choice Based Lettings (CBL) and sought support for a bid to the DCLG for funding to implement a joint CBL scheme for most local authorities in Hertfordshire.

The Housing Needs Manager explained that as part of its drive to increase choice in the delivery of public services, the Government required all local authorities to operate a CBL for allocating all social housing units by 2010.

In response to a query, Cabinet was advised that people would be assessed for need on the North Hertfordshire District Council's points system and that if the bid was successful, a further report would be brought back to Cabinet.

The following documents were appended to the report;
Appendix 1 – What is Choice Based Lettings?
Appendix 2 – Draft joint bid to be submitted to the DCLG

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the views of Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (2) That Choice Based Lettings (CBL) be supported in principle as a future methodology for allocating social housing;
- (3) That North Hertfordshire District Council participate in a joint bid with 6 other Hertfordshire authorities and Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) (as attached at Appendix 2) to secure funding to introduce a Choice Based Lettings scheme ("Herts Housing Choice");
- (4) That in the event of the bid being successful, it be agreed that full commitment to the project will be dependant upon the growth bid put forward in the Service and Financial Planning Process being approved;
- (5) That officers work to introduce the "Herts Housing Choice" scheme for the District.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) CBL was a mandatory requirement for all Local Housing Authorities and Registered Social Landlords by 2010;

- (2) A bid in collaboration with a number of other Hertfordshire local authorities was likely to yield the following advantages:
- Benefits of economies of scale in relation to ICT and advertising;
 - Consistent with Government guidance;
 - Enabling cross boundary mobility;
 - Assists RSLs that operate across a number of local authority areas.
- (3) Due to the preliminary nature of the "Herts Housing Choice" bid, it was reasonable to proceed on a conceptual basis and to defer detailed consideration of the CBL scheme until DCLG funding has been granted, the growth bid (see 6.3) had been approved and initial discussions with the project team have taken place.

69. TRADE WASTE FOR CHARITIES

The Portfolio Holder for Waste and Environment presented a report of the Head of Leisure & Environmental Services that outlined the options for consideration by Cabinet for the charging mechanism for charitable organisations with respect to waste collection and disposal and sought agreement to implement the preferred option.

The report advised Cabinet that charitable organisations within North Hertfordshire were not charged a reduced rate for their waste but schools were as they clearly qualified under the legislation.

Cabinet agreed that help should be given to small charities and discussed the various options put forward.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That registered charities be provided with free disposal costs and charged for collection only;
- (2) That small registered charities that have only a 240 litre bin collected once a week be provided with a free service;
- (3) That the above recommendations be implemented retrospectively from 1st April 2006.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To comply with legislative requirements;
- (2) To support small charities;
- (3) The first challenge to our policy was received on 5th May 2006 and referred to our invoice dated 1st April 2006.

The meeting closed at 10.10p.m.

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Chairman