

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth on Thursday, 14 December 2006 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: *Councillors Mrs C.P.A. Strong (Chairman), A. Bardett (Vice-Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley, D.J. Barnard, David Billing, Judi Billing, John Bishop, Tom Brindley, P.C.W. Burt, Paul Clark, J.M. Cunningham, Melissa Davey, Tricia Gibbs, Fiona Hill, T.W. Hone, A.F. Hunter, Sal Jarvis, Steve Jarvis, David Kearns, Joan Kirby, Marilyn Kirkland, I.J. Knighton, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, Lawrence McNamara, H.M. Marshall, D. Miller, M.R.M. Muir, Elliot Needham, Mrs L.A. Needham, Lawrence Oliver, M. Paterson, Deepak Sangha, R.L. Shakespeare-Smith, D. Sheard, F.J. Smith, Martin Stears, R.A.C. Thake, M.E. Weeks, Sarah Wren and A.D. Young.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services, Corporate Legal Manager, Democratic Services Manager and Senior Committee and Member Services Officer.*

66. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Liz Beardwell, Monica Bloxham, Simon Bloxham, Jane Gray, Gary Grindal, R.E. Inwood, Lorna Kercher and Diane Proudlove.

67. MINUTES

It was moved by Councillor F.J. Smith, seconded by Councillor T.W. Hone, and

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 2 November 2006 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

68. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No additional items were presented for consideration by the Council.

69. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

70. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(1) Launch of Member Development Programme

The Chairman announced that Members will have realised that this evening was the official "launch" of the revised Member Development arrangements.

The Chairman hoped that as many councillors as possible had already sampled the PC based and other learning and development materials on offer in Committee Room 3. This facility was also available after the meeting, and it was understood that the Learning and Development Team had some free resources available for Members to take away.

The Chairman advised that Members should also collect their personal development folders from Committee Room 3. Amongst other things, this contained details of the process for arranging any development requirements they may have, including conferences and seminars. This process had been designed to ensure that the budget was effectively managed.

At the Chairman's invitation, both Councillors Tricia Gibbs and Sal Jarvis (Members of the Member Development Group) made statements in support of the Member Development Programme.

(2) The Sanctuary – Fundraising

At the request of the Chairman, Councillor Sarah Wren informed the Council of a "Sleep Over" in St. Albans Abbey in which she had participated in order to raise funds for The Sanctuary, Hitchin. Councillor Wren advised that she had already raised over £200 in sponsorship for this event, and would be pleased to increase this sum should anyone wish to donate retrospectively.

(3) Change of Date of Council Meeting – 28 February 2007

The Chairman asked Members to note that, as a consequence of a County Council's precept setting Council meeting taking place on 27 February 2007, and therefore to allow officers sufficient time to prepare the formal Council Tax Resolution for 2007/08, the date of the Council meeting scheduled for Wednesday, 28 February 2007 had been put back a day. It would now take place on **Thursday, 1 March 2007**.

71. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Question from a Member of the Public to Cabinet Portfolio Holder

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 9.3, Mr Giles Woodruff addressed the following question to Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste Management and Environment):

"On 9 November, the Council issued a press release headed "Waste and Recycling". In this it was stated that Council is committed to recycling, but that it might abandon or delay plans to move to alternate weekly collections because of uncertainty regarding cost. My question refers to this and as background I would also like to quote from a recent article in the Cambridge Evening News. This stated: "*When fortnightly collections were proposed in Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire, there was uproar, with some householders claiming it would result in flytipping and fill the streets with rubbish. But now the two councils have some of the highest recycling rates in the country.*" For comparison, North Hertfordshire, which is committed to recycling, has recently announced a recycling rate of 30% for household waste. Cambridge City has achieved 36% and are targeting 45% this year. South Cambridgeshire has already exceeded 50%.

I believe it would be hard to argue that as a standalone action, moving to fortnightly black bin collections would reduce the Council's costs and should beneficially influence people's behaviour, resulting in less waste and putting less pressure on landfill, something the Portfolio Holder acknowledges is a significant contributor to global warming. What reasons does the Portfolio Holder give for not supporting the immediate implementation of fortnightly collections for most areas in the district (that is, those streets other than the few where fortnightly collections would cause genuine difficulties for residents) and using any savings achieved from this to enhance recycling facilities, even if the Council's financial position does not currently permit this to be to the extent that had previously been hoped?"

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste Management and Environment replied that the Council clearly had a responsibility to recycle and minimise waste, but that this needed to be balanced with financial prudence, in order to ensure that value for money was obtained regarding the expenditure of Council Tax Payers money. Any decision to move towards alternate weekly collections would need to be considered in tandem with improved recycling. The cost of recycling, in association with the alternate weekly collections, was beyond original estimates, although the Council was investigating alternative methods of kerbside recycling. The Council would also be investigating a bring bank system for recycling plastics, as this could prove to be a more economical method for such recycling. In Autumn 2007, the Waste Collection

Vehicle fleet was due to be changed, and it was intended that the replacement vehicles would be able to collect greater volumes of waste material.

Mr Woodruff asked the following supplementary question:

“Should the move to alternate weekly collections be approved, does the Council have any proposals to provide appropriate publicity and information (including use of its website) to residents and local businesses on methods to reduce non-recyclable waste and increase recyclable waste?”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste Management and Environment commented that there would be a full publicity programme approximately six months before the implementation of any new alternate weekly collection scheme.

72. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 14 NOVEMBER 2006 – GAMBLING ACT 2005: PROPOSED STATEMENT OF LICENSING PRINCIPLES

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 November 2006, in respect of the Gambling Act 2005: Statement of Licensing Principles (Minute 96 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Appendix A – Final Draft Statement of Licensing Principles;
Appendix B – Comments received during consultation, including recommendations.

It was moved by Councillor Sarah Wren, seconded by Councillor F.J. Smith, and

RESOLVED: That the proposed Statement of Licensing Principles in respect of the Gambling Act 2005, as attached at Appendix A to the report, and including the proposed delegation of functions to the Licensing Committee/Sub-Committee and Officers, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: As required by the Secretary of State, to ensure that the Statement of Licensing principles is adopted by the Council by no later than the deadline date of 3 January 2007.

73. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 14 NOVEMBER 2006 – DISABILITY EQUALITY SCHEME

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 14 November 2006, in respect of the proposed Disability Equality Scheme (Minute 103 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as was the following appendix:

Appendix 1 – Disability Equality Scheme.

It was moved by Councillor F.J. Smith, seconded by Councillor Tricia Gibbs, and

RESOLVED: That the Disability Equality Scheme, as attached at Appendix 1 to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Council conforms with the statutory requirement to develop and implement a Disability Equality Scheme by 4 December 2006.

74. THE 2006 REVIEW OF THE CORPORATE PLAN 2005-2015

The Council considered a joint report of the Head of Policy, Partnerships and Performance and Chief Executive in respect of the 2006 Review of the Corporate Plan 2005-2015. The following appendices were submitted with the report:

Appendix 1 – The Vision, the Mission and Our Strategic Objectives;

Appendix 2 – Draft 2006 Review of the Corporate Plan 2005-2015.

A series of revisions to the Corporate Plan were tabled at the meeting, together with a revised Action Plan. These revisions incorporated the comments of Cabinet, made at its meeting held on 14 November 2006, and also the proposals made at the meeting of the Performance, Audit & Review Committee held on 7 December 2006.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the 2006 Review of the Corporate Plan, attached at Appendix 2 to the report, and as amended by the version tabled at the meeting, be approved;
- (2) That any required final drafting amendments to the document, and other alterations that may be required as a result of the Service and Financial Planning Process, be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Policy.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the constitutional requirement to have a suitable high level strategic planning document.

75. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

No questions had been submitted by Members.

76. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

(a) Post Offices

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor A.D. Young, seconded by Councillor H.M. Marshall, and following debate, was

RESOLVED: That this Council fully supports the North Hertfordshire local sub-post office network. Furthermore, we request that the Local Government Association demand continued Government support and funding for our local Post Offices, to ensure continued provision of crucial local services to all our residents.

(b) Train Services

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor I.J. Knighton, and seconded by Councillor A.D. Young,

“That this Council urges First Capital Connect to:

- (i) re-consider the recent changes that have been made to its weekday morning timetable which significantly and inconveniently affect a large number of residents, living within the Council’s geographical area, that use the Baldock and Ashwell and Morden railway stations as a means of commuting to work. It is also anticipated that further changes are planned that will also affect Letchworth commuters next year;
- (ii) ensure that there is no further reduction in the timetable for these stations and that all future timetable changes throughout the North Herts area are only implemented after fully consulting all local users and representative bodies including this Council.”

The following amendments to the motion were tabled at the meeting by Councillors David Billing and S.K Jarvis respectively:

- (1) That in (ii), the words “these stations” should be replaced by “any stations serving the communities of North Hertfordshire”.
- (2) To add at the end:

“That this Council also notes that, next year, First Capital Connect are required to pay the Government a premium of £43.9M – approximately 13% of predicted

fares – and believes that this tax on passengers can only encourage the type of changes that First Capital Connect have introduced.

It therefore calls on the Government to review the impact of this premium on the services to the travelling public of North Hertfordshire at the first available opportunity.”

Councillors Knighton and Young agreed to add the above amendments to their motion without debate and, following a debate and upon the substantive motion and it being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED:

- (1) That this Council urges First Capital Connect to:
 - (i) re-consider the recent changes that have been made to its weekday morning timetable which significantly and inconveniently affect a large number of residents, living within the Council’s geographical area, that use the Baldock and Ashwell and Morden railway stations as a means of commuting to work. It is also anticipated that further changes are planned that will also affect Letchworth commuters next year;
 - (ii) ensure that there is no further reduction in the timetable for any stations serving the communities of North Hertfordshire and that all future timetable changes throughout the North Herts area are only implemented after fully consulting all local users and representative bodies including this Council.
- (2) That this Council also notes that, next year, First Capital Connect are required to pay the Government a premium of £43.9M – approximately 13% of predicted fares – and believes that this tax on passengers can only encourage the type of changes that First Capital Connect have introduced.

It therefore calls on the Government to review the impact of this premium on the services to the travelling public of North Hertfordshire at the first available opportunity.

(c) Facilities for the Disabled at Railway Stations in North Hertfordshire

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor David Billing, and seconded by Councillor Joan Kirby,

“That this Council resolves to press strongly and urgently upon First Capital Connect and Network Rail the unacceptability of the present lack of service for the disabled people in our North Hertfordshire communities, and to work closely with these rail bodies to set out and ensure resources for a shortened timetable to enhance access at our stations, in particular Hitchin and Letchworth. Local rail and disability groups should be consulted about design aspects.”

During the debate upon this motion, the Council requested the Chief Executive to arrange a meeting urgently with appropriate Members, senior representatives of First Capital Connect and the three local Members of Parliament to seek a way forward on this matter and the matter referred to in Minute 76(b) above.

In response to a request made regarding the content of the motion, Councillors Billing and Kirby agreed to the deletion of the words “in particular Hitchin and Letchworth” without debate.

Upon the amended motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED: That this Council resolves to press strongly and urgently upon First Capital Connect and Network Rail the unacceptability of the present lack of service for the disabled people in our North Hertfordshire communities, and to work closely with these rail bodies to set out and ensure resources for a shortened timetable to enhance access at our stations. Local rail and disability groups should be consulted about design aspects.

The Chairman wished those present a Merry Christmas and prosperous New Year.

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

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Chairman