

# **NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **CABINET**

**Wednesday, 16 December 2009**

**PRESENT:** Councillor B Hoare (Chair); Councillor PD Varnsvery (Deputy Chair);  
Councillors Beardsworth, Church, Crake, B Markham and Perkins

### **1. APOLOGIES**

There were none.

### **2. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2009 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

### **3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES**

#### **RESOLVED:**

- (1) That Mr C Grethe and Councillors Hawkins, Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 6: "Proposed Changes to the 2010/11 Concessionary Fares Special Grant".
- (2) That Councillors Palethorpe, Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 7: "People Plan".
- (3) That Mr J Small, Mr B Stevens and Councillors Hawkins and Clarke be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 8: "Future of Archway Cottages, Abington Park".
- (4) That Mr J Cutler and Councillors Hawkins, Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 9: "Cycling within the Racecourse".
- (5) That Councillors Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 10: "Premises Closure Orders".
- (6) That Ms S Watson and Councillors Palethorpe, Hawkins and Clarke be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 11: "Housing PFI – Amended Proposals".
- (7) That Councillor Clarke be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 12: "Council Tax Base 2010-2011".
- (8) That Mr C Grethe and Councillors Palethorpe, Clarke, Mildren and Davies be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 13: "Draft Budget for 2010-11 to 2012-13".
- (9) That Councillors Palethorpe, Hawkins, Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 14A: "Performance Monthly Report – October 2009".
- (10) That Councillors Palethorpe, Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 14B: "General Fund Revenue Monitoring 2009-10 – Period 7".
- (11) That Councillors Palethorpe, Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 14C: "Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Monitoring 2009-10 – Period 7".
- (12) That Councillors Clarke and Mildren be granted leave to address Cabinet on item 14D: "Capital Programme Monitoring 2009-10 – Period 7 Project Appraisals and Variations".

#### **Cycling within the Racecourse**

Mr John Cutler addressed Cabinet and thanked them for tackling the issues in such a positive way. He felt that allowing cycling on the Racecourse was in everyone's interest and hoped that this would open the way for a relaxation of regulations in other parks and open spaces. He urged Cabinet to look at the matter in a sensible and rational way without putting a blanket ban on cyclists.

#### **Future of Archway Cottages, Abington Park**

Mr Small addressed Cabinet having read the recommendations regarding the future of Archway Cottages. He would like to see the cottages remain, but was concerned about the archaeology

of the area, especially if there was a need to disturb the surrounding land with trenches for essential services. He asked that an archaeologist be present to keep a watching brief, particularly in the un-surveyed area that had formed a garden area to the cottages. He suspected that the foundations of the cottages may be of medieval origin and would welcome the opportunity for further investigation.

Mr B Stevens addressed Cabinet as a representative of Abington Park Conservation Society and Friends of Abington Park. He considered that the decision made in April 2008 to dispose of the cottages showed a lack of thinking as they could be converted for community use, which would be less costly than renovating them as domestic properties. He felt that there was a lack of information about alternative options and that external funding had not been thoroughly investigated. The Friends of the Park were keen to keep the buildings in the public domain as part of the public park and under the control of the local authority.

In response to questions from Councillors Perkins and PD Varnserry, Mr Stevens confirmed that neither the Friends of Abington Park nor the Abington Park Preservation Society had made any attempt to bid for external funding and Councillor Beardsworth advised him that the Northampton Volunteering Centre could help organisations with such bids.

#### **Proposed Changes to Concessionary Bus Fares**

Mr C Grethe addressed Cabinet commenting that it would be good to get enough funding from central Government to enable the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny report to be implemented. He was particularly concerned for arrangements to be put into place for companion bus passes for the assistance of the elderly and disabled.

#### **Draft Budget for 2010-11 to 2012-13**

Mr C Grethe then referred to the budget report and the proposed 2.47% increase in Council Tax. He hoped that the public would be widely consulted and those without access to computers would be considered. He also hoped that grants to the voluntary sector would not be cut.

#### **4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

- (1) Councillor B Hoare Trini Crake declared personal, non-prejudicial interest in item 8: "Archway Cottages, Abington Park", as a member of 'Friends of Abington Park'. Councillor Crake declared a personal non-prejudicial interest owing to her husband being a member of 'Friends of Abington Park'. Councillor Hawkins declared a personal non-prejudicial interest as the Council's Heritage Champion.
- (2) Councillor Richard Church declared a personal non-prejudicial interest in item 9: "Cycling within the Racecourse" as he was a member of 'Friends of the Racecourse'. Councillor Hawkins declared a personal non-prejudicial interest as the Council's Heritage Champion.
- (3) Councillors Beardsworth, Crake, B Hoare, B Markham, Hawkins and Mildren declared personal non-prejudicial interests in item 6; "Proposed Changes to the 2010/11 Concessionary Bus Fares Special Grant" as being eligible for Concessionary Bus Passes.

#### **5. ISSUES ARISING FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEES**

There were none.

#### **6. PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE 2010/11 CONCESSIONARY FARES SPECIAL GRANT**

Councillor Hawkins addressed Cabinet and stressed the importance of the concessionary bus pass for the residents of the outer wards in the Borough, who depended on the service to enhance their quality of life. She advised that there had been confusion amongst residents who understood that the recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny made to Cabinet would be

implemented and this was not yet the case. She asked Cabinet to consider the importance of the scheme to residents on outlying wards.

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet accusing them of 'crying wolf' by claiming a shortfall in funding when the financial estimates in the report presumed future increases in uptake comparable with towns that were clearly tourist attractions. He considered that there was in fact an under spend and this should be used to carry out the Overview and Scrutiny report's recommendations.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and referred to the appendix to the report setting out the Council's draft response to Government. He thought that the projected overspend had been included in the budget. He requested that a separate letter be sent to local MPs outlining the Council's concerns and that MPs also be given sight of the Overview and Scrutiny report containing their recommendations.

Councillor Perkins, as Portfolio Holder for Finance, presented the report to Cabinet. He explained that Cabinet was responding to the consultation document about the amount of the specific grant from central Government to local authorities to fund the scheme for concessionary bus travel as it was extended from a local to a national scheme. This scheme had been imposed on local authorities and was currently severely underfunded by central Government. He warned that if the Overview and Scrutiny recommendations were adopted without adequate funding from central Government, then other local services could suffer as a result. The administration of the scheme was to be passed to the County Council in 2011. Referring to the estimated costs in the report, Councillor Perkins explained that the figures were all based on actual cost, apart from 2010-11, which was based on the latest forecast estimates.

It was further made clear that the figures were based on usage to date, which was still increasing and that the comparisons made with other towns were for illustration purposes. Councillor Church commented that short funding this and next year would certainly have an impact on other services that could be offered and was disappointed that nothing was being done to help this large authority with high bus usage.

Councillor B Markham commented on the good work of scrutiny and agreed that their report and recommendations should accompany the Council's letter to MPs.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That Cabinet agree the consultation response for submission to the Department for Transport.
2. That Officers write to the local MP's appraising them of the position asking for support to ensure that Northampton Borough Council is fully funded for all aspects of the scheme.

## **7. PEOPLE PLAN**

Councillor Palethorpe addressed Cabinet welcoming the People Plan as a statement of the Council's investment in people over forthcoming years. He asked Cabinet to look at organisational development and bear in mind the need to shrink at the top end as well, when front-line services were being trimmed. He was concerned about sickness absence levels and about the additional stress and financial impact of running at the same level with fewer staff. He felt that people should enjoy coming to work and this should be addressed in the people plan.

Councillor Clarke also welcomed the people plan although he was concerned that it had not previously gone before the General Purposes committee, where he would have welcomed the opportunity to contribute to it. He then commented on the induction programme, which he felt was inconsistent across departments and needed to be improved. He further commented on the

need for the organisation to support and encourage women returning to work, making them feel valued rather than simply offering the minimum entitlement.

The Chair, Councillor B Hoare explained that the nursery voucher scheme was in place. He also clarified that policy matters came to Cabinet, whereas General Purposes committee dealt with non-executive issues. He then advised that Political Groups were encouraged to become involved in the Constitutional Working Party, where these matters were being discussed.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet commenting that within the tough budget round, the organisation should still want people to come to work and give them good prospects of career progression. The planned restructuring would have staff implications and it was important that those staff who were released were dealt with sympathetically.

Councillor B Markham, as the appropriate Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Cabinet. He felt that this was a most important piece of work and that the way staff were recruited and developed was key to their loyalty and commitment to the organisation. He explained that the Plan brought together a number of Human Resources policies to help to empower staff to deliver better services and become more customer focussed.

Councillor Beardsworth welcomed the report and, given that people spent such a large proportion of their life at work, felt that the Plan would go a long way to help staff achieve job satisfaction. Councillor Crake added that reward and recognition was important and stressed that staff needed to be valued and thanked.

The Chief Executive addressed Cabinet explaining that policies concerning the management of restructure and the fair treatment of staff sat under the plan. It was clear that public services would reduce in the future and the organisation had to have an interest in the well being of the employees. The employee survey had shown that there was a high level of job satisfaction and there was a feeling that employers did value staff. However, with an inevitable reduction in staffing, high quality and value for money had to be addressed. He considered this was a fundamental document to ensure a solid foundation to move forward as an employer over the next few years.

Councillor B Hoare summed up the Plan as being an overarching document sitting above a number of existing policies. The Council needed to demonstrate the value it placed on staff.

## **RESOLVED**

That approval be given for the People Plan.

## **8. FUTURE OF ARCHWAY COTTAGES, ABINGTON PARK**

Councillor Hawkins addressed cabinet and commended the excellent work in the succinct report. She endorsed the comments of the earlier speakers regarding the site and accepted the importance of interpreting the landscape. The Council had a duty to act in the best possible custodial way and decisions made now would be significant for future generations. She urged cabinet not to confirm the decision made in 2008 but to look at alternative options that had not been fully developed. She suggested that as part of the strategic business review on asset management, applications be made to secure heritage funding to accommodate the aspirations of all those with an interest in the park.

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet suggesting that councillors were leaving the important decision of the future of the premises to officers and did not have adequate knowledge of the alternative options for their use. He referred to the original donation of the property by the Wantage Estate as pleasure grounds for public use. He called for a further report outlining possible future uses.

In response to a question from Councillor PD Varnsberry, Councillor Clarke confirmed that he did not take the opportunity to express his views at the Cabinet meeting in April 2008, when the issue was first discussed. Councillor Church compared the issue with one of the disposal of Thornton Hall in which Councillor Clarke had been involved. In response to Councillor Church's question, Councillor Clarke stated that a decision had been taken at the time with councillors in full knowledge of all the facts and he claimed that this was not the case with Archway Cottages. It was made clear that, until a lease agreement had been signed, there were still opportunities for parties to come forward with viable bids. Councillor Clarke suggested that appropriate staff from Cliftonville be placed in there, for example.

As Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Perkins presented the report to Cabinet. He explained that there was still the proviso for further consultation. He had met with Mr Stevens and discussed alternative uses. He had advised Mr Stevens that if either the Friends of Abington Park or the Abington Park Preservation Society wished to retain Archway Cottages as an Environmental Centre or similar use, then they would have to find the capital funding to take over the cottages and also be responsible for the day to day running costs. He was disappointed that none of the organisations had taken the opportunity to bid for funding. Councillor Perkins would like to see the cottages maintained for domestic use. As listed properties, they could not be demolished or refurbished unsympathetically. Attempts to sell the lease to RSLs had been unsuccessful owing to the cost and to retain the freehold would necessitate their use as sheltered housing. The cost for this was prohibitive and it was not felt that they were suitable for this sort of accommodation. It was important to consider their future use in the best possible way, without allowing further deterioration but using funding from the private sector.

Councillor Church felt that this beautiful group of cottages in a prominent site should be brought back into use and restored to their former glory, bearing in mind the historical importance of the environment. Although they were partially spoiled when the Wellingborough Road was rebuilt, the prime motivation was to protect what was left, so he supported the recommendations.

It was made clear that all reasonable offers for the future use of the cottages would be considered.

Councillor B Hoare clarified that Cabinet was very aware of the importance of making informed decisions. The finalisation of a lease would entail another decision, which would be fully informed.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That consideration be given to the objections made to the proposed disposal of Archway Cottages including associated garden land, shown for the purposes of identification edged red upon the plan attached to the Cabinet report ('the Property').
2. That Cabinet's 'in principle' decision made on 7 April 2008 to dispose of the Property by the grant of a 125 years lease, on terms that lead to the restoration of the properties in accordance with listed building requirements be confirmed.
3. That Cabinet acknowledge the risk that the grant of such a long lease could lead ultimately to individual occupiers of the cottages exercising statutory rights to acquire the freehold of their homes.

## **9. CYCLING WITHIN THE RACECOURSE**

Councillor Hawkins addressed Cabinet and explained that she was a frequent user of a number of parks. She was concerned about a conflict of use between cyclists and other users and felt it was essential to look at the byelaws affecting other parks. She was not clear on who had the primacy of use and asked Cabinet to ensure that for all such decisions, equal rights were given to cyclists, walkers and other park users.

Councillor Clarke supported the principle of the report but was concerned about its application. The byelaw applied to all parks and pleasure grounds and the Racecourse was being treated separately. He was concerned that the paths were not wide enough for the joint use of cyclists and pedestrians and was worried about the possible damage to sports pitches by cyclists in the parks. It was important that there was appropriate signage to indicate where cycling was permitted.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and clarified that the NCC had identified the paths in the Racecourse as suitable for shared use, apart from the perimeter path. He was concerned at how this would be enforced, especially if the Friends of the Racecourse could not agree to the amount of signage that may be necessary. He was concerned, too, about the timeframe for putting white lines down and erecting signage. He further commented on the demise of the cycle bell and felt that there were health and safety aspects to consider.

Councillor PD Varnsvery confirmed that there was regular consultation with the Friends of the Racecourse regarding signage.

Councillor Crake presented the report to Cabinet and confirmed that the police did not have the resources to enforce the current byelaw with regard to cycling in parks. It was not possible to have a blanket law for all parks, as they were each to be considered separately.

Councillor Church referred to the map and advised that none of the designated paths currently crossed sports pitches. Whilst there were frequently complaints about cyclists on pavements, it was rare to hear complaints about cyclists in parks, most of which offered tracks with good visibility. However, he accepted that there were some parks with blind corners and places where it was not appropriate for cyclists.

Councillor PD Varnsvery pointed out that the Racecourse was one of the largest and most prominent parks in the Borough with a lot of tarmac areas but it was important to consider the relaxations of byelaws on a park-by-park basis. He hoped that the Friends of the Racecourse would be consulted and would accept at least the minimum legal requirement for signage, bearing in mind the appropriate health and safety needs.

## **RESOLVED**

That Cabinet agree:

1. Cycling is permitted within part of the Racecourse in accordance with the provisions of byelaw 5(ii) of the Council's byelaws in respect of Parks and Pleasure Grounds that prohibits cycling except in the exercise of any lawful right or privilege
2. The tracks indicated as dotted lines on the map attached to the Cabinet report are designated for joint use by pedestrians and cyclists, and the path around the parameter of the park, as marked in black ink is used solely for pedestrian use.

## **10. PREMISES CLOSURE ORDERS**

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet saying that he welcomed the report and the confidence it would bring to his constituents with regard to the control of anti-social behaviour. He was pleased at the recent closure of a crack house in the Castle ward. He went on to express concern at the short term tenancies of public houses to unsuitable tenants and hoped that this strategy would assist in the closure of these badly operated premises.

For clarification, Councillor Beardsworth explained that the closure of licensed premises fell under the review process of the licensing authority and the Police Licensing Officer had certain powers to activate this.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet stressing the importance of full consultation with partners, especially the police. He was concerned at the implications of maintaining benefits to persons who could be made homeless and wondered if the extent of costs could affect a decision to close a premises. He pointed out further resource issues related to the cost of sealing properties.

Councillor PD Varnsberry, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Cabinet and made it clear that the closure order would be a tool of last resort. He confirmed that this particular legislation could not be used to take quick direct action in licensed premises as there were licensing laws dealing with that. It was further clarified that there had to be robust and substantial evidence provided to support an application for a closure order. There was the additional safeguard of having all closure orders countersigned by the Borough Solicitor or Chief Executive. He commended the report as a useful additional tool to address anti-social behaviour.

Councillor B Hoare reiterated the need for action to be taken to deal with persistent nuisance or disorder.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That Cabinet endorse the protocol (appendix 1 of the Cabinet report) in relation to the Premises Closure Legislation for Northampton Borough Council.
2. That the powers under Part 1A to the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003, as introduced by section 118 and Schedule 20 of the Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008, be delegated to the Chief Executive, Directors or Borough Solicitor for authorising the issue of a closure notice, consulting with the police and applying for a closure order. It is required that on all occasions the Chief Executive or Borough Solicitor also counter sign the authorisation.

## **11. HOUSING PFI - AMENDED PROPOSALS**

Shayley Watson, a tenant in Eastfield and member of the local residents' association, addressed Cabinet. She wanted to know the details of the proposed refurbishment programme for the Eastfield estate as she felt that residents of both Thorplands and Eastfield were unaware about the implications of PFI. She did not feel that there had been a good representation of residents at the recent exhibitions.

Councillor Palethorpe then addressed Cabinet. He accepted that external funding was necessary to stop houses falling below the decent homes standard and urged Cabinet to ensure that full consultation be carried out so that there were no unnecessary delays. He went on to express his disappointment that Bellinge had not been included in the project, although he understood the reasons why Thorplands had been selected. He pointed out the risk of a void while the transformation took place and asked for information about the use of profits from infill developments.

Councillor Hawkins, as ward councillor for Eastfield, addressed Cabinet and was delighted that Eastfield should now have its needs addressed proactively. She pointed out that the Housing Strategy consultation had helped to inform why the PFI was the answer to the proposed transformation of some estates. She appealed to officers to meet with residents in the community to progress the consultation process. She then warned that if this council did not take up the opportunity of securing the PFI bid, then there were other councils that would step in.

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet expressing his continuing confusion over the whole meaning of PFI. He was still not convinced why these particular estates had been chosen and suggested that a pepper-potting approach may have been a better response to the decent homes ambition. He felt that Bellinge had the worst housing stock although its residents appeared to have a better social quality of life. He hoped there would be a sensible debate regarding the financial impact and urged that such estates as Bellinge, Blackthorn, Spring Boroughs and St James were not overlooked in the quest to reach the decent homes standard.

At this point, the Chair thanked the Interim Housing Advisor, who was attending his last Cabinet meeting, having helped move Housing issues in the right direction.

As Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Beardsworth presented the report to Cabinet. She shared in Councillor Palethorpe's disappointment that only two estates could benefit but pointed out that a reduction in the available funding had meant that a selection process had been necessary. The report set out full details of the consultation so far with the result that Eastfield and Thorplands had emerged as being the best combination that was affordable within the PFI. The assets would remain in council ownership and secure tenants would remain. Work would be carried out within communities to develop the plans and it was made clear that regeneration was not possible without outside funding. In response to Councillor Palethorpe's query about profits from infill developments, Councillor Beardsworth commented that any decision as to its use would be made by Cabinet as appropriate

Councillor B Hoare explained that all councillors had been invited to a briefing the previous day that had set out all the details of the proposal. Further details would be communicated as they emerged. Detailed questions about the finer points of the developments would be answered once the money had been secured and the proposals had been considered.

Councillor Perkins commented that there was a continuing expression of interest and that when funding opportunities arose, decisions could be made about work towards decent homes.

Councillor Church pointed out that the proposal was not simply for internal improvements to property but was essentially for the transformation of whole estates.

Councillor B Markham commented on a transformational change in Bellinge a number of years ago that had gone a long way to improve the estate and the attitude of its residents.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That Cabinet note the work of external advisors in producing assessment criteria to assist in producing a scaled back Expression of Interest in PFI.
2. That a decision be made, in the light of the reports on the scaled back bid and the revised financial implications whether to proceed with the PFI project.
3. That approval be given to the inclusion of Eastfield and Thorplands estates in the scaled back bid.
4. That the Director of Housing be authorised, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to submit the revised bid after the financial assumptions have been scrutinised by the new team of external advisors
5. That Cabinet note the financial implications of proceeding with the bid as set out in section 4.2 of the report and a call be made for regular monitoring reports to be provided on progress and project expenditure



6. That Cabinet call for a report on the way forward for the two estates not included in the PFI project.

## **12. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2010-2011**

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet and referred to the number of properties that were reported as being currently unoccupied and therefore not eligible for council tax. He asked that powers be used to bring those properties back into residential use.

In response, Councillor Beardsworth clarified that work was going on with private sector landlords to resolve these issues.

Councillor Perkins, as relevant Portfolio Holder, presented the report to Cabinet. He confirmed that the headlines for the report had been taken into account with regard to single person discount and the rate of non-payment.

Councillor Church commented on the 1% increase in council tax base since last year and pointed out that Northampton was continuing to grow and the funding formula from central Government was out of date.

Councillor B Hoare ratified the Cabinet's support of the efforts in relation to empty properties and recognised the need for resources to bring them back into use.

### **RESOLVED**

That Council approve the tax base for 2010/11 at 66,896 Band D equivalent properties and associated parish tax bases within this.

	<b>2010/11</b>	<b>(2009/10)</b>
Billing	2,716	2,568
Collingtree	517	514
Duston	5,255	5,172
Great Houghton	288	286
Hardingstone	755	743
Upton	1,469	1,302
Wootton & East Hunsbury	6,340	6,331
Northampton (Unparished)	49,556	49,250
Total tax base	66,896	66,166

## **13. DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2010-11 TO 2012-13**

Councillor Palethorpe addressed Cabinet and expressed disappointment that this important item had been obscured into a full agenda and that most of the public had now left the meeting. He felt that the paper was vague and hard to understand and did not explain how decisions were being arrived at. He suggested that Cabinet recognise that they were the architects of change and not necessarily the victims of current circumstances. He called for more clarity and wondered if his neighbours living in Bellinge would understand the details of the budget from this paper.

Councillor Clarke addressed Cabinet and agreed with Councillor Palethorpe that there was not enough detail in the paper to enable him to comment properly. He felt that the paper was not understandable for the public and therefore it would be hard to have a proper consultation. There were also unresolved issues relating to proposed savings that had not been implemented and the impact in respect of next year if these savings were not achieved. He commented on the rise in fees for cemetery and sports and then highlighted a figure for the investment in

community clean-ups, which he felt was work that the Council should be undertaking as part of their statutory services.

Councillor B Hoare pointed out that Overview and Scrutiny would scrutinise the budget but Councillor Clarke was not convinced that this could be properly achieved given the small resources available to Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet stating that the start of the consultation period was not easy with all three budgets being contained in one paper and he agreed that there was little detail on which to pass comment. He made a plea that when the budget was presented to council, standing orders be raised in order for a full debate to ensue. He then commented on the proposed rise in cemetery and other fees that would directly hit the frail, elderly and disabled.

Councillor Davies addressed Cabinet and suggested there may be issues with the consultation owing to the vagueness of the content. He commented on proposed staff cuts that could affect council services. He then went on to comment about proposals to cut CCTV coverage and cited a recent incident in Rectory Farm when there had been no CCTV coverage of an incident. He was concerned that, in this recession, the council seemed to be failing to support residents by increasing council tax above the rate of inflation.

As Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Perkins presented the report to Cabinet. He commented that in addition to a 15-page report, there were also 14 pages of detail included in the appendices. He confirmed that information would be going out regarding consultation meetings and that interested parties could quiz members and raise comments then. Referring to the proposed cuts in CCTV coverage, he commented that CCTV usage would be realigned to crime hotspots. With a ½% increase in the Government's support grant and a 1.3% RPIX inflation, raising council tax by 2.47% was not passing on the full cost. Efficiencies would have to be made to address the shortfall.

The purpose of the report was to present the draft budget proposals for consultation and to approve the Council's draft Capital Strategy. Councillor Perkins explained that the council tax increase on a Band D property would be equivalent to 10p per week. Even with the increase there would have to be changes in the net spend of the Borough. He highlighted the intention to maintain the grant to the voluntary sector and not to increase the daily car parking charges. He felt that whichever political party was successful in the forthcoming general election, there would be pressure to reduce public expenditure. The Council would continue to progress towards becoming 'excellent'. Efficiency savings were essential with the impact of the support grant being miscalculated with an underestimation of the town's population by about 8,000. Partnership working with the police and PCT would continue. Although the rent increases would not be known until February, the Housing Revenue Account had proposed efficiency savings of £¾ million. There was a clear framework for capital funding as set out in the appendices to the report. He stressed the importance of the consultation leaflet being distributed and it was noted that there were to be a series of events around the town to encourage public participation. He recommended acceptance of the recommendations as set out in the report.

Councillor B Markham commented that the list of efficiency savings as detailed in the paper was quite clear. He was confident that the efficiency proposals would offer better value for money for the people of Northampton.

Councillor Church referred to this budget as being an example of the way in which the Council had transformed itself over the previous three years. In spite of the reduced funding available, this Council had become more efficient and effective and was determined to protect front line services.

Councillor Perkins then thanked officers for rising to the challenge to help the Council work towards becoming excellent.

Councillor B Hoare confirmed that the efficiencies being delivered were a demonstration of the way in which the Council was transforming itself financially. Front line services were being protected with fee increases only where necessary and appropriate. He gave assurance that Cabinet was mindful of people on fixed income. He felt that the strategic business reviews were key for the future maintenance of services and there would be further consultation to establish ways to involve all interested parties.

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the Cabinet's General fund draft budget proposals for 2010/11 and indicative budgets for 2011/12, and 2012/13 as summarised in Annexes A to E be approved for public consultation.
2. That the proposed council tax increase of 2.47% for 2010/11 and the indicative 2.47% for 2011/12, and 2012/13 be approved for public consultation.
3. That the Cabinet's draft capital programme and financing as detailed in annexes I, J, and K be approved for public consultation
4. That Cabinet approve the draft Housing Revenue Account (HRA) budget excluding charges, subsidy and rents.
5. That the draft Capital Strategy at appendix L be approved for consultation.
6. That the consultation leaflet be delegated to the Assistant Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance for approval.
7. That the Chief Executive and Director of Finance, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holders, undertake the preparatory work in relation to the savings and efficiencies built into the draft budget proposals, subject to any actions being rescinded should any budget options not be approved by 25 February 2010 Council.

## **14. PERFORMANCE**

### **14.1 PERFORMANCE MONTHLY REPORT - OCTOBER 2009**

Councillor Clarke declined to speak on this and subsequent items and left the meeting at this point.

Councillor Palethorpe addressed Cabinet and expressed extreme concern at the rise in domestic violence as described in the report. He urged Cabinet to consult with the Safer Stronger Northampton Board with a view to partnership working in addressing this serious issue. He suggested that the Audit Committee look at the problem and investigate the resources required to address domestic violence before it got completely out of hand. Finance was needed to sort out the community safety issues.

Councillor Beardsworth commented on a recent Domestic Violence Workshop at which recognition had been given to the council's officers for the amount of work going on in this field.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and was pleased to see that there were only seven red indicators and observed that maybe the bar was being set too low now. He then commented on some of the good results in the report. He asked if the council's target to pay local suppliers within 10 days had been met.

Councillor Hawkins addressed Cabinet and requested that plain English be used to facilitate better communication, especially for the adoption of policies.

As the relevant Portfolio Holder, Councillor B Markham presented the report to Cabinet. He pointed out that a number of the red indicators were out of the Council's control, although closer partnership working might help towards better achievements. He reported that training was being undertaken to manage sickness absence in departments where targets were not being met, although a dip in October had been owing to a viral infection affecting many staff.

Councillor PD Varnsvery informed the meeting that the Borough Council was well represented on the SSNB, with himself and the Leader as members and the Director of Environment and Culture as Chair. Referring to the figures for domestic violence, he suggested that with support, victims were now being encouraged to ignore the stigma and come forward to report incidents so that they could be assisted.

Councillor Beardsworth was not happy at the assertion that the bar had been set too low to make it easier for targets to be met. She commended the hard work of officers and felt it was appalling imply criticism by devaluing the targets. Councillor Crake added her congratulations to officers for achieving the green indicators.

In response to the query regarding payment to local suppliers, it was noted that NN postcodes were prioritised but in any case, officers passed all invoices for payment as quickly as possible.

The Chief Executive referred to the targets relating to crime and pointed out that a lot of work was carried out countywide. The Council was still contributing to funding for the Sunflower Centre to assist with the victims of domestic violence. It was clear that a large element of violent crime was domestic violence and it was also clear that alcohol played a significant part in this. There was a lot of activity going on between the Council and its partners to address this.

Councillor B Markham reported that, following training, a new style of reporting would be introduced in the New Year to make performance results easier to communicate. With better reporting, it would be easier to align resources to targets that were not being achieved.

## **RESOLVED**

That the contents of the report be noted.

### **14.2 GENERAL FUND REVENUE MONITORING 2009-10 PERIOD 7**

Councillor Palethorpe declined to speak on this item.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and was pleased to see that the books were likely to balance. He was concerned that management action in the directorate of Environment and Culture might be difficult and referred to the possible closure of Sheep Street toilets.

Councillor Perkins presented the report to Cabinet, which identified the projected outturn position for the current financial year. The report also referred to management action being taken in response to the forecast and to minimise the impact on the Council's general fund reserves at the end of the financial year. He asked Cabinet to note the forecast under spend of £473k net of management action. He pointed out that the Council was in a difficult position and there were pressures to achieve savings. Where this was not being achieved, alternative ways were being found to balance the budget and offer value for money within an efficient council.

## **RESOLVED**

That the report and the forecast under spend of £473k net of management action be noted.

### 14.3 HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) MONITORING 2009-10 PERIOD 7

Councillor Palethorpe declined to speak on this item.

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and commended them on achieving targets in rent collection and reducing voids in difficult circumstances.

Councillor Perkins presented the report to Cabinet. He commented that there was still an overspend showing but this was being worked on and he was confident that with the work that was being done, the budget would be achieved.

#### RESOLVED

1. That Cabinet note the report and the forecast overspend of £160k on the Net Cost of Services.
2. That approval be given to the virement of £1m from the Contribution to Earmarked Reserves to the Property Maintenance Service, to support the current level of service being delivered to tenants.

### 14.4 CAPITAL PROGRAMME MONITORING 2009-10 PERIOD 7: PROJECT APPRAISALS AND VARIATIONS

Councillor Mildren addressed Cabinet and referred to the removal of Abington Park Museum from the capital programme. He suggested that the reduction in opening times would make it less likely that heritage funding would be forthcoming. He then referred to other works in the report and asked how optimistic the Cabinet was to complete the £16 million programme with only five months left to go.

As Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor Perkins outlined the purpose of the report and commented on the need to step up work to complete it within the timescale.

#### RESOLVED

1. That Cabinet approve the following scheme to be added to the capital programme for 2009-10.

Scheme Reference, Description & Directorate	Narrative	2009-10 £	Future Years £	Funding Source
2009-10/HRA018 Capital Improvement Works  Housing HRA	Adhoc capital improvements to properties, that are not included in the schedule of work for other HRA projects, but where work is required within the financial year to meet the decent homes standard. Examples of work will include replacing windows, heating systems, roofs, kitchens and bathrooms.	300,000	-	MRA

Further details of this appraisal can be seen at Annex A of this report.

2. That Cabinet approve the following variations to schemes in the capital programme for 2009-10.

Scheme Reference, Description & Directorate	Narrative	2009-10 £	Future Years £	Funding Source
<b>Budget Increases</b>				
*2007-08 /CS0026 V04 IBS Housing Management System  Housing HRA	Following restructure of the housing service, the implementation of outstanding IBS modules was put on hold pending an independent review. The review, which has recently concluded, confirms that IBS is a fit for purpose industry standard solution, and made a key recommendation that all outstanding business critical modules should be rescheduled for implementation. This represents an additional sum of £186K over and above the current budget.	61,135	125,250	HRA Earmarked Reserve
2008-09/GF074 V01 Playbuilder – Eastfield Park  Environment & Culture	NBC were awarded £50k from DSCF in 2008-09 for the Playbuilder in Eastfield Park scheme. The funding received was £50,500 and NCC have advised to spend the additional £500 and the underspend from 2008-09 on the scheme in 2009-10, as opposed to returning it.	500	-	DSCF
<b>Budget Reductions</b>				
2006-07 Slip V17 Urban Enhancement  Planning & Regeneration	A revised proposal due to site conditions has reduced the expenditure required, as has the fact that County Council is now paying for the installation of the town signs. This reduction in budget therefore represents a saving.	(4,670)	-	Prudential Borrowing
2008-09/GF078 V01 DPPO Signage  Environment & Culture	NBC was awarded a grant from the Home Office in 2008-09 for DPPO signage. £10k of this was allocated to capital, however not all of this was required. The terms and conditions of the grant outline that the funding can be spent on either capital or revenue items, therefore it is proposed to move this remaining funding to the revenue cost centre for DPPO signage to enable it to be utilised.	(380)	-	Home Office
2007-08/CS029 V01 Abington Museum Upgrade  Environment & Culture	NBC resources are required to support an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for funding to upgrade Abington museum. The change in the museum's opening times has made it less likely that the application, for such a large amount, will be successful. Therefore a decision has been made to not proceed with the application and the project is to be withdrawn from the capital programme.	(987,575 )	-	£900k Heritage Lottery Fund, £87,575 Prudential Borrowing

<b>Neutral Budget Impact</b>				
2007-08/GI0010 V03 One Stop Shop, CRM  Finance & Support	To purchase a corporate solution for authentication of secure on-line transactions that will initially support recovery and e-benefits but provide increased on line capability in terms of providing secure authentication for all other services such as Housing Repairs.	6,000	-	£4k Prudential Borrowing, £2k Revenue Financing
2008-09/GF043 V05 E-Benefits Application  Finance & Support	Take up for E-Benefits application is now being linked to the 24 Claim Guarantee scheme and will be extended to all new E Benefits claims in the future. A smaller take up budget is thus required against this project in 2009-10. This saving is to be moved to assist in the funding of additional software within the One Stop Shop CRM capital project to enable customer self serve options to be expanded.	(4,000)	-	Prudential Borrowing
2008-09/GF080 V01 EDT Workflow  Finance & Support	The funding reserve for additional consultancy has proved not to be required. These funds will be moved to support the wider agenda of the One Stop Shop CRM capital project, to introduce self-serve options for our customers.	(2,000)	-	Revenue Financing
2008-09/GF081 V01 Lings Forum Wetside Changing Rooms  Environment & Culture	Due to unforeseen work this project has overspent by £1,845. This will be funded by a reduction to the Fire Door Improvements project.	1,845	-	Prudential Borrowing
2008-09/GF067B V02 Fire Door Improvements  Finance & Support	This budget will be reduced to accommodate the overspend on the Lings Wetside Changing Rooms project.	(1,845)	-	Prudential Borrowing
<b>Movement Between Years</b>				
2008-09 /HRA007 V03 Complete Roofs  Housing HRA	There are several roofing projects running at the moment, most of which work will be complete this year. However each project has an annual retention based on the defects liability periods, which will not be payable until 2010-11. Therefore it is proposed to move the budget to 2010-11 to reflect this.	(145,000 )	145,000	HRA Revenue Financing
2009-10 /HRA002 V01 Cooper Street Replacement – Phase 2	There are two elements to this project: 1) installing thermostatic controls to flats 2) the potential replacement of the combined heat and power unit (CHP), which is an additional facility to	(550,000 )	250,000	HRA Revenue Financing

Housing HRA	the district boilers that generates additional heat and electricity. There are two budget adjustments to be made: the first is to slip the CHP element of £250k into 2010-11. The second is to reduce the budget by £300k to fund the project outlined in 2.1 above. This reduction is possible due to the phase 2 heating works being tendered at much lower costs than anticipated.			
2009-10 /HRA004 V03 Decent Homes & Poor Condition  Housing HRA	The first phase decent homes project is on site, however this was later than anticipated due to some local issues concerning contractor selection and tender evaluation, works will therefore extend beyond the end of the financial year. The funds committed to the contract must be slipped into the next financial year to cover these contractual obligations.	(1,739,651)	1,739,651	HRA Revenue Financing
2009-10 /HRA015 V02 Lifts Refurbishment  Housing HRA	Two of the three lift projects at Alliston Gardens and Eleonore House have been subject to the housing strategy review, which has delayed the project inception. Section 20 leasehold consultations are required on the work to two lifts at Cooper Street. The lead in time on lift projects is traditionally very long, with most of the build and technical work being completed off site, therefore the majority of the programme expenditure will not occur until 2010-11. The budget is to be moved to 2010-11 to reflect this.	(554,480)	554,480	HRA Revenue Financing
2009-10/GF060 V01 Places of Change  Housing GF	The section 106 funding for this project is to contribute towards the build costs. Work is not expected to be on site now until April 2010, therefore the budget for this needs to be moved to 2010-11 (£150k). Additional CLG grant of £26k is now required in 2009-10 following updated costs from Midland Heart. There is no overall impact on the budget for this project; it is simply a realignment of expenditure and funding.	(123,709)	123,709	Section 106 & CLG

Further details of these variations can be seen at Annex B of this report.

### 3. That Cabinet note:

- a) The capital programme monitoring position as at end of October 2009, including forecast outturns, revenue expenditure funded by capital and slippage into 2010-11, as set out at Annex C, D and E.
- b) The funding arrangements for the 2009-10 capital programme as set out at Annex F.

The meeting concluded at 20:56