

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Council held on
Thursday, 18 June 2009 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor CR Nightingale – Chairman
Councillor AG Orgee – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: Mrs FAR Amrani, Dr DR Bard, RE Barrett, Mrs VM Barrett, JD Batchelor, Mrs PM Bear, AN Berent, D Bird, NCF Bolitho, FWM Burkitt, TD Bygott, NN Cathcart, JP Chatfield, Mrs PS Corney, NS Davies, Dr DR de Lacey, Mrs SJO Doggett, SM Edwards, Mrs SM Ellington, Mrs JM Guest, R Hall, Dr SA Harangozo, Mrs SA Hatton, Mrs EM Heazell, MP Howell, PT Johnson, SGM Kindersley, Mrs JE Lockwood, MB Loynes, RMA Manning, RB Martlew, MJ Mason, DC McCraith, DH Morgan, Mrs LA Morgan, Mrs CAED Murfitt, Mrs DP Roberts, NJ Scarr, Mrs BZD Smith, Mrs HM Smith, PW Topping, RJ Turner, Dr SEK van de Ven, Mrs BE Waters, JF Williams, TJ Wotherspoon and NIC Wright

Officers:	Catriona Dunnett	Principal Solicitor
	Steve Hampson	Executive Director
	Greg Harlock	Chief Executive
	Richard May	Democratic Services Manager

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors BR Burling, RM Matthews, A Riley, Cllr Mrs JEO Squier, JH Stewart and RT Summerfield.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE IN THE LEADER AND DEPUTY LEADER

Councillor SGM Kindersley moved and Councillor MJ Mason seconded a Motion in the following terms, signed by 15 Councillors in accordance with Council Standing Order 12.1:

'We, the undersigned, being Members elected to South Cambridgeshire District Council, hereby submit a Motion of No Confidence in Councillor Manning, Leader of the Council, and call for his removal from office as Leader, and the removal of Councillor Edwards from the Executive of the Council, as allowed by Section 12.1 of the Council's Constitution.'

The Motion stood in the names of Councillors D de Lacey, A Riley, Mrs EM Heazell, Mrs DP Roberts, Mrs HM Smith, NN Cathcart, JF Williams, RB Martlew, Mrs FAR Amrani, Mrs SA Hatton, SGM Kindersley, Mrs SJO Doggett, NJ Scarr, JD Batchelor and Mrs PM Bear.

During debate of this item Council resolved unanimously, in accordance with Standing Order 22.1, to suspend Standing Order 12.5 for the duration of the item to allow debate to exceed thirty minutes.

In proposing the Motion, Councillor SGM Kindersley stressed that, in bringing it forward, no criticism was intended of the Council's officers who had carried out the tasks required of them throughout the Housing Futures project in a professional manner. During debate

of the Motion, those speaking in favour considered that the Housing Futures exercise had been a futile waste of £800,000 of public money when it was clear that there remained a large section of the Council's tenants who were in favour of retention; the percentage of tenants voting against transfer during the previous exercise had been 82%; the current exercise had reduced this majority only to 72%. The campaign by the Council had inundated tenants with one-sided information in favour of transfer without any balance, to the point of intimidation of vulnerable residents. At the same time, details of the business case had never been released, and the business plan for the housing association not made available to enable tenants to make informed judgements regarding the viability of the process. The leadership had demonstrated misjudgement in choosing to proceed to a ballot during a period of great economic uncertainty and with questions about the short and long-term financing of transferring the housing stock. The overwhelming nature of the 'no' vote was tantamount to a vote of no confidence by tenants in the Council's political leadership, which had become discredited as a result; as such, and to ensure proper accountability for their actions, it was regrettably necessary for the Leader and Deputy Leader to be removed from office.

Members arguing against the Motion considered that the ballot result constituted an overwhelming endorsement of the excellent housing service provided by the Council's staff. The Housing Futures project had been based on sound principles, which sought to remedy a situation in which the Council paid £12 million per year to government in negative subsidy. That revenue, in the event of transfer, would have been directed to the provision of further improvements to the service received by tenants. Far from having lost credibility, Councillors Manning and Edwards had demonstrated leadership and commitment to achieving a solution, whilst other Members had raised technical and procedural issues as a pretext for their failure to come out openly in support, or against, transfer. The choice offered to the Council's tenants, through the distribution of full information, had clearly presented a choice between investment by a housing association in the event of transfer and service cuts in the event of retention. Sixty per cent of tenants sampled as part of the Stage Two consultation had indicated they were in favour of transfer, therefore at no stage had any groundswell of opposition been apparent; it was likely, however, that subsequent misinformation by lobby groups opposing transfer may have influenced those who were undecided. It was unfortunate that the Motion required Council to look back in an attempt to apportion blame, when it should be focussing on the key future decisions facing the housing service and its staff, following the outcome of the ballot. The tenants' interests had been placed at the centre of the process from the beginning, culminating in their decision to stay with the Council. It was now doubly imperative to continue to work with them in shaping the future of the housing service.

In summing up, Councillor Kindersley thanked Members for their contributions to the debate, especially that by Councillor Edwards. Councillor Kindersley went on to offer an apology on behalf of the Council to its staff, taxpayers and tenants for subjecting them to the housing futures process.

The Motion, on being voted upon in a secret paper ballot, was declared **LOST** with twenty-two Members voting in favour and twenty-seven against the Motion.

The Meeting ended at 3.36 p.m.
