

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on  
Thursday, 11 September 2014 at 6.00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Councillor Ray Manning (Leader of the Council)  
Councillor Simon Edwards (Deputy Leader of the Council, Finance and Staffing  
Portfolio Holder)

**Councillors:** Mick Martin Environmental Services Portfolio Holder  
Robert Turner Planning Portfolio Holder  
David Whiteman- Corporate and Customer Services Portfolio Holder  
Downes  
Tim Wotherspoon Strategic Planning and Transportation Portfolio Holder  
Nick Wright Economic Development Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
Mike Hill	Health and Environmental Services Director
Stephen Hills	Director of Housing
Jean Hunter	Chief Executive
Richard May	Policy and Performance Manager
Fiona McMillan	Legal & Democratic Services Manager and Monitoring Officer
Graham Watts	Democratic Services Team Leader

Councillors David Bard, Kevin Cuffley, Lynda Harford, Cicely Murfitt, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith and Bunty Waters were in attendance, by invitation.

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Mark Howell.

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### **Procedural Items**

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#### **1. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2014 were agreed as a correct record, subject to the following amendments:

- the word 'formed' be replaced by the words 'agreed to form' in resolution (a) of minute number 7;
- the amendment of a typographical error in the second paragraph of minute number 10 to reflect that an 'in principle' investment of £25 million was approved.

#### **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

#### **3. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of the Council, welcomed Councillor Robert Turner to his first meeting of Cabinet as the new Portfolio Holder for Planning.

Councillor Manning reported that a letter had been received from the Local Government Boundary Commission, informing the Council that it would commence an electoral review in 2015, to end in 2016 for implementation in 2019, involving 'all-out' elections. Further details would be reported to the Council as they were made available and an item had been included on the agenda for the next meeting of the Civic Affairs Committee scheduled to be held on 25 September 2014.

#### **4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

No public questions had been received.

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### **Operational Items**

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#### **5. CORPORATE ENFORCEMENT & INSPECTION POLICY**

Cabinet considered a report which sought approval of a corporate Enforcement and Inspection Policy for South Cambridgeshire District Council.

Councillor Mick Martin, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services, presented the report and referred Members to a review undertaken last year via a Portfolio Holder Task and Finish Group to oversee and shape the development of a corporate Enforcement and Inspection Policy. A draft Policy had been produced, taking into account the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group, and a public consultation was undertaken with residents, businesses and Parish Councils in December 2013 following agreement by Cabinet in November 2013. Further amendments were made as a result of the Government's Regulators' Code in April 2014 and the final version of the Policy was attached to the report at Appendix 1.

Councillor Martin felt that it was important for the Council to provide clear guidance to residents and businesses, as well as the Council's officers, regarding enforcement and inspections which he felt this corporate Policy had achieved. It was emphasised that there were detailed enforcement and inspection policies sitting beneath this overarching corporate Policy relating to specific service areas and the different types of enforcement and inspections that the Council was required to carry out and that these would remain in place.

A concern was expressed with regard to a statement in paragraph 8 of the Policy Statement, particularly with regard to planning enforcement action, which gave the impression that enforcement action would not always be taken. Councillor Martin referred Cabinet to paragraph 12 of the Policy Statement, which stated that the Council had a zero tolerance approach to a number of cases including deliberate, fraudulent or criminal activity or in circumstances where people deliberately undermined or 'played the system' in respect of regimes such as planning or licensing. He added that the role and involvement of local Members and the wider community in the enforcement process was extremely important, which had been recognised and was embedded within the Policy.

A question was raised as to whether there was a move towards enforcement officers becoming more generalised, rather than specialising in certain areas of enforcement. The recent re-organisation of the Environmental Services department included the multi-skilling of enforcement officers so that they had more opportunities to develop their knowledge and experience, whilst providing a wider-range of enforcement and inspection duties on behalf of the Council.

Cabinet **APPROVED** the corporate Enforcement and Inspection Policy for South Cambridgeshire District Council, subject to the final sentence of paragraph 7 under the Policy Statement being amended to read:

“It will encourage mediation between parties in a dispute and support local Councillor engagement in solving local problems”.

## 6. POSITION STATEMENT: FINANCE, PERFORMANCE AND RISK 2014/15 Q1

Consideration was given to a report which provided Cabinet with a statement on the Council’s position with regard to its General Fund, Housing Revenue Account and capital budgets, corporate objectives, performance indicators and strategic risks.

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, presented the financial elements of the report and commenced by emphasising that the report was a very early indication of the Council’s finances for the year ahead.

Councillor Edwards reported two areas of significant additional income as follows:

- planning income was expected to be £600,000 more than originally estimated due to a number of large fees relating to planning applications for solar panel developments;
- successful overachievement of trade waste income, flexible working arrangements and reduced staff sickness levels, and lower fuel costs than planned for, were resulting in a positive variance against profiled budget which was estimated at £157,000 for the year.

It was noted, however, that there were still a large number of appeals yet to be determined in respect of non-domestic rates. The amount the Council had to pay for successful appeals in 2013/14 had been £550,000 more than estimated due to refunds granted by the Valuation Officer, so this remained as an area of concern.

Councillor David Whiteman-Downes, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Customer Services, presented the performance and risk management aspects of the report and took Cabinet through the relevant documents attached as appendices. He highlighted a particular risk in view of the Council losing two planning appeals at Waterbeach based on the lack of a five year land supply. Planning agents and developers had indicated that they were preparing major planning applications for submission during Autumn 2014. The likelihood score on the Strategic Risk Register for this issue had therefore been increased from ‘likely’ to ‘almost certain’ and additional control measures had been put in place to address the risk.

A question was raised as to whether the Business and Improvement Efficiency Programme’s Goods and Services Review would consider how decisions were taken about the way in which sub-contractors were appointed by the Council. Cabinet was informed that a piece of work on this issue would be undertaken, however, it was not envisaged to be part of the Goods and Services Review specifically.

Cabinet **NOTED** the Council’s provisional financial outturn position, together with the performance and risk matters and contextual information set out in the report, and **APPROVED** the Strategic Risk Register and Matrix set out in Appendices E and F.

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**Information Item**

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**7. WELFARE REFORM/UNDER OCCUPATION**

Consideration was given to a report which informed Cabinet of the impacts of the under occupation charge in South Cambridgeshire and reviewed the impact of the Council's initiatives in the first 12 months of the policy change.

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, reminded Cabinet that the Government introduced changes to housing benefit, which took effect from 1 April 2013. These changes, known as the Under Occupation Charge, involved the reduction in the amount of housing benefit payable to households deemed to be under occupying by more than one bedroom.

In presenting the report, Councillor Edwards praised the work of the housing and benefits and revenues teams for their approach towards this very sensitive issue and for minimising the impact of the Under Occupation Charge for the residents of South Cambridgeshire. He referred Cabinet to the appendix attached to the report entitled 'Welfare Reform/Under Occupation – One Year On' which provided an overview of the work that had taken place over the 2013/14 financial year. It focussed on how the Council had helped tenants and Cabinet noted that 455 home visits, telephone contacts or office interviews had been undertaken, with 342 under occupation questionnaires having been completed. When visiting or interviewing tenants affected by the welfare reform changes, a standard form was developed which facilitated discussions about the following:

- options for downsizing;
- possibilities for taking in lodgers;
- financial/benefits advice;
- employment, education and training advice;
- bank account advice;
- participation in the Council's tenant-led scrutiny function;
- discretionary housing payment application advice.

The appendix also set out the total number of South Cambridgeshire tenants under-occupied and affected by welfare reform changes or reduced housing benefits throughout the year, which had reduced from 360 to 285. This compared favourably to the national statistics, but it was acknowledged that 285 tenants in the district were still detrimentally affected.

Councillor Edwards took Cabinet through page 10 of the appendix, which he felt highlighted the key problem in the district with regard to allocations and waiting times. The table on that page clearly highlighted a significant need for more affordable housing in South Cambridgeshire, but specifically one bedroomed properties. He called for more engagement with Parish Councils in order to establish where the demand was so that appropriate sites could be identified. It was noted that the next Parish Planning Forum was scheduled to be held on 8 October and that this issue would be added as an item on the agenda for that meeting.

During discussion it was suggested that this report should be used in discussions with developers to negotiate delivery of more one bedroomed properties in the district. It was noted that this would have to be within the affordable housing sector. It was also suggested that these properties could be included in mixed developments within exception sites.

Cabinet **NOTED** the report.

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### Standing Items

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**8. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE**

No issues arising from the Scrutiny and Overview Committee were reported.

**9. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE PARTNERSHIPS REVIEW COMMITTEE**

No issues arising from the Partnerships Review Committee were reported.

**10. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

No updates on outside bodies were reported.

**11. REPORTS FROM CABINET MEMBERS ATTENDING PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS**

No reports from Cabinet Members attending Parish Council meetings were received.

**12. REPORTS FROM MEMBER CHAMPIONS**

No reports from Member Champions were received.

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### Confidential Item

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**13. SOUTH CAMBS LTD - BUSINESS CASE UPDATE**

Cabinet **AGREED** to exclude the public and press from the meeting during consideration of this item in accordance with the provisions of Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 (exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act).

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, presented the exempt report which sought approval for the proposed approach to investing in the pilot phase of the South Cambs Ltd housing company.

Cabinet:

- (a) **APPROVED** the investment in South Cambs Ltd of up to £7 million for the acquisition of up to 40 properties as part of the pilot phase of the project, selecting each property on an individual basis in line with the viability modelling criteria set out in Annex A of the exempt report.

- (b) **APPROVED** a mix of equity investment up to 45% with the balance being loan finance from the Council, as identified in options B and C of the exempt report.

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**The Meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.**

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