

## **SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held on  
Thursday, 24 September 2015 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Councillor Sue Ellington – Chairman  
Councillor David McCraith – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard, Val Barrett, Henry Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Francis Burkitt, Brian Burling, Tom Bygott, Nigel Cathcart, Graham Cone, Simon Crocker, Christopher Cross, Kevin Cuffley, Neil Davies, Simon Edwards, Andrew Fraser, Jose Hales, Roger Hall, Lynda Harford, Tumi Hawkins, Roger Hickford, Mark Howell, Peter Johnson, Sebastian Kindersley, Janet Lockwood, Ray Manning, Mick Martin, Cicely Murfitt, Charles Nightingale, Des O'Brien, Tony Orgee, Tim Scott, Ben Shelton, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Edd Stonham, Peter Topping, Richard Turner, Robert Turner, Bunty Waters, Aidan Van de Weyer, David Whiteman-Downes, John Williams and Nick Wright

Officers:	Alex Colyer	Executive Director, Corporate Services
	Jean Hunter	Chief Executive
	Fiona McMillan	Legal & Democratic Services Manager and Monitoring Officer
	Graham Watts	Democratic Services Team Leader

### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Grenville Chamberlain, Pippa Corney, Philippa Hart, Caroline Hunt, Douglas de Lacey, Mervyn Loynes, Raymond Matthews, Robin Page, Alex Riley, Deborah Roberts and Tim Wotherspoon.

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

No declarations of interest were made.

### **3. REGISTER OF INTERESTS**

The Chairman reminded Members that they needed to update their register of interests whenever their circumstances changed.

### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 May 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to the inclusion of reference to Almshouses in Councillor Sebastian Kindersley's supplementary question under minute number 19(d).

The minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 4 June 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record, subject to an amendment to reflect that Councillor David Bard was not present at the meeting and had submitted his apologies for absence.

## 5. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Councillor Sue Ellington, Chairman of the Council, made the following announcements:

- Councillor Simon Crocker was welcomed to his first meeting of Council as a newly elected Member for Bourn Ward;
- former Chief Building Control Officer Ralph Friday, who retired in the 1990's but had worked for the authority for approximately 30 years, had recently passed away;
- former South Cambridgeshire District Councillor Val Truman, who represented Melbourn Ward from 7 May 1992 to 5 May 2008, had recently passed away;
- representatives from the Chairman's Charity, Dogs for Good (formerly Dogs for the Disabled), had been present at South Cambridgeshire Hall prior to the meeting to provide information on the charity. Councillor Ellington's aim was to raise enough money to sponsor a puppy through its training and development into a fully-fledged assistance dog. The Chairman was running a competition for Members and staff to name the puppy, together with a quiz that would be held in October to raise money for the charity;
- a certificate was presented to those officers involved in helping the Council achieve the Investors in People gold standard. This result demonstrated the Council's commitment to high levels of development, training and support for its staff, which in turn delivered better services for the district. Members gave officers a standing ovation upon presentation of the certificate;
- Councillor Alex Riley was currently unwell in hospital, so the Chairman agreed to send a card on behalf of the Council to wish him a speedy recovery.

Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of the Council, proposed that Councillor Simon Crocker be appointed to the Civic Affairs Committee in place of Councillor James Hockney, and that Councillor Crocker also be added onto the list of named substitutes for the Corporate Governance Committee. This was unanimously **AGREED**.

## 6. QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

No questions from the public had been received.

## 7. PETITIONS

Jeni Sawford presented a petition that had been received, consisting of 108 signatures, in relation to Syrian refugees. It petitioned the Council to:

- (a) state its willingness to accommodate a proportionate number of refugees;
- (b) approach relevant Government Departments and other local authorities to develop a coordinated scheme for accommodating refugees;
- (c) urge the government to participate in EU-wide approaches to helping refugees.

Ms Sawford said that with millions of Syrian refugees being displaced over the last few years, the situation had reached crisis point and action needed to be taken now. Not only did she think people in this country had a duty to help but, as the petition showed, local people also wanted to help. She highlighted that groups were coming together all over the country and mobilising into action in any way they felt they could be useful. Ms Sawford reported that Cambridge City Council had announced that it was willing to help and today the European Union announced that it would give at least one billion Euros in measures to help. She closed by saying that those signing this petition would like South

Cambridgeshire District Council to look into accepting a proportionate number of refugees.

In debating the petition, Members express their sympathy for those people caught up in the Syrian conflict and the following comments or views were noted:

- South Cambridgeshire District Council should welcome the opportunity to help in whatever way it could. It was well known that other parts of the region and country had more spare housing capacity than South Cambridgeshire, but that did not mean that the Council should fail to demonstrate a willingness to help;
- the idea of using some local facilities for a transit or reception function had been mooted and the Government's scheme was specifically targeted at people in severe need of medical care. Cambridgeshire had some of the best specialist medical providers in some fields, so medical institutions in the area could be in a position to help a small number of those most in need without impacting the general population;
- the only way to properly establish these people's needs would be to genuinely work with other bodies, in particular Cambridgeshire County Council and the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership;
- the Government had provided significant additional funding to those refugee camps in countries neighbouring Syria which meant that people did not need to endure dangerous journeys to countries further afield for aid and support;
- the Council should have the appetite to cooperate with the Government and help where it could to support people in need when they did arrive;
- the issue was too big and complex to reach a specific decision at this meeting. A cross-party working group should therefore be established with frequent update reports to Cabinet.

At this stage of proceedings Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of the Council, read out an email he had sent in response to a letter from the East of England Strategic Migration Partnership. His email said that South Cambridgeshire District Council was not in a position to make such an important and far reaching commitment regarding the provision of accommodation for Syrian refugees without further information and long term funding guarantees. Councillor Manning highlighted that the Government had only committed to meet any costs associated with the resettling of refugees for the first year, with local authorities and other service providers then expected to meet the cost for subsequent years. Details around the actual costs relating to those subsequent years had yet to be confirmed, therefore Councillor Manning felt it would be premature for this Council to agreed towards anything before further information was known. He was also against the proposal to establish a Member working group given that the Portfolio Holder for Housing would consider this issue at his meetings whenever necessary, which any Member would be able to attend and participate in.

Further discussion ensued and the following additional comments or views were noted:

- a resident from Haslingfield had recently set up a petition where people could signify an offer of accommodation to Syrian refugees. This had achieved over 4,000 positive responses to date, meaning that 4,000 local families had essentially offered their homes to the Government by way of help and support;
- the main question that needed to be addressed at this meeting was whether South Cambridgeshire District Council would be prepared to state a willingness to help;
- this was a multiagency issue and there was a lot of misunderstanding amongst the general public, with lots of scaremongering that needed to be managed;

- there needed to be complete and controlled support for refugees, which was why they could not simply be placed in people's homes.

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, highlighted that a request for help from South Cambridgeshire District Council essentially meant support with housing and accommodation, since other services that would be required by way of offering support fell under the responsibility of the County Council or health providers. He emphasised the difficult position the Council would be put in should it have to consider supporting Syrian refugees by way of housing or accommodation alongside those vulnerable people already living in the district. Councillor Howell said that this was the reality of the situation in a local context and confirmed that the Council currently had 19 people designated as class A homeless and 26 families classified as priority homeless on its housing lists, with 15 families awaiting temporary accommodation. He reiterated the Leader's point regarding his Portfolio Holder Meetings and said that if necessary he would hold special meetings to solely consider the Syrian refugee issue as and when necessary.

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Opposition, proposed the establishment of a cross-party Member working group to consider the issue of Syrian refugees and provide update reports to Cabinet. This was seconded by Councillor John Williams. Voting on the proposal, with 11 votes in favour, 33 votes against and 1 abstention, the proposal was lost.

Enough Members as prescribed in the Council's Standing Orders requested a recorded vote for this proposal. Votes were therefore cast as follows:

#### **In favour**

Councillors Henry Batchelor, Anna Bradnam, Jose Hales, Tumi Hawkins, Sebastian Kindersley, Janet Lockwood, Des O'Brien, Bridget Smith, Hazel Smith, Aidan Van de Weyer and John Williams.

#### **Against**

Councillors David Bard, Val Barrett, Francis Burkitt, Brian Burling, Tom Bygott, Graham Cone, Simon Crocker, Christopher Cross, Kevin Cuffley, Neil Davies, Simon Edwards, Sue Ellington, Andrew Fraser, Roger Hall, Lynda Harford, Roger Hickford, Mark Howell, Peter Johnson, Ray Manning, Mick Martin, David McCraith, Cicely Murfitt, Charles Nightingale, Tony Orgee, Tim Scott, Ben Shelton, Edd Stonham, Peter Topping, Richard Turner, Robert Turner, Bunty Waters, David Whiteman-Downes and Nick Wright.

#### **Abstention**

Councillor Nigel Cathcart.

Councillor Mark Howell proposed that the petition be noted. Councillor Ray Manning seconded the proposal. Voting on the proposal, with 35 votes in favour and 10 votes against, Council **NOTED** the petition.

**8. TO CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING RECOMMENDATIONS:****8 (a) Financial Management System (Cabinet, 10 September 2015)**

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, presented a report considered by Cabinet on 10 September 2015 and proposed that Council approved a supplementary budget of up to £190,000 (capital) for a new financial management system, in partnership with Cambridge City Council.

Councillor Edwards explained that the current system was inefficient and that a new financial management system would improve performance in terms of making quicker payments to service users and suppliers. He added that the introduction of the same new system that the City Council intended to use would support the potential for a shared financial service between the two authorities in due course, so it made sense to procure the system for both Councils as a joint project at this stage.

Councillor Francis Burkitt, Chairman of the Corporate Governance Committee, seconded the proposal and, from the perspective of internal and external audit, made the point that it was critical for systems to be in place that were robust and efficient. He noted that the current system dated back to 2004 which, in terms of Information Technology, was a relatively long time.

Councillor John Williams referred to comments he had made at the meeting of Cabinet which questioned the lack of detail set out in the business case appended to the Cabinet report, together with the large price range for the new system quoted as being £100,000 to £190,000. Councillor Simon Edwards outlined that this was an early stage of the procurement process and costings had been drawn up based on soft market testing. More detail would be reported to Cabinet in due course, with Councillor Edwards as Portfolio Holder having delegated authority to make any final decision on the system to be procured from South Cambridgeshire District Council's perspective.

Voting on the proposal, with 34 votes in favour, 8 votes against and 3 abstentions, Council **APPROVED** a supplementary budget of up to £190,000 (capital) for the financial management system project.

**9. APPOINTMENT TO THE INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL**

Council unanimously:

- (a) **RE-APPOINTED** Kevin McIntyre as a member of the Independent Remuneration Panel for a three-year term of office, with an expiry date of 31 July 2018.
- (b) **CONFIRMED** that the level of expenses paid to the individual members of the Independent Remuneration Panel be no more than £200 each per financial year, with the final amount payable to be agreed by the Executive Director in consultation with the Leader of the Council.

**10. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODY - CAMBRIDGE SPORTS HALL TRUST MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of the Council, proposed that Councillor Ben Shelton be appointed as the Council's representative on the Cambridge Sports Hall Trust Management Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Roger Hickford.

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Opposition, proposed that Councillor Henry Batchelor be appointed as the Council's representative on the Cambridge Sports Hall Trust Management Committee. This was seconded by Councillor Tumi Hawkins.

With 24 votes compared to 18 votes, Council **APPOINTED** Councillor Ben Shelton as its representative on the Cambridge Sports Hall Trust Management Committee and Councillor Henry Batchelor as a substitute, subject to the use of substitutes being permitted.

#### 11. **QUESTIONS ON JOINT MEETINGS**

No questions on joint meetings were noted.

#### 12. **QUESTIONS ON THE GREATER CAMBRIDGE CITY DEAL**

Councillor John Williams referred to City Deal funding and asked whether there was a contingency plan should the objectives of tranche one not be met, resulting in further funding not being granted by the Government for further tranches of the Deal.

Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of the Council, shared Councillor Williams' concerns and was himself disappointed with the pace that the City Deal's projects were moving at. He explained, however, that with transport infrastructure schemes there was a large amount of public consultation that had to be undertaken which did take time. He added that schemes within tranche one would be judged by the Government as to whether they were being delivered on budget and on time. Schemes scheduled to commence in the later stages of tranche one, such as 2019 for example, would be judged by the Government at this stage as being on target.

Councillor Aidan Van de Weyer asked how the relationship was between the Joint Assembly and Executive Board and how the two bodies were functioning.

Councillor Manning said he thought the two bodies were working well together, with the Chairman or Vice-Chairman of the Joint Assembly invited to make a report as a standing item to meetings of the Executive Board and present the Assembly's recommendations.

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Opposition, referred to the City Deal project seeking to address congestion in the centre of Cambridge. She said that through the media she had heard of lots of positive, innovative ideas and solutions from local people and asked how the Executive Board would give proper consideration to them.

Councillor Manning said that the Executive Board would welcome those people coming forward and sharing their ideas with Members of the Board and supporting officers from partner organisations.

Councillor Nigel Cathcart raised the issue of rural exception sites and sought an assurance that all sites would be looked upon equally in terms of affordable housing.

Councillor Manning confirmed this would be the case and reminded Members that the Greater Cambridge City Deal included the area of South Cambridgeshire as well as the City of Cambridge.

Councillor Sebastian Kindersley asked whether the Leader felt the City Deal, so far, had been a success or failure and whether his views would be shared by the majority of Members from South Cambridgeshire District Council and Cambridge City Council.

Councillor Ray Manning thought it was a shame that the City Deal had been given the title 'Greater Cambridge City Deal' as this implied that it was focused on the City of Cambridge, which was not the case, and on reflection he thought that the people of South Cambridgeshire probably did not appreciate how much it would impact them. Councillor Manning added that he did not think people had engaged with the process so far, but acknowledged that it was still in the early stages and that nothing physically had yet been delivered. He felt that this would happen more as specific projects developed.

In terms of whether the City Deal had been a success to date, Councillor Manning said that it had made the three partner Councils, the University and the Local Enterprise Partnership work better together as partners, bringing with it improved forward planning and cooperative working that may not have occurred without the City Deal.

### **13. QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS**

#### **13 (a) From Councillor Ben Shelton**

Councillor Ben Shelton asked the following question:

"Will the Leader explain how the Government's recent changes to Council house rent and the cap on benefits will affect our residents?"

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, answered the question and said that the reduction in rent would remove £12 million from the Housing Revenue Account in the first four years and £134 million over the course of the 30 year business plan. By year four there would be £4.7 million per year less in the budget than planned and further work would need to be undertaken to identify where savings could be made from the investment surplus intended to build new Council houses, which was set at £4.5 million a year.

In respect of the cap on benefits, Councillor Howell said that current figures were estimates based on information currently held and the Council was awaiting confirmation from the Department for Work and Pensions. Councillor Howell estimated, however, that the £20,000 cap on benefits would affect 94% of current Council tenant households and a further 166 households in the district as a whole. This could have an impact if households were left with insufficient money to pay their rent in that if they were to be evicted and became homeless it was likely that the Council would have a statutory duty to house them. Provision therefore needed to be made to support these households, which may require additional resources from the Council's General Fund.

As a supplementary question, Councillor Shelton asked what Cabinet and senior officers at the Council were doing by way of highlighting these issues with Ministers and central Government.

Councillor Howell said that officers were working to identify individuals detrimentally affected by the changes in order to offer support, such as providing help and advice with managing budgets. He also reported that he would soon be attending a meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss the impact on South Cambridgeshire and that he had recently discussed the issue at length with Heidi Allen, Member of Parliament for South Cambridgeshire.

**13 (b) From Councillor John Williams**

Councillor John Williams asked the following question:

“How many applications have been received for the Right to Buy Mobility Fund, how many tenants have so far been successful and how much money has so far been spent from the Fund?”

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, answered the question and reminded Members that the Council was successful in its bid for £200,000 funding from the Right to Buy Mobility Fund. The scheme targeted Council tenants who aspired to home ownership but did not want to buy their current property under the Right to Buy. Every applicant supported through this process would free up a Council property and the scheme was able to support up to ten tenants for 2015/16.

Councillor Howell explained that the scheme had been promoted widely, with future promotions scheduled in due course. In the first 12 weeks the Council had received a small number of enquires about the scheme but there had been no formal applications to date. Funding would only be drawn down when a tenant had successfully progressed to a purchase, which was monitored on a monthly basis.

Councillor Williams asked as a supplementary question when the money had to be spent by.

Councillor Howell did not have an answer to this question but agreed to inform Councillor Williams outside of the meeting.

**13 (c) From Councillor Bridget Smith**

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Opposition, asked the following question:

“How much has the Council had to pay as rebates to Medical Practices that have appealed their business rates? How much is it anticipated will need to be paid out in the next 5 years to cover further claims?”

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, answered the question and confirmed that the Council had refunded £1,034,544.64. He said that this had been very hard to estimate as it was difficult to know what appeals would be upheld. However, it was noted that the final figure may exceed £3 million.

Councillor Bridget Smith, as a supplementary question, asked what percentage of appeals were upheld.

Councillor Edwards could not provide an answer to this question, but explained that the legislation regarding the date by which they could be backdated had changed. Appeals could now only be backdated to 1 April 2015, so the majority of those prior to 1 April 2015 had already been received. Councillor Edwards also explained that the other difficulty was the different amounts each appeal related to, with some being relatively small sums compared to some which were much larger, so it depended on the amount in each case as to the impact on the Council rather than the number of appeals.

Councillor Edwards said that this issue would be reflected within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.



**14. NOTICES OF MOTION****14 (a) Standing in the name of Councillor John Williams**

Councillor John Williams proposed the following motion:

“SCDC is heading into ‘a perfect storm’ over affordable rented housing as it is hit by a triple whammy from the new government’s recent budget announcements. Firstly by having to give a 1% reduction in council rents over the next four years which will hit our ambitious council house building programme; secondly, by being forced to sell our best housing stock as properties become void to reimburse housing associations for introducing “right to buy” to their properties; and thirdly by the fact that the council will still have the £205 million loan to repay which we took out to pay off our HRA debt to the government to enable us to embark on our council house building programme. In addition to the above we are expecting to see many small landlords selling up as a result of the changes to the tax rules on ‘buy to let’ properties. Officers have warned that homelessness will rise in the district as a direct result of this government action. Therefore this council instructs the Chief Executive to draw the Secretary of State’s attention to these facts and copy to the Local Government Association.”

In presenting the motion, Councillor Williams referred to the Cabinet meeting held on 9 February 2012 where a report on the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan for thirty years was approved. This set out that the Housing Revenue Account subsidy system would be replaced by a new regime of self-financing and that through the Localism Act 2011 the Government was ceasing negative subsidy and was asking for the Council to make a one-off payment of £205.7 million. He had calculated that the interest of the loan that the Council took out to make this payment would amount to £7.2 million. This, on top of the Chancellor’s budget announcements and the impact this would have on the Housing Revenue Account, he felt, placed the authority in a very serious situation.

Councillor Williams was concerned that the Council could not now guarantee whether its Council housing scheme would go ahead as planned and felt that the Council’s political leadership should do more to represent the people of South Cambridgeshire by lobbying central Government, questioning why a recent request to write a letter to the Minister on the issue had been refused.

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Opposition, seconded the motion.

Councillor Ray Manning, Leader of the Council, agreed with the principles of the motion but emphasised that a meeting with the Secretary of State had been diarised. Long discussions had also been held with representatives of Cambridge City Council in order that the two Councils could work together to address this and Heidi Allen MP had also been supportive. A request to send a letter to the Secretary of State had been refused for the sole reason that the Leader, Housing Portfolio Holder, Chief Executive and the Director of Housing were scheduled to meet with the Secretary of State very soon.

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, highlighted that the Council did not incur any debt itself but had in fact taken on a debt.

Councillor Mark Howell, Portfolio Holder for Housing, expressed his extreme disappointment with the Chancellor’s budget announcements and the impact the resulting changes to house rent and the benefit cap would have on the people of South Cambridgeshire and the Council’s Housing Revenue Account. He reiterated the Leader’s comments about the meeting with the Secretary of State and said he would not be afraid to explain, on behalf of South Cambridgeshire’s residents, what these changes

would mean for the people in the district.

Councillor Bridget Smith said that the motion was intended as a way of empowering the Council's representatives ahead of the meeting with the Secretary of State and provide some support.

Voting on the motion, with 13 votes in favour, 30 votes against and 2 abstentions, the motion was lost.

**14 (b) Standing in the name of Councillor Bridget Smith**

Councillor Bridget Smith, Leader of the Opposition, proposed the following motion:

“The much valued Green Belt in South Cambridgeshire is currently facing a number of threats. Most significantly these are from speculative planning applications, the emerging Local Plan itself and the City Deal. Our Local Plan currently recognises the high level of protection that the Green Belt deserves. In order to reaffirm this Council's commitment to protecting the Green Belt this motion proposes that as a Council we welcome the original proposals being put forward by Cambridgeshire BOLD as an acknowledgement that they go some way to ensuring a light touch approach to the Green Belt which does everything reasonably possible to protect it for future generations and invite Members to give due consideration to these at the relevant stages.”

Councillor Smith reflected on the importance that was placed on the green belt, especially in terms of keeping land permanently open. She was concerned that there were a number of threats to South Cambridgeshire's green belt with regard to the revised Local Development Plan and the submission of speculative planning applications, as well as from the Greater Cambridge City Deal.

Councillor Smith was hopeful that the Council would support this excellent piece of work that had been put forward by Cambridgeshire BOLD.

Councillor Van de Weyer seconded the motion.

Councillor Francis Burkitt supported the motion, but asked for the word 'original' to be removed to reflect that this piece of work was still ongoing and the proposal may be subject to change as a result of ongoing consultation.

The proposer and seconder of the motion agreed to the removal of the word 'original' from the motion.

Councillor Simon Edwards, Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Finance and Staffing, proposed an amendment to include the words 'and all Parish Councils, pressure groups, interested parties and members of the public' after reference to Cambridgeshire BOLD, to reflect that proposals from anyone would be welcomed and taken into consideration.

The proposer and seconder of the motion agreed to accept this proposed amendment.

Council unanimously **AGREED** the following motion:

“The much valued Green Belt in South Cambridgeshire is currently facing a number of threats. Most significantly these are from speculative planning applications, the emerging Local Plan itself and the City Deal. Our Local Plan currently recognises the high level of protection that the Green Belt deserves. In order to reaffirm this Council's commitment to protecting the Green Belt this motion proposes that as a Council we

welcome the proposals being put forward by Cambridgeshire BOLD and all Parish Councils, pressure groups, interested parties and members of the public as an acknowledgement that they go some way to ensuring a light touch approach to the Green Belt which does everything reasonably possible to protect it for future generations and invite Members to give due consideration to these at the relevant stages.”

**15. CHAIRMAN'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Council noted the engagements attended by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman since the last meeting, as stated on the agenda.

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**The Meeting ended at 4.05 p.m.**

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