

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Civic Affairs Committee held on
Thursday, 10 September 2015 at 4.00 p.m.

PRESENT:
Councillor Sue Ellington – Chairman
Councillor Charles Nightingale – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: David Bard
Kevin Cuffley
Sebastian Kindersley
Deborah Roberts
Bunty Waters
Nigel Cathcart
Simon Edwards
Ray Manning
Bridget Smith

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

Advisors: Grant Osbourne
Independent Person

Councillors Anna Bradnam, David McCraith, Cicely Murfitt and Hazel Smith and Hazel Smith were in attendance, by invitation.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Raymond Matthews. Councillor Kevin Cuffley was appointed as a substitute for Councillor Matthews.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sebastian Kindersley declared an interest in item 4 as a Cambridgeshire County Councillor.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 9 July 2015 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT BOUNDARY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND REVIEW COUNCIL SIZE SUBMISSION

Consideration was given to a report which provided the Civic Affairs Committee with an opportunity to consider a recommendation to Council on making a submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council size as part of its whole Council electoral ward review.

The Chairman introduced this item and referred to the appointment of Councillor Alex Riley, who had recently been appointed by the Leader of the Council as the Council's Boundary Review Champion. Councillor Riley, who was unable to attend the meeting, had put forward a proposal to recommend that the Council submitted a Council size of 45 to the Boundary Commission. He felt that the best chance of agreeing this figure was for

the whole Council to agree upon it in a unified way and cited the following as reasons for his proposal:

- a Council size of 45 would correspond readily to mapping three South Cambridgeshire District Councillors onto every Cambridgeshire County Council Member in the current 15 Member Boundary Commission review of the County Council;
- it happened to match numerically to a boundary review scenario independently drawn up by officers;
- it was the minimum Council size which allowed the district's largest parish of Histon and Impington to remain a three Member ward;
- it represented a reduction of some 20% in the current Council size.

Discussion ensued on the proposal to recommend a Council size of 45, during which the following points were noted:

- it was very difficult to consider a reduction in Council size given the rural nature of the district and the difficulties some Members already experienced in representing numerous rural communities;
- there was a real risk of democratic deficit across the district as a reduction in Members would mean more communities to represent per Member;
- there was a danger, however, of the Boundary Commission imposing a Council size based on South Cambridgeshire District Council's statistical neighbours should the Council not be minded to put forward an evidence-based recommendation. It was noted that a recommendation by the Council, as long as it was supported by an evidence base, was more likely to be accepted by the Boundary Commission;
- the proposed Council size of 45 should be supported, but it should also be recommended that this number be a minimum for any proposed reduction in Council size;
- the role of County Councillors and District Councillors was very different, so it was not vital to achieve a 3:1 ratio of District Councillors per County Councillor across the district;
- in view of the significant projected population growth for South Cambridgeshire, it may be necessary for the Boundary Commission to undertake a further electoral earlier in the future than anticipated;
- a reduction in Council size would mean that a lower number of Members would be expected to represent more people, with the projected population growth adding to this pressure. In view of this, another issue to consider was how difficult it would be to attract people to stand as Councillors, particularly young people who worked and would not necessarily have enough time to devote to the role.

The Chairman put this proposal to the vote and the Civic Affairs Committee **RECOMMENDED** to Council that it recommends a Council size of 45 as part of its submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England's electoral review.

The Chairman invited Members to consider the draft document attached as an appendix to the report which formed an evidence-base for the Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England on Council size, in accordance with the Boundary Commission's guidance.

The following additions to the document were suggested:

- more reference to the rural character of South Cambridgeshire, particularly the issue of rural isolation experienced by a number of communities in the district;
- reference to South Cambridgeshire as an area being significant to regional and national economic growth;
- more emphasis on the substantial population growth in South Cambridgeshire and the fact that this was projected to be above the national average;
- more emphasis on the significant increase in the workload of those Members involved in the Greater Cambridge City Deal Executive Board and Joint Assembly;
- more emphasise on the expectation for Members to attend significant amounts of training and ensure that they kept up to date with issues, such as changes in legislation, regulations or guidance;
- Council housing stock being identified as a South Cambridgeshire District Council asset and reference to St Ermine Street Ltd as the Council's housing company;
- further clarity around the amount of time Members currently spent on Council business per month.

The Civic Affairs Committee **AGREED** the draft document appended to the report as a basis for an evidence-based submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, subject to the inclusion of a number of amendments as suggested above, and that a revised version be circulated to all Members of the Civic Affairs Committee as soon as possible.

It also **AGREED** that officers be given authority to make any necessary amendments to the evidence-based submission document prior to its submission to Council, in liaison with the Chairman of the Civic Affairs Committee and political group leaders.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was **NOTED** that the next meeting of the Civic Affairs Committee was scheduled to be held on 24 September 2015 at 11.00am.

The Meeting ended at 4.50 p.m.
