

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Cabinet held on
Thursday, 10 September 2009

PRESENT: Councillor RMA Manning (Leader of the Council)
Councillor SM Edwards (Deputy Leader of the Council, Finance and Staffing
Portfolio Holder)

Councillors: Dr DR Bard New Communities Portfolio Holder
MP Howell Housing Portfolio Holder
NIC Wright Planning Portfolio Holder
Mrs SM Ellington Environmental Services Portfolio Holder
TD Bygott Sustainability, Procurement and Efficiency Portfolio Holder

Officers in attendance for all or part of the meeting:

Holly Adams Democratic Services Officer
Alex Colyer Executive Director, Corporate Services
Steve Hampson Executive Director, Operational Services
Greg Harlock Chief Executive
Stephen Hills Corporate Manager, Affordable Homes
Paul Williams Equality and Diversity Officer

Councillors JD Batchelor, Mrs EM Heazell, JA Hockney, SGM Kindersley, Mrs CAED Murfitt, CR Nightingale, Mrs HM Smith, PW Topping and Dr SEK van de Ven were in attendance for all or part of the meeting, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor TJ Wotherspoon.

Procedural Items

19. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Leader was authorised to sign the minutes of the meeting held on 2 July 2009 as a correct record.

Further to Minute 4 (Cambridge Sport Lakes Trust: Request for Capital Grant Aid), the Leader confirmed that Cambridgeshire County Council had agreed to fund half of the project, making the Visitor Centre extension and improvements a joint venture between the two authorities.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

21. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were no public questions received.

21 (a) GAMLINGAY: Warden Service at Avenells Way and Grays Road - Petition

Council, at its meeting of 23 July 2009, referred to Cabinet a petition from residents of

the Sheltered Housing Scheme at Avenells Way and Grays Road, Gamlingay, dated 21 June 2009 and received by the Council on 7 July 2009. The petition, with a covering letter which referred to the recent reduction to a part-time warden service, charges for the services, and previous correspondence with the Council on the subject, read: "As this is a Warden-controlled scheme, we expect a Warden here at least 9am to 5pm, which we were promised and are paying for."

The lead petitioner, Mr Doug Gilbert, was in attendance at the Cabinet meeting and addressed the Cabinet. Mr Gilbert referred to the recent ballot on the future of the Council's housing stock, and the consequent review of housing services following the tenants' vote in favour of the authority retaining the stock, stating that he believed that the money spent on the ballot and the review could have been spent on those Council tenants who had moved into the scheme with the expectation of an on-site warden service between 9 am and 5 pm every day. He described the current arrangements, with the warden services shared with the Blythe Way scheme, as reasonable but not ideal. In response to a question, Mr Gilbert asserted that the letter he had received from Mr Steve Hampson, Executive Director (Operational Services), had contained an inaccuracy regarding the level of warden service provided, as the Supported Housing Manager previously had confirmed to residents that four wardens were on sick leave at the time the letter was written.

The Leader explained that the background to the current arrangements was the continuing financial pressure on the Council, which was required to transfer 50% of rents to central government instead of being able to reinvest the money in local housing services. The proposed reforms in the recently-published government Green Paper on council housing finance, if enacted, would see the Council's situation grow even worse.

Cabinet **RECEIVED** the petition and **REFERRED** it to the meeting of the Housing Portfolio Holder on 16 September 2009 for detailed consideration and agreement of a response.

Cabinet thanked Mr Gilbert for his petition and for coming to the meeting to present it.

Following the Cabinet meeting, the Housing Portfolio Holder scheduled a special meeting on Wednesday 23 September 2009 at 6 pm at Avenells Way, Gamlingay, so residents of the scheme could be in attendance when this decision was taken.

22. SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN POLICY

The Executive Director (Corporate Services) presented the Safeguarding Children Policy, which had been produced in line with government guidance and which the internal auditors had been found to be satisfactory. The attached procedures were intended to reassure Members that adequate arrangements were in place to ensure that the Council's obligations were being met.

Cabinet **AGREED** to adopt the Safeguarding Children policy and **NOTED** the supporting procedures.

23. COMPREHENSIVE EQUALITIES POLICY 2009-2012: GENDER EQUALITY AND RACE EQUALITY SCHEMES

Councillor MP Howell, lead member for equality and diversity, presented the new Gender Equality Scheme and the revised Race Equality Scheme, which had been updated following a twelve-week public consultation period and which had been endorsed by the Equality and Diversity Steering Group. He confirmed that these were

legal requirements, formed two elements of the Comprehensive Equalities Policy 2009-12 and were part of the Council's work towards achievement of Level 3 of the Equality Standard for Local Government. Action plans for both schemes had been produced and the majority of actions centred on training and raising awareness.

Cabinet **AGREED** to adopt the new Gender Equality Scheme and revised Race Equality Scheme.

24. COUNCIL ACTIONS 2010/2011

Cabinet received the proposed Council Actions for 2010/11, which would build upon work undertaken in 2009/10. The Leader drew attention to the increasing importance of joint working, particularly through the Cambridgeshire Local Area Agreement (LAA).

In response to questions about their respective portfolios, Cabinet members explained that:

- There was a need for increased anti-littering education, as litter picking along the A14 cost the authority approximately £20,000 per annum. The A10 was also a major route which could be included in the litter picking scheme if funds could be identified;
- Local Public Sector Agreement (LPSA) reward grant monies had been funding enhanced street cleaning in those villages prioritised by officers as having an urgent need, freeing up some of the Council's budget for use in the smaller villages;
- Under the current planning system, if Marshall's Aerospace did not relocate from Cambridge, the Council would be required to find somewhere in South Cambridgeshire to accommodate its share of the homes proposed for the Cambridge East development, but not for those the City Council was required to accommodate within Cambridge;
- Establishment of community orchards was a suggestion coming from villages and existing schemes had proven popular; and
- Attendance by non-executive members at Portfolio Holder meetings was encouraged.

Cabinet

- (a) **APPROVED** continuation of the current Vision, Aims and Approaches as the Council's strategic policy framework;
- (b) **APPROVED** the twelve draft Actions for 2010/11 given in Appendix 2 to the report for the purpose of service planning and subject to more detailed costings;
- (c) **ADVISED** services that there would be no bidding process this year for resources for service development and that only in exceptional cases would requests for additional resources for inescapable commitments be approved;
- (d) **REQUESTED** services, wherever relevant, to continue current year Council Actions into the service planning process for incorporation into the Council's core business from 2010/11 onwards; and
- (e) **AGREED** to review and confirm the Council Actions at their November meeting in the light of costs and other emerging financial commitments and the review of the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

25. SHEPRETH: 74-76 FROG END

Two properties, 74 and 76 Frog End, Shepreth, had been vacant for several years and had deteriorated to the point that it was more economical for the buildings to be demolished and rebuilt than repaired; the Council had to consider whether to transfer the land to a housing association, sell it to a private developer or sell some of the land to a

developer and transfer the remainder to a housing association. The Housing Portfolio Holder preferred the transfer of the land to a housing association, contrary to the officer recommendation.

Councillor Dr SEK van de Ven, local member, explained that there were different views held locally but all parties would like to see the matter resolved as soon as possible. She and the Parish Council supported the proposal for the land to be transferred to a housing association. Shepreth Parish Councillors Mrs J Ravenhill and Ms D Thomas, in attendance, spoke in favour of transfer to a housing association as the only way to guarantee affordable housing development in the village. Mr A Jones, a resident of Frog End, preferred that the Council sell the land to a private developer, as he believed that the location was unsuitable for affordable housing, with the rail and bus services more than half a mile away and the road in poor condition. The Leader confirmed that this decision should not be seen as setting a precedent, as every site was considered on its merits.

Cabinet, with five in favour, one against and one abstention, **AGREED** the sale of land at 74-76 Frog End, Shepreth for private development to maximise the return to the Council on its asset, enabling the development of new affordable housing within Shepreth, improvements to Council housing in the District, and / or other Housing capital expenditure.

26. **WORKFORCE PLAN ANNUAL REVIEW 2009-10**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder introduced the annual refresh of the three-year rolling Workforce Plan, which would undergo a thorough review in 2010/11 as it completed its three-year cycle. He drew members' attention to the increase in ethnic minority representation on the workforce, the recent Investors in People accreditation, and the positive benefits of the flexible working and homeworking schemes which were comparable to those offered in the private sector and were essential for attracting new, and retaining existing, staff. He also highlighted the need to investigate new ways of working, such as apprenticeship schemes and partnership working. Councillor MP Howell spoke of the Council's recent recognition as a Stonewall Diversity Champion.

Cabinet **APPROVED** the Workforce Plan, including the Action Plan.

Information Items

27. **TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2008/09 PERFORMANCE**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder commended the work of the Council's treasury management function, whose investments continued to outperform those managed externally. Members noted that the report referred to performance in 2008/09 and not the current year.

Cabinet **NOTED** the performance of the treasury management function and offered its congratulations to officers for another successful year.

28. **INTEGRATED BUSINESS MONITORING REPORT AND UPDATE ON FINANCIAL POSITION 2009/10: FIRST QUARTER**

The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder presented the first quarterly monitoring report

for 2009/10 and advised that the Council was projected to have a 4.36% overspend by the end of the year. Portfolio Holders would be examining their service areas in detail to identify any one-off savings to address the overspend; these savings would be in addition to the required £325,000 efficiency savings. The report set out in detail those service areas for which income was lower than expected and the Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder asked that the Council's current policy of investing in UK-only banks be reviewed to determine the risks associated with any change to the policy.

Cabinet also considered the Council's first-quarter performance against the Corporate Plan 2009/10 and it was clarified that the average processing time for benefits claims should meet its end of year target, with agency staff appointed to assist after the number of claims doubled due to the recession. The Finance and Staffing Portfolio Holder advised of implications for the Council's finances if the recession and financial pressures on the Council continued, but that the Medium Term Financial Strategy had taken this into account. He encouraged all members to make use of the CorVu performance management system, which he commended.

Cabinet:

- (a) **NOTED** the projected expenditure position;
- (b) **NOTED** that the first quarter performance figures showed a positive start to the year but that Senior Management Team would be keeping a close eye every month on measures of concern; and
- (c) **CONFIRMED** that Portfolio Holders would use the CorVu performance management system to enable them to more closely monitor performance across the authority without waiting for reports from officers.

Standing Items

29. ISSUES ARISING FROM THE SCRUTINY AND OVERVIEW COMMITTEE

Councillor JD Batchelor, Scrutiny and Overview Committee Chairman, summarised that Committee's recent decision to uphold the Policy and Performance Portfolio Holder decision that Council "owned" SCDC email accounts be retained for all Members (no auto-forwarding to personal addresses allowed). He said that there were lessons to be learned, particularly that, in spite of the Portfolio Holder's best efforts to draw attention to the issue, the implications of the decision were not understood by some members.

Councillor SM Edwards encouraged members to read the e-mail sent after the Scrutiny and Overview Committee, which included clear instructions on how to access the new system.

30. UPDATES FROM CABINET MEMBERS APPOINTED TO OUTSIDE BODIES

Nothing to report.

31. REPORTS FROM CABINET MEMBERS ATTENDING PARISH COUNCIL MEETINGS

Nothing to report.

The Meeting ended at 4.10 p.m.
