

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Civic Affairs Committee held on
Friday, 20 September 2013 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor David Bard – Chairman

Councillors: Simon Edwards
Janet Lockwood
Raymond Matthews
Robert Turner

Sebastian Kindersley
Ray Manning
Jim Stewart
Bunty Waters

Officers: Patrick Adams
Andrew Francis
Tracy Mann
Fiona McMillan

Senior Democratic Services Officer
Electoral Services Manager
Development Officer
Legal & Democratic Services Manager and
Monitoring Officer
John Pym
Steve Rayment
New Village Senior Planning Officer
Head of ICT

Councillor Kevin Cuffley was in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Tony Orgee, Alison Elcox and Douglas de Lacey.

13. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2013 were agreed as a correct record.

14. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Sebastian Kindersley declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item on the Trumpington Meadows Community Governance Review as a County Councillor for Trumpington Meadows.

Councillor Simon Edwards declared a non-pecuniary interest in the item on the Northstowe Community Governance Review as a member of Oakington Parish Council.

15. FILMING OF PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented this report which invited the Committee to consider making recommendations to Council on the filming of the authority's meetings following guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government in June 2013.

An e-mail from Councillor Douglas de Lacey had been circulated and was considered by the Committee. The Committee decided that recommendation (a), as laid out in the report, did not need any substantial amendments, as it that empowered the Chairman to run the meeting in keeping with the guidance from the Department for Communities and Local Government. However, it was agreed that the word "any" was superfluous and should be removed.

Councillor Simon Edwards proposed that recommendation (b), as laid out in the report, should be removed as members of the public should be informed that if they attended a public meeting they might be recorded. Councillor Ray Manning seconded this proposal,

which was agreed by the Committee. It was noted that the recording of a meeting that had gone into private session was prohibited under current legislation.

After a brief discussion the Committee agreed that the Council should not record or broadcast any of its meetings, due to the cost of installing and maintaining the necessary equipment. The Head of ICT reported that it would cost approximately £20,000 a year to webcast meetings in the Council Chamber and according to a recent press report Hampshire County Council had spent £200,000 on webcasting their meetings, but had only received 57 views. It was agreed that the Committee should review this decision in 12 months' time as this form of technology was constantly improving.

The Committee

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL

To allow members of the public to film its public meetings in accordance with newly published guidance by the Department for Communities and Local Government entitled 'Your council's cabinet – going to its meetings, seeing how it works'.

That Standing Order 21.4 of the Council's Constitution (Recording of Business) be amended to read: -

"The recording in any format of any meeting of the Council, the Executive, or any committee or sub-committee of the Council or the Executive, is permitted, except: -

- (a) where the Chairman, or person presiding the meeting, rules that filming is being undertaken in such a way that it is disruptive or distracting to the good order and conduct of the meeting.
- (b) where the public have been excluded from the meeting in accordance with the Council's Access to Information Procedure Rules (Rule 10) during the consideration of exempt or confidential information.

The Committee

AGREED that it would be inappropriate at the current time for the Council to film or broadcast its own meetings due to the cost of the installation and maintenance of the equipment required. It was further agreed that the situation would be reviewed in 12 months.

16. REVIEW OF WHISTLEBLOWING POLICY

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services presented this report, which recommended that the Council's Whistleblowing Policy be amended following changes in national legislation.

The Committee

APPROVED The amended Whistleblowing Policy at Appendix A to the report.

NOTED The quick guide to the policy for staff.

AGREED To include the Whistleblowing policy as a standing item on its agenda.

AGREED To review the policy on a bi-annual basis to ensure it is fit for purpose.

17. INDIVIDUAL ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

The Electoral Services Manager presented this report which briefed the Committee on the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and the potential issues that might stem from this change. The Electoral Services Manager assured the Committee that the Government were committed to covering the transitional costs of moving over to the IER system.

Committee members expressed concern regarding the need for canvassers to ask for residents' National Insurance numbers in order to verify the returns against the database held by the Department of Work and Pensions. It was suggested that vulnerable residents should be warned of the risk of identity theft from bogus callers posing as canvassers.

The Electoral Services Manager explained that there would be more pages in the new forms, which would be less likely to be filled in than the current single page form. This change could also increase the cost of postage, which was already a concern.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

18. NORTHSTOWE COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Development Officer updated the Committee on the progress being made on the Northstowe Community Governance Review. The Council was liaising with Oakington, Longstanton and Willingham parish councils.

It was noted that new developments brought administrative challenges, especially when facilities were being built for a new development that was just over the border in a different parish.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update.

19. TRUMPINGTON MEADOWS: COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Development Officer updated the Committee on the progress being made on the Trumpington Meadows Community Governance Review. She explained that a productive meeting had been held with Haslingfield Parish Council. Granchester Parish Council had been invited to take ownership of a small triangle of land near Byron's Pool.

The New Village Senior Planning Officer informed the Committee that further planning applications for Phase 2 (with the South Cambridgeshire District Council area) are still awaited. When received it has been agreed by the Committee that this will trigger the formal Governance review. The Chairman highlighted the fact that the Trumpington Road Park and Ride site might be relocated in the future.

The Electoral Services Manager explained that the Council had not quite reached the Boundary Commission's trigger point for requiring a boundary review. He added that Huntingdonshire District Council had requested a review and had been told to wait. The number of new developments in the district made a review increasingly likely. It was noted that whilst the district could change its parish boundaries only the Boundary Commission could alter the district's ward boundaries meaning that it was possible to have residents voting in different places in parish and district elections, as was the case for some residents living in the Duxford/Whittlesford border area.

The Committee **NOTED** the verbal update.

20. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services updated the Committee on complaints cases regarding alleged breaches of the code of conduct. Paragraph 3(c) was amended to reflect that CORCOM 574 involved complaints from two district councillors, not one.

Concern was expressed by Committee members with regard to the impact of the new Code of Conduct on parish councils and suggestions were made on how district councillors could assist in addressing complaints about parish councillors. It was noted that officers provided parish councils with impartial advice on the Code of Conduct.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

21. TRAINING OF MEMBERS ON THE CODE OF CONDUCT/PRE-DETERMINATION AND BIAS

The Committee **NOTED** that a training session on the Code of Conduct was being run jointly with Huntingdon District Council in the Council Chamber on Thursday 3 October from 10am to 1pm. The Legal and Democratic Services Manager asked that Committee members advertise this event amongst their fellow councillors.

22. COMMITTEE ON STANDARDS IN PUBLIC LIFE ANNUAL REPORT 2012-13

The Head of Legal and Democratic Services brought the Committee's attention to the Committee on Standards in Public Life Annual Report 2012/13. She explained that following the abolition of the Standards Board, there was no national body and highlighted that the report raised concerns about the lack of leadership.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

23. GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION ON SETTING UP OF NEW TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILS

The Electoral Services Manager presented this item on the Government's response to consultation on the setting up of new town and parish councils. It was noted that this had relevance to the governance of new settlements in the district. It was unclear whether there would be a demand for parish councils in the city of Cambridge, or how boundaries could be decided on, as historical parish boundaries on the edge of the city might not be relevant now.

The Electoral Services Manager explained that it made financial and administrative sense to ensure that elections for parish councils coincided with district elections in the same ward.

The Committee **NOTED** the report.

24. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The Committee **NOTED** that the next meeting would be held on Thursday 5 December 2013 at 10am.

The Meeting ended at 11.20 a.m.
