

SOUTH CAMBRIDGESHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Civic Affairs Committee held on
Thursday, 25 September 2014 at 10.00 a.m.

PRESENT: Councillor David Bard – Chairman
Councillor Kevin Cuffley – Vice-Chairman

Councillors: Nigel Cathcart Alison Elcox
Sue Ellington Sebastian Kindersley
Douglas de Lacey Ray Manning
Tony Orgee Deborah Roberts
Bridget Smith Jim Stewart
Bunty Waters

Officers: Andrew Francis Electoral Services Manager
Tracy Mann Development Officer
Fiona McMillan Legal & Democratic Services Manager and
Monitoring Officer
Graham Watts Democratic Services Team Leader

Grant Osbourn (Independent Person) and Gillian Holmes (Independent Person) were in attendance, by invitation.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Simon Edwards.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Simon Edwards. Councillor Tony Orgee had been appointed as his substitute for this meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sebastian Kindersley declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 7 as he chaired a working group at Cambridgeshire County Council that had considered issues relating to the electoral review.

Councillor Douglas de Lacey declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 as Chairman of Girton Parish Council.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 20 March 2014 were confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

4. THE OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014

The Civic Affairs Committee considered a report setting out the implications of the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 that were enacted on 5 August 2014, which mainly related to the filming and reporting of public meetings and the publication of certain non-executive decisions made by officers under delegated powers.

The Council was required to make a decision on the threshold for officer decisions considered as 'materially affecting the Council's financial position', details of which, in accordance with the new Regulations, would need to be published. Levels 4 and above in the Council's Financial Regulations (anything in excess of £50,000) had been put forward in the report as the recommended threshold as this was consistent with the amount that Cabinet was authorised to spend or commit the Council to within approved policy. A table outlining the number and value of contracts for levels 4 and above for the last two years were set out in the report. Members were content with the recommended threshold, but were keen to understand the number and value of contracts granted by officers below Level 4 of the Financial Regulations. The Democratic Services Team Leader agreed to circulate this information to the Committee immediately after the meeting.

Subject to receiving information regarding the number and value of contracts granted by officers under Level 4, the Civic Affairs Committee **RECOMMENDED** to Council that the level for officer decisions considered as 'materially affecting the Council's financial position' be set at Level 4 in the Council's Financial Regulations and above, i.e. at present values, over £50,000.

5. **DARWIN GREEN COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

The Civic Affairs Committee considered a report which updated Members on progress so far in relation to the intention to change parish boundaries at Impington and Girton parishes in order to create a new parish for the development at Darwin Green (phases 2 and 3).

Background information relating to the development at Darwin Green was included in the report. It was reported that the parishes of Histon, Impington and Girton were long-established rural villages in the district of South Cambridgeshire, whereas the Darwin Green developments would be new communities that were, in effect, urban extensions to the city of Cambridge. It was anticipated that residents of Darwin Green, similar to those of new developments at Orchard Park and Trumpington Meadows, would have different needs and expectations to those of people living in such long-established rural communities. The Darwin Green developments were further complicated by the fact that they straddled parish boundaries in a way that Trumpington Meadows did not.

Officers had attended the Parish Council meetings of both Girton and Histon and Impington and were part of the Darwin Green Working Group set up by Histon and Impington Parish Council to investigate options for new governance arrangements. It was intended to carry out early informal consultations with the local communities to determine the best place for any new parish boundary lines to be drawn and the timing for any formal consultation and review. A proposed action plan was set out in the report.

During discussion, some Members expressed concern with the use of the term 'urban extension' in the report as they felt that there was a clear disparity between living in the city and living in South Cambridgeshire. Phases 2 and 3 of the Darwin Green development would be physically located in South Cambridgeshire and they felt that the use of this term was unhelpful. Furthermore, it was their view that residents of Orchard Park, as a similar new development close to the city, very much considered themselves as residents of South Cambridgeshire rather than as residents of the city of Cambridge. It was accepted that the Darwin Green developments, from the perspective of developers, would be seen as an urban extension but the point was noted.

The Civic Affairs Committee **NOTED** the action plan set out in the report and progress to date.

6. UPDATE ON CODE OF CONDUCT COMPLAINTS

The Civic Affairs Committee considered a report which updated Members on complaints cases regarding alleged breaches of the code of conduct.

Discussion ensued on Parish Councils and the use of social media. Some examples were given whereby social media had been used to portray a very negative and inaccurate image of Parish Councils and individual Parish Councillors. It was suggested that the Parish Council Forum could be used to highlight social media policies for Parish Councils. Members also suggested training sessions on how to deal with hostile communications through social media.

Councillor Deborah Roberts took this opportunity to thank Fiona McMillian, Monitoring Officer, for the very helpful advice she had provided in a recent case relating to a Parish Council in her electoral ward.

The report was **NOTED**.

7. COUNTY ELECTORAL REVIEW - VERBAL REPORT FROM THE ELECTORAL SERVICES MANAGER

Andrew Francis, Electoral Services Manager, provided Members with an update on an electoral review of Cambridgeshire County Council that had recently commenced.

A formal consultation process would be undertaken in due course, with implementation of any changes planned for 2017.

The population figures for Cambridgeshire as part of this review would include the projected population in the county up to 2020, which took into account windfall sites, developments identified in the Local Plan and associated phasing.

The Civic Affairs Committee **NOTED** the update.

8. DISTRICT ELECTORAL REVIEW

The Civic Affairs Committee received notification that an electoral review of South Cambridgeshire District Council would be carried out. A copy of the letter received from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

It was noted that the Boundary Commission was primarily concerned with balancing the number of electors represented by each Councillor within an electoral division or ward. Any division or ward with an imbalance of 30% from average could trigger a boundary review and in South Cambridgeshire's case the increased population at Histon and Impington Ward pushed the figure beyond the 30% threshold, with Bourn Ward nearing this figure too.

The review was scheduled to commence in November 2015 and would be completed in September 2016, with any changes ready for implementation in whole-council elections in May 2019.

The report was **NOTED**.

9. DATES OF NEXT MEETINGS

The Civic Affairs Committee **AGREED** to change the dates of future meetings so that they coincided with meetings of Full Council, as follows:

- Thursday 29 January 2015, 10.30am
- Thursday 23 April 2015, 10.30am

The Meeting ended at 10.40 a.m.
