

MINUTES OF ST EDMUNDSBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Minutes of the Special Meeting of the Council held on Tuesday 25 October 2011 at 7.00pm in the Conference Chamber, West Suffolk House, Western Way, Bury St Edmunds

PRESENT: The Mayor (Councillor C J E Spicer) (in the Chair),
Councillors Beckwith, Mrs Broughton, Buckle, Ms Byrne, Chung, Clements, Clifton-Brown, Cockle, Cox, Everitt, Farmer, Farthing, French, Mrs Gower, Griffiths, Hale, Mrs Hind, Mrs R Hopfensperger, Hordern, Houlder, Mrs Levack, Marks, McManus, Mrs Mildmay-White, Nettleton, Pugh, Ray, Redhead, Mrs Rushbrook, Mrs Rushen, Simner, Springett, Stevens, Thorndyke, F J Warby, Mrs P A Warby, A Whittaker and Mrs D A Whittaker.

54. Prayers

The Mayor's Chaplain, Reverend Canon Sally Fogden opened the meeting with prayers.

55. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Ager, P Hopfensperger, Oliver, Mrs Richardson, Rout and Mrs Stamp.

56. Announcements by the Leader of the Council

On behalf of the Council, Councillor Griffiths, Leader of the Council, wished to congratulate Deborah Cadman, former Chief Executive of St Edmundsbury Borough Council, on being appointed as Chief Executive of Suffolk County Council. It was agreed that the Mayor would write a letter of congratulations to Ms Cadman.

57. Declarations of Interest

Members' declarations of interest are recorded under the item to which the declaration relates.

58. Public Questions

No questions were asked.

59. Shared Services: Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council

The Council considered Report C184 (previously circulated) which sought approval to the creation and implementation of a combined staffing structure between Forest Heath District Council (FHDC) and St Edmundsbury Borough Council for the purpose of delivering services across the areas of both Councils.

The Borough Council and FHDC had been pursuing a Shared Services agenda for approximately 20 months. Both Councils had undertaken a review into shared services and a summary of the most recent discussions between both Councils was included as Exempt Appendix 2 of the report. It was now proposed that both Councils should move forward with the Shared Services agenda and officially join both Councils' staff, including their respective Management Teams and incorporating a single Chief Executive.

The fundamental purposes of Shared Services between the Councils were to:-

- (1) minimise the impact of funding cuts on the people within West Suffolk;
- (2) increase resilience; and
- (3) make budget savings.

It was considered that both Councils working together could protect frontline services for the residents and businesses better through cutting duplication, increasing income and, by having one workforce, creating greater flexibility to deliver efficient services across both geographic areas.

Exempt Appendix 1 to the report was a copy of the report presented to Forest Heath District Council on 19 October 2011 and Appendix 3 was a draft minute emanating from that meeting which detailed the resolutions passed by FHDC.

It was noted that it would be necessary to deal with the very practical issues involved in the appointment of the new senior management team serving both authorities. It was proposed that 'outside expertise' should be utilised to support the ensuing recruitment process. An agreed timetable would be required and a joint appointments panel set up for the appointment of the Chief Executive.

It was also noted that there were some business cases outstanding from Phase 1 of the Shared Services agenda which required final approval and it was suggested that these be advanced as soon as possible. In addition, the Phase 2 work, which was currently underway, should be continued and concluded.

Councillor Griffiths moved the recommendations within the report and emphasised that, if approved, this was just the beginning of the second phase of partnership working with FHDC. A strategic decision was required at this meeting of the Council and then the more detailed work would need to be undertaken. Councillor Ray seconded the motion and emphasised that the detailed work needed to be undertaken once this strategic decision was taken and that there was a need to ensure that robust governance arrangements were in place for the decision making process to ensure the appropriate level of Member involvement.

Some concerns were expressed on the necessity of pursuing the Shared Services agenda, especially in the light of the Borough Council's successful implementation of its Dynamic Review – Innovation, Value and Enterprise (DR-IVE) budget reduction annual exercise that had been in operation for many years. In addition, concerns were raised about public perception and whether the public would expect a reduction in Council Tax associated with significant reductions in expenditure arising from Shared Services. Concerns were further expressed on the lack of detail within the report, especially the impact upon the Borough Council's staff of the joint payline and the details of how the Chief Executive was to be appointed. Furthermore, it was emphasised that the appointment of a Chief Executive must be a 'top priority' as it would be his or her responsibility to determine the staffing structure.

There was a consensus that the Borough Council had been successfully involved in a number of major initiatives in the delivery of services with partner organisations including FHDC, such as the housing stock being transferred to Havebury Housing Partnership, leisure centres being managed by Abbeycroft Leisure, joint working on waste management, and the recent transfer of the revenues and benefits work to the Anglia Revenues Partnership. There was also a consensus of opinion that the Shared Services agenda would at least maintain the services to the public and that at this stage in the process the Borough Council needed to take a strategic decision now before going into the detail that was required. It was emphasised that the recommendations in the report

included provision for further details to be presented at the Council's meeting on 13 December 2011.

It was recognised that staff were showing patience and understanding in difficult times and continuing to deliver excellent services and that senior officers, in particular, would be under pressure as a joint management structure would inevitably lead to a reduction in the number of staff.

In order that Councillor Griffiths, the mover of the motion, could respond to the points raised during the debate it was proposed by Councillor Nettleton and seconded by Councillor Clements and

RESOLVED:-

That rule 14.5, permitting Members to speak only once on the original motion and rule 14.9, Right to Reply, of the Rules of Debate contained within the Council Procedure Rules within the Constitution, be suspended for this debate.

Councillor Griffiths considered that no change was not an option due to the continuing budgetary pressures of reduced funding from the Government and inflationary pressures. He considered that the current arrangement of having a Shared Head of Planning was a success, but envisaged that the role would become 'easier' when managing one, rather than two teams. He considered that the Council had a duty to take a decision at this meeting in order that staff could be apprised of the situation and the Shared Services agenda progressed. He concurred with the views expressed that the appointment of a Chief Executive was a 'top priority'.

It was proposed by Councillor Griffiths, seconded by Councillor Cockle and

RESOLVED:-

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12(A) of the Act.

The Council then went into private session and a discussion was held regarding the negotiations with FHDC and the contents of Exempt Appendix 2. This included the circumstances when outsourcing may be considered, the implications of the payline review, the process of appointing a Chief Executive and the determination of a staffing structure.

On the motion of Councillor Ray, seconded by Councillor F J Warby it was resolved that the Council return to public session.

Councillor Nettleton considered that recommendation 8.2 should be deleted and replaced by 'a joint appointment committee recruit a Chief Executive Officer as a first priority'. This amended motion being put to the vote was defeated. The original motion, moved by Councillor Griffiths and seconded by Councillor Ray was then put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED:- That

- (1) the creation and implementation of a shared officer structure between Forest Heath District Council and St Edmundsbury Borough Council for the purpose of delivering services across the

areas of both Councils, expressly pursuant to the agreed conditions 1-15 inclusive, as described in Exempt Appendix 2 of Report C184 be approved;

- (2) further work be undertaken between both Councils to consider the practical steps necessary to recruit a Chief Executive Officer to serve both Councils and that the details of the process and the anticipated timings be reported to both Councils at the December 2011 cycle;
- (3) further work be undertaken by the appropriate officers to develop a common payline for both Councils;
- (4) business cases for the remainder of Phase 1 and Phase 2 services be concluded where appropriate and submitted for approval as soon as possible; and
- (5) a draft budget be prepared and presented to the December 2011 Council meeting, outlining the contingent costs of these proposals.

60. **Conclusion of Business**

The meeting concluded at 8.39 pm

MAYOR