

## DISTRICT COUNCIL OF SEVENOAKS

### Minutes of the meeting of the Sevenoaks District Council held on 18 October 2011 commencing at 7.00 pm

Present: Cllr. R Orridge (Chairman)

Cllr. Mrs Morris (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr. L Abraham, Cllr. Mrs B Ayres, Cllr. L Ayres, Cllr. L Ball,  
Cllr. K S Bayley, Cllr. I Bosley, Cllr. Mrs E Bracken, Cllr. R Brookbank,  
Cllr. C Brown, Cllr M Butler, Cllr. Ms I Chetram, Cllr. C Clark,  
Cllr. Mrs C Clark, Cllr. P Cooke, Cllr Mrs J Davison, Cllr. R J Davison,  
Cllr. C Dibsall, Cllr. M Dickins, Cllr. J Edwards-Winser, Cllr. A Eyre,  
Cllr. Mrs A Firth, Cllr. M Fittock, Cllr. P Fleming, Cllr J Gaywood,  
Cllr. R Hogarth, Cllr. M Horwood, Cllr. Mrs A Hunter, Cllr. J London,  
Cllr Ms M Lowe, Cllr. K Maskell, Cllr. P McGarvey, Cllr. Mrs F Parkin,  
Cllr. A Pett, Cllr. R Piper, Cllr. Mrs E Purves, Cllr. S Raikes,  
Cllr. B Ramsey, Cllr. G Ryan, Cllr. Mrs J Sargeant, Cllr. J Scholey,  
Cllr. T Searles, Cllr. J Thornton, Cllr. J Underwood and Cllr. R Walshe

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr. Mrs P Bosley,  
Cllr Mrs A Cook, Cllr. Mrs A Dawson, Cllr. Mrs A George, Cllr. J Grint,  
Cllr. Miss L Stack, Cllr. P Towell and Cllr. G Williamson

### PRAYERS

Reverend Mitchell led the Council in prayers.

### **25. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

Resolved: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 26 July 2011 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### **26. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

The declarations of interest made by Members at meetings held between 6 July and 22 September 2011 were received. No additional declarations were made.

### **27. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman thanked Members for the concern shown for him during his recent illness and in particular for the many offers of transport he had received at that time.

The Chairman regretted to inform Members of the death of Louise Wilson, a former Member of the Council and a Kent County Council Member, who had passed away the previous week at the age of 92. She had been a member of the Council from its inception in 1973 representing Crockenhill and Well Hill ward until 1987.

Members were also reminded that they should contact the Chairman's Personal Assistant, Margaret Hagger by Friday 21 October if they wished to attend the forthcoming Christmas event.

The Chairman extended an invitation to Members to attend the Civic Service which would take place at 3.00 pm on Sunday 23 October at Edenbridge Parish Church.

**28. TO RECEIVE ANY PETITIONS SUBMITTED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC.**

The Chairman announced that no petitions had been submitted by members of the public.

**29. MATTERS CONSIDERED BY THE CABINET AND/OR OTHER COMMITTEES**

**A. West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016**

Cllr. Fleming moved and Cllr. Mrs Davison seconded the recommendation of the Cabinet held on 15 September 2011 that the West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-16 be adopted as District Council Policy.

The report explained that the draft Strategy had been developed in consultation with a wide range of service users and partners across various sectors and updated the Joint Homelessness Strategy 2007, although the new draft Strategy was significantly different from the 2007 document. Key themes that had emerged from consultation included a desire for more commonality in how the three West Kent local authorities (Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council, and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) worked. This included a need for more shared services, more innovation and sharing of knowledge, information and good practice, and opportunities to streamline services, processes and information. The draft Strategy provided the national, regional and local policy context, methods of consultation and key findings along with the five key strategic objectives and conclusions. The Strategy had already been adopted as policy by Tonbridge & Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils.

Cllr. Fittock welcomed the Strategy as a good and necessary approach to address the housing needs of the homeless. He voiced concerns about the possible impact of the decision to limit housing benefit payments for people aged under 35 to the shared room rate which was likely to force more people into homes in multiple occupation, which were sometimes quite primitive accommodation, and also questioned what other initiatives were proposed to deal with this. He also expressed concern that 32% of applicants for housing during the last year had not been deemed to be "in housing need" and felt that

areas of underperformance highlighted in the Strategy should be addressed. He also felt that the levels of both social housing stock and right-to-buy properties were falling and that it was likely that the percentage of long term tenancies was likely to increase further squeezing the availability of housing. Finally he welcomed the Council's strategies to deal with traveller needs which would also protect the Council's position if challenged.

The Leader of the Council explained that changes to welfare provision and the inclusion of housing benefit within the universal credit meant that 25-35 year olds would only be entitled to the shared room rental rate in future and that he had raised this at the Cabinet meeting to make it clear that the demand for accommodation in homes in multiple occupation was likely to increase and that this would need to be addressed in the Council's plans. He explained that he was very proud of the Council's achievements in recent years such as the commitment to reduce the use of bed and breakfast accommodation and the new policy around developer contributions which he felt would not deter development projects given that new housing would continue to be built as long as it was profitable to do so. He also felt that the Council had good policies in place to deal with traveller housing issues and to protect the Green Belt.

Resolved: That the West Kent Homelessness Strategy 2011-2016 be adopted as District Council policy.

#### B. Proposed Changes to Staff Terms and Conditions

Cllr. Fleming moved and Cllr. Mrs Davison seconded that the recommendations of the Cabinet held on 15 September 2011 and confirmed on 13 October 2011 be approved.

The report set out the proposals to achieve the savings included in the 10-Year Budget arising from changes to staff terms and conditions. The changes would be introduced on a phased basis to mitigate the impact on productivity and to ensure that residents continued to receive high quality, value for money services whilst delivering the level of savings required over the life of the 10-Year Budget. The proposals had been subject to extensive consultation with staff who had broadly understood the need for savings to be made and were supportive of the proposal as the "least worst option". The report outlined the consultation timetable and briefings which had begun in April 2011 with a view to the changes being introduced in April 2012. It was noted that in addition to briefings the staff most directly affected by the proposals had received one-to-one meetings.

The proposed changes to staff terms and conditions were outlined in Appendix A to the report and attention was drawn to the comments received from staff in response to the consultation process which ended on 6 September, which were summarised in Appendix B to the report along with the management response to those comments.

The Leader of the Council explained that the recommendations had been shaped by the Council's staff and had been subject to wide consultation.

When options for savings had been considered during the preparation of the 10-Year Budget it had been proposed that the outer fringe payment for staff would be withdrawn however this had been reconsidered as this was felt to have a disproportionate impact on lower paid staff. The proposed changes to pay and conditions would deliver the same level of savings over the ten year period but phased more evenly across that time and also contained an element of protection for staff on the affected grades.

Resolved: That

- (1) the changes to staff terms and conditions set out in the report and in Appendix A to the report be implemented from 1 April 2012; and
- (2) the 10-year budget be amended as shown in Appendix B to the report to take account of the phased introduction of these changes.

C. Review of IT Allowances/Provision of Computers for Members

Cllr. Fleming moved and Cllr. Mrs Davison seconded that the recommendations of the Modern Local Government Group held on 6 October 2011 be approved.

Members considered a report which reviewed whether an IT allowance should be added to the current Members' Allowance Scheme as recommended by the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP). The report explained that laptops had been provided to SDC Members in 2004 under a central government funded scheme whereby funding of £60,000 was secured which equipped all 54 Councillors with a basic laptop computer. However by the time of the May 2011 elections many of the original laptops had become obsolete or required disproportionate support from the IT Department and the central government funding was no longer available. The accessibility of information by Members had also changed in the intervening years and the Council had developed a simple approach to Members' access to Council information and communications via a new Members' Electronic Portal, an extranet which made it possible to have web-based access to the e-mail system and all the necessary information systems and databases. As a consequence Members could access all of the information that they required to perform their duties securely from any internet access point including a home computer.

The Leader of the Council explained that it was no longer possible for the Council to provide a new laptop computer for every member of the Council nor to continue to provide the level of support that would have been required to support those laptops. The proposals recognised that there was no separate IT allowance currently as the allowance for Broadband had already been withdrawn from the Scheme. However the JIRP had considered that it was appropriate for Councillors to be able to claim a separate allowance as a contribution towards the cost of purchasing or maintaining a computer and to even out imbalances in the current provision for Members. The JIRP had also recognised that the current Basic Allowance in the Council's Scheme of

Allowances had been set at a lower level than that recommended by the Panel for adoption and suggested that the new IT allowance should be withdrawn should the Council decide to increase the Basic Allowance to the recommended level. The Council was being asked to make the necessary changes to the Scheme of Members' Allowances in the Constitution.

Resolved: That the Council, in giving consideration to the Report and recommendations of the Joint Independent Remuneration Panel (JIRP) as included in Appendix A to the report, and the comments of the Modern Local Government Group on 6 October 2011

(1) adopts the allowance as set out in paragraph 7 of the report, as recommended by the JIRP, with minor changes of wording to recommendations 7(a) and 7(c) suggested by the Modern Local Government Group, and be met from within budget for 2011/12 and as a growth item for future years;

(2) updates Appendix G Clause 3.7 of the Constitution in its entirety as set out within Appendix B to the report incorporating the allowance as set out in (1) above; and

(3) formally records thanks to the members of the JIRP, Barry Cushway, Sue Holes, Simon Knott, Jean Selmes and Colin Wilby for their work in preparing the review of IT allowances and provision of computers for Members.

**30. REPORTS FROM THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OR OTHER DIRECTORS ON MATTERS REQUIRING THE ATTENTION OF COUNCIL**

A. Appointments to the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors

Councillor Fleming moved and Councillor Mrs Davison seconded the recommendations in the report for appointments to the new Member and Officer Local Democracy and Accountability Networks set up by South East Employers.

Resolved: That

(1) Councillors Miss Stack and Raikes be appointed to serve on the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Councillors for the remainder of the Municipal Year; and

(2) Appointments to the Local Democracy and Accountability Network for Officers be made at the discretion of the Chief Executive.

**31. TO CONSIDER ANY QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS UNDER PARAGRAPH 19.3 OF THE CONSTITUTION**

No questions were submitted by Members in accordance with Paragraph 19.3 of Part 2 of the Constitution.

**32. TO RECEIVE ANY QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC UNDER PARAGRAPH 17 OF PART 2 OF THE CONSTITUTION.**

No questions had been received from members of the public.

**33. TO RECEIVE THE REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL ON THE WORK OF THE CABINET SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING.**

The Leader of the Council reported on the work that he and the Cabinet had undertaken in the period 8 July to 5 October 2011.

The Leader thanked Members for supporting the new grant scheme to distribute money available through the Big Community Fund and noted that the first tranche of successful applications were being progressed and that the second tranche would be considered shortly. He also updated Members on the work of the Kent Ambition Board 2 which had just held its third meeting and would be focussing on health and education initiatives for young people. The Leader also highlighted a meeting of the West Kent and East Sussex mini Local Enterprise Partnership which had been attended by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council together with councils from East Sussex to identify areas where the Councils could work together before raising initiatives with the full Local Enterprise Partnership. Opportunities currently being considered included rural Broadband, transport issues, mainly associated with the A21, and rail transport including the Hastings line. In response to a question from a Member regarding the Council's involvement with the National Endowment for Science Technology and Arts and the Local Government Group Creative Council's the Leader explained that he had an involvement "wearing another hat" but was hoping to be able to access some of the £35m funding available through NESTA.

**34. TO RECEIVE A REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMEN OF THE SELECT COMMITTEES ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEES SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING.**

The Council received the reports from the Chairmen of the Select Committees as follows:

- Environment Select Committee – 6 September 2011
- Social Affairs Select Committee – 8 September 2011
- Services Select Committee – 20 September 2011

**35. TO RECEIVE A REPORT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PERFORMANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE ON THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE SINCE THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING.**

The Council received the report from the Vice-Chairman of the Performance and Governance Committee on the work undertaken by the Committee at its meeting on 27 September 2011.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 7.28 pm

Chairman