

MINUTES

FINAL MEETING OF BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

26TH MARCH 2009 (9.30am start)

Present:

Councillors Atkins, Richard Baker, Roger Baker, Blaine, Bootiman, Burley, Colling, Drinkwater, Duggan, Fairbairn, Faulkner, Gillard, Jack Goodchild, Susan Goodchild, Goodwin, Grugeon, Gwynne Jones, Hand, Hollick, Johnston, King, Lee, Male, Mingay, Oliver, Record, Reedman, Rogers, Ross, Russell, Sadler, Saunders, Scott, Shingler, Spurr, Stay, Street, Summerfield, Swaisland, Walker, Willey, Wootton and Younger

08-09cc90 PRAYERS

The Reverend Richard Hibbert, Christ Church, Denmark Street Bedford led the Council in prayer.

08-09Ccc91 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Elford, Gaszcak, Howard and Piggott.

08-09cc92 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 12th February 2009 be confirmed and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

08-09cc93 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No Member declared an interest in any of the items on the Council agenda.

08-09cc94 COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILOR ROBIN YOUNGER

1. Running of the meeting

Councillor Younger, Chairman orally reported on how he proposed to conduct the business of this meeting given the large number of items on the Council Agenda. He indicated that at the end of the normal business (Part 1 of the Agenda) which he hoped to conclude by 11.45am there would be a short adjournment of the Council meeting to enable stakeholders, guest speakers to join the meeting. When the meeting re-commenced he proposed to move a motion for the suspension of Council procedures under Rule 21, to enable guest speakers to speak at the meeting. Council Procedure Rules would be re-applied for the final Item of Council Business to enable him as Chairman to formally deal with the closure of the Council.

2. Thanks to Officers/Councillors

Councillor Younger said that today was a very difficult meeting for him given it was

the last meeting of Bedfordshire County Council and he would say more about that under the final item on the Council's Agenda.

This was the last meeting for all County Councillors and officers who have worked so very hard to provide services for the people of Bedfordshire. A number of Councillors would be looking forward to working in the new Councils but many may not be standing so this would be their last meeting. He did not plan to mention all Councillors by name but would want to make reference to those Councillors who had had 12 or more years of **continuous service** with Bedfordshire. In order of length of service, they were:

Councillor Kay Burley with **25 years service**.

Councillor Richard Baker with **24 years service**.

Councillors Brian Piggott and John Saunders with **20 years service**.

Councillors Tony Duggan, Roger Gwynne Jones, Peter Hollick, John Scott and Robin Younger with **16 years service**.

Councillors Alan Carter, Gordon Colling, Rhys Goodwin, David Reedman and Richard Stay with **12 years service**.

He wished them and all other County Councillors the very best for the future whatever their plans.

Councillor Younger wished to place on record the deep appreciation and grateful thanks of the County Council to the Chief Executive, Directors and Staff. He stated "I am on record as saying that I have never come across such a cadre of skilful and high performing senior officers. It is not just their individual skills and professional expertise which has been so apparent; it is teamwork which has driven the way the whole County Council has delivered services of the highest order to the public of Bedfordshire.

Leader and Chief Executive, Director and Cabinet Member, Staff and County Councillors; all worked together so closely to produce the first class teamwork that has delivered those services so effectively and efficiently. The amount of awards and plaudits that have been received is all too evident of that teamwork. What might well have been further achieved in the future if that team had been allowed to carry on is now, a matter for history to judge. But the public of Bedfordshire have been well served by everyone here."

08-09cc95 EXECUTIVE REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chairman reported that there were no recommendations for Council consideration arising from the recent meeting of the Executive.

08-09cc96 REPORT AND QUESTIONS TO CABINET MEMBERS

Councillor Madeline Russell moved her report and those from cabinet members on bloc without any formal introductions. There were no oral questions put to cabinet members.

a) Report from Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council

The Council received a report from Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council which outlined work undertaken since the last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years.

b) Report from Councillor Richard Stay, Cabinet Member for Finance

The Council received a report from Councillor Richard Stay, Cabinet Member for Finance which outlined work undertaken since his last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within his portfolio of responsibility.

c) Report from Councillor David Reedman, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

The Council received a report from Councillor David Reedman, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People which outlined work undertaken since his last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within his portfolio of responsibility.

d) Report from Councillor Peter Hollick, Cabinet Member for Community Service

The Council received a report from Councillor Peter Hollick, Cabinet Member for Community Service which outlined work undertaken since his last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within his portfolio of responsibility.

e) Report from Councillor John Street, Cabinet Member for Customer Service

The Council received a report from Councillor John Street, Cabinet Member for Customer Service which outlined work undertaken since his last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within his portfolio of responsibility.

f) Report from Councillor Rita Drinkwater, Cabinet Member for Education

The Council received a report from Councillor Rita Drinkwater, Cabinet Member for Education which outlined work undertaken since her last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within her portfolio of responsibility.

g) Report from Councillor Tom Wootton, Cabinet Member for Highways and Waste

The Council received a report from Councillor Tom Wootton, Cabinet Member for Highways and Waste which outlined work undertaken since his last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within his portfolio of responsibility.

h) Report from Councillor John Scott, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth

The Council received a report from Councillor John Scott, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth which outlined work undertaken since his last report to the Council and summarised the Council's achievements over the last four years within his portfolio of responsibility.

i) WRITTEN QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

In accordance with Councillor Procedure Rules, Councillor Peter Blaine put the following written question to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Waste, Councillor Tom Wootton:

"For around two years some "bus lanes" in London have been available for use by motorcycles. I understand that this trial has produced no significant problems and motorcycle use has been extended to more "bus lanes". When will motorcycles be permitted to use "bus lanes" in Bedfordshire?"

Response by Councillor Tom Wootton, Cabinet Member for Highways and Waste:

"The use of motorcycles in bus lanes was only recently adopted as policy in London by Mayor Boris Johnson after his election in May 2008, although a small number of discreet trials did take place prior to this.

Officers have investigated the possibility of adopting this type of policy in Bedfordshire with a view to running a trial in Bedford town and the necessary approvals have been sought from the Department for Transport. Consequently it is not possible to state when trials might begin."

In response to a further question Councillor Wootton confirmed that he would pursue this issue, as far as was practicable, whilst he was still in office as Cabinet Member.

08-09cc97 AUDIT COMMITTEE – ANUAL STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Council considered a report and recommendation from the Audit Committee about the Annual Statement of Accounts for 2008/09 based on the third quarter closedown of the accounts at 31st December 2008.

Councillor Roger Gwynne Jones, Chairman of the Audit Committee drew attention to the following points in the report:-

- The robust financial management in place with a forecast underspend of £246k, a variation of only 0.1% against the budget requirement. (Since the figures for the third quarter report were produced, the position had continued to be monitored closely, and the forecast outturn was now a £47k overspend. The movement was mostly due to the recent national pay award.)
- Reserves were at £13.7m; in line with the Budget Strategy agreed by the Council in February 2008. The overall level of earmarked reserves had reduced by £7.2m as existing reserves had been utilised for their intended purpose which is normal practice but new reserves had not been created at this time.

- There was a 'loss' on sale of assets of £69m. This was a technical accounting entry, having no effect on the general fund balances, and reflected the change in status of a number of schools becoming trust/foundation schools and consequently no longer being assets on the County's Balance Sheet.
- There had been little movement on the level of debt – some borrowing was taken in advance of the current financial year and there has been a general slow down in the capital programme and hence the financing required.

Whilst the third quarter close was an extensive exercise building on the one in 2007/08, the financial information was nevertheless incomplete, as it was based on information as at 31 December 2008. Specific attention was drawn to three key areas:

- There had been a significant downturn in the property market. The impact of this as at 31 March 2009 has not yet been assessed and the accounts prepared at the end of June would doubtless include a significant 'impairment' and hence writing down of the value of fixed assets.
- There would be an offsetting entry to this as the 'additions' to asset values are also unknown at this time. There was always uncertainty as to the exact completion date of capital schemes and the position at 31 March 2009 had not been estimated at this point.
- The FRS17 (pension) adjustments had not been made to the accounts as the necessary information from the actuary was not available at this time.

The production of these accounts had also been used to bring forward actions that would enable the full year Statement of Accounts to be completed more swiftly. The completion of the year-end Statement of Accounts for Bedfordshire County Council is the responsibility of Central Bedfordshire, supported by Bedford Borough.

The Audit Committee agreed that the accounts were a good foundation for the final accounts that would be produced by the end of June 2009. These would, in turn, be a robust basis for the new unitaries to disaggregate assets and balances. The County Council's legacy would, in this regard, be a robust foundation for sound financial control going into 2009/10.

Councillor Richard Stay, Cabinet Member for Finance endorsed the work of the Audit Committee and its Chairman, Councillor Roger Gwynne Jones and paid tribute to Peter Lewis, Director of Finance and Human Resources and his team for their work. He concluded that the County Council was leaving a very robust financial picture. He expressed his extreme irritation at recent media references to "black holes" in the County's accounts. The Council emphatically asked that it be placed on record that there is no 'black hole' in the Council's accounts. This position had been confirmed by the Director of Finance and Human Resources, Bedfordshire County Council; the Director of Finance, Bedford Borough Council and the Council's Audit Committee.

Councillor Stay also referred to recent references to the debts of the County Council. He reiterated the need for Council's providing the breadth of services provided by the County to have to borrow money to invest in the infra structure. The County had over £1 billion of assets and its ratio of debts against assets was very sound.

Councillor Colling whilst recognising the current sound position on the accounts reminded the Council of the poor starting position following the then Administration's

decision to outsource the back office functions to Hyder Business Services and its costing a “small fortune” to terminate the contract. (see response to this point by Leader of Council under minute on the Performance Report).

Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council drew attention to the robust financial position of the Council arising from its strong budget management, the provision of value for money and the Council’s achievements in meeting its efficiency targets and going beyond these targets. She paid tribute to Peter Lewis and his team and also to Cajetan Chukwolezie, the former Head of Internal Audit, for their outstanding work on budget management.

RESOLVED:

1. That the third quarter Statement of Accounts based on figures as at 31st December 2008, be noted and received.
2. That the Council notes the robust financial position to be handed over to the successor unitary authorities.

08-09cc98 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

The Council considered a report from Tasnim Shawkat, Assistant Director Corporate Governance concerning the Annual Governance Statement which the Council was required to make and needed to be signed by the Leader and the Chief Executive of the Council in accordance with CIPFA/SOLACE.

Councillor Madeline Russell indicated that a number of people had been involved in the preparation of the Statement and she moved its acceptance which was duly seconded by Councillor Roger Gwynne Jones and agreed by the Council.

RESOLVED:

That the Annual Governance Statement signed by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive as now submitted, be approved.

08-09cc99 REPORTS FROM NON-EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

a) Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Jane Walker, Chairman presented the report which outlined the achievements of the Committee and the former Select Committee over the Council’s four year term. She drew attention to the contribution played by witnesses from the wider community that assisted in policy development activities and also the vital role played by young people and looked after children who attended as witnesses.

The report also included a summary of the important work undertaken by the Corporate Parenting Panel chaired by Councillor Peter Swaisland.

Councillor Walker paid tribute to the support given to the Committee by members of the Committee including its co-opted parent and church representatives. She expressed special thanks to Malcolm Newsam, Director of Children’s Services; to Councillors Drinkwater and Reedman Cabinet Members and to Peter Storey, Clerk to the Committee.

Councillor Rita Drinkwater thanked the Committee for their outstanding work both in challenging matters and also in supporting her in her work. She was particularly pleased with their engagement with young people which was good practice.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

b) Community Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Brian Sadler, Chairman presented his report which outlined the achievements of the Committee over the past four years and in so doing drew attention to some specific projects with which the Committee had been involved.

He thanked members of the Committee for their work and support. He expressed his and the Committee's sincere thanks and appreciation to Charlie McNally, former Director of Community Services and Ian Porter, Assistant Director for their support. He also expressed his special thanks to Greg Jeffrey, Committee Adviser for the professional way in which he had supported him and the Committee. He also thanked his Vice-Chairman Councillor Jack Goodchild for his work and support.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

c) Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Peter Blaine, Chairman presented his report which outlined the achievements of the Committee over the past four years. He referred to the significant volume of work and projects undertaken by the Committee.

He expressed his thanks to fellow members of the Committee and particularly to Councillor Steve Male, his Vice-Chairman who had played a significant role in the work of the Committee. He expressed his special thanks to Tasnim Shawkat, Assistant Director Corporate Governance for her tremendous help on the Committee and to Mel Peaston, Committee Adviser who had been a wonderful support to him and the Committee.

Councillor Male, Vice Chairman also added his vote of thanks to Tasnim Shawkat for the breath of fresh air she had brought to the Committee which had helped it develop as a Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

d) Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Brian Spurr, Chairman presented the report of the Committee which outlined the achievements over the past four years. He drew attention to the number of the significant projects that the Committee had been involved with. He expressed his particular thanks for the dedicated work of Councillor Brian Piggott who had been Chairman of the Committee until the last few months.

Councillor Spurr also paid tribute to all members of the Committee and thanked Councillors Wootton and Scott, Cabinet Members for their support. He paid tribute to Richard Watts, Director of Environment for his support and to an officer who he felt was one of the best Directors the Council has had. He also thanked Peter Storey, Committee Adviser who had been superb.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

e) Bedfordshire Health and Adult Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Steve Male, Chairman presented the report of the Committee outlining its achievements over the past four months. He drew attention to the variety of work undertaken by the Committee.

He posed the question whether or not the Committee had been successful in its work. He responded by drawing attention to a letter from the Chief Executive, NHS East to Go East as appended to the report. The Committee had been asked to lead on a joint review of the Strategic Strategy Clinical Vision – Towards the Best. In the response to Go East the Chief Executive of NHS East of England had drawn attention to the excellent response received from the joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee that was set up to scrutinise the proposals. He went on to indicate that 'it seems to me that this provides an excellent example of what can be achieved by proper partnership working and may be worth bringing to the attention of others. If you would like a fuller briefing on any aspect of this, please do not hesitate to contact me.'

Councillor Male also referred to the significant underspending in NHS Bedfordshire; it was 3½% short on its funding, compared to the allocation that the Department of Health needs analysis indicated it should have. The service demands remained and the NHS bodies had in the past spent at, or near, the level of their allocation. Any over-spends were carried forward from one year to the next and this compounded the spending shortfall in any single year. He hoped that the new authorities would work together to press the Government to meet this short fall in funding.

Councillor Male thanked the members of the Committee for their work and support. He expressed his special thanks to Bill Hamilton, Adviser to the committee and to Mel Peaston, Clerk to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

f) Audit Committee

Councillor Roger Gwynne Jones, Chairman presented the report of the Audit Committee covering work over the past four years. He said that every recommendation from the Audit Commission or the internal Audit Team was reported to the Committee, reviewed and followed up on.

He expressed his thanks to members of the Committee and officers who supported them.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

g) Development Control Committee

Councillor Roy Johnston, Chairman presented the report of the Committee covering its work over the last four years which he said was self-explanatory. He reminded Council that the work of this Committee was more high profile given some of the significant planning applications it needed to determine. This was particularly challenging to officers and members and he thanked them for their work.

He expressed his personal thanks to Councillor Vic Lee, Vice Chairman who he had worked with closely and who had supported him. He also expressed his thanks to members of the Committee and officers who had supported the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

h) Pension Fund Committee

Councillor Roger Gwynne Jones, Chairman presented the report which covered the work of the Committee over the last four years. He referred to the credit crunch and the volatile nature of the market. He suggested that all things being equal – with rising interest rates in the next few years - the long term prospects would be good. He thanked his fellow trustees for their work and officers who supported the Committee.

Councillor Stay expressed his thanks for the work undertaken by Councillor Gwynne Jones on this Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

i) Standards Committee

Councillor Bob King, Vice Chairman presented the work of the Committee covering achievements over the last four years. He expressed his thanks to Ken Frazer, Independent Chairman for all his work on the Committee and to the other independent members.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received.

08-09cc100 MINUTES OF NON-EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES

a) Audit Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 16th March 2009 having been submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received.

b) Development Control Committee

The minutes of the meetings of the Development Control Committee held on 28th January and 5th March 2009 having been submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received.

c) Standards Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 5th December 2008 having been submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received.

d) Pension Fund Committee

The minutes of the meeting of the Pension Fund Committee held on 18th February 2009 having been submitted.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes be received.

08-09cc101 BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY

The report from the meeting of the Bedfordshire Police Authority held on 13th February 2009 was submitted. Councillor Hollick, representative of the Police Authority elaborated on issues contained in the report. He thanked the members from the County Council who served on the Committee and fellow representatives from Luton Borough Council. He informed the Council that there was uncertainty about the membership of the Police Authority from the two unitary authorities from 1 April, and until this was settled he was not sure how many members would be serving from each of those two authorities prior to the June 2009 elections.

He responded to questions put to him by members.

It was noted that there were no written questions submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.2.

08-09cc102 REPORT FROM BEDFORDSHIRE AND LUTON COMBINED FIRE AUTHORITY

Councillor Duggan, Chairman of the Fire Authority presented a report from a meeting of the Combined Fire Authority held on 6th February 2009. He paid tribute to the eight members from this Council who had served on the Fire Authority together with those appointed by Luton Borough Council. He indicated that the Fire Authority was in a good shape. He had been able to develop strong links both regionally and nationally through the Local Government Association, whose Fire Panel he had

chaired over the last eight months, and he particularly thanked Councillor Madeline Russell for her support.

Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council thanked Councillor Duggan for the first class job he had done in chairing the Combined Fire Authority. Councillor Duggan's work on the fire authority was well known both regionally and at a local level and he had been one of the county's best ambassadors. Councillor Shingler endorsed the views expressed by Madeline Russell and said that the Bedfordshire and Luton Combined Fire Authority was a highly regarded Authority which was a great tribute to the staff and to Councillor Tony Duggan as Chairman.

It was noted that there were no written questions submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11.2.

08-09cc103 PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2003/04 – 2008/09

The Council considered a report from Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council about the Council's performance for the period 2003/04 to 2008/09 and which highlighted the Council's performance journey. Councillor Russell expressed her pleasure in moving a motion for the Council's acceptance of the performance report as a legacy to the new Unitaries. She paid tribute and expressed her thanks to Councillors elected in 2005, of which 50% were new, and were elected on the promise of turning the Council around and to the Officers who had jointly helped in the achievement of this goal.

Three stars was the County Council's legacy and whilst the Council had not been issued with a Direction of Travel Statement due to its abolition, if the Council had done so, it would have continued to be 'improving strongly'.

Councillor Russell also paid tribute to the stunning performance of the Environment Directorate in achieving four stars. Part of the success undoubtedly had been due to the innovative partnership with Amey. A recent survey among Town and Parish Councils in Bedfordshire showed the very high level of satisfaction about the performance of Amey.

Councillor Russell referred to an earlier comment by Councillor Colling under the Annual Statement of Accounts item about the termination of the HBS Contract costing the Council "a small fortune". She stressed that the only cost to the County Council was some £6.7m to purchase the assets in which HBS had invested. Councillor Russell, whilst acknowledging that the HBS contract should have been better managed, said that, as soon as it was clear that the Council was not deriving the expected benefits, the Administration took the decision to terminate the contract.

Councillor Russell, in commending the report to the Council, said that the Council's improvement from one to three stars was recognised nationally as the fastest turnaround anywhere in the country and the Performance Report as now submitted "speaks for itself".

Councillor Grugeon congratulated all Members/Officers for their dignity in continuing to improve service provision in the final year of the Council. He referred to the improvements made in education over the past two years which would be a challenge for the new Unitary authorities to take forward.

Councillor Blaine referred to his term on the Council in the 1980's which was an institution that he was proud of. He said that when he returned to the Council in 2001

the difference in the Authority was obvious and his view was that the Council had failed to deal with the changes placed on it. From 2005 however, with a new Council and the appointment of a new Chief Executive and Management Team, considerable improvements were made and he was now again proud to be a Member of Bedfordshire County Council. He went on to indicate that although a star rating was a useful indicator, the real test was how the people of Bedfordshire felt about the service they were getting. He felt that the loss of the County Council had resulted in its replacement by a unitary authority covering the Mid and South Beds areas of the County to which electors would not naturally relate. He referred to the Performance Report and whilst acknowledging that there had been improvements in education results in Bedfordshire, he felt that the Authority should be doing better than the national average.

Councillor Scott, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Growth, paid tribute to the four star achievement of the Environment Service. He stated that Bedfordshire, a small Authority, was achieving a great deal and “punching above its weight”. He referred to two recent successes namely the agreement of the Core Strategy for South Bedfordshire and the launch of the Local Delivery Vehicle.

Councillor Hollick expressed his pleasure at being Cabinet Member for Community Services and referred to the tremendous improvements in Adult Care. He recorded his thanks to Councillor Bob King, former Cabinet Member for his stewardship in this area.

Councillor Drinkwater, Cabinet Member for Education referred to the incredible journey of the Council since 2005. The Council had set her and the Children’s Services Directorate a huge challenge to improve education results, a challenge which she believed had been met. She expressed her personal thanks and the Council’s thanks to Malcolm Newson for his inspirational leadership.

Councillor Reedman, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, added that some of the improvements in children’s care were due in part to the introduction of new procedures and practices which had resulted in the outstanding services now being provided by the Council. This was also due in part to the closer working relationship and support that had been developed with the voluntary sector, and the sharing of information.

Councillor Johnstone said that his impression of the County Council was that it had been fantastic and he would take this philosophy forward when working in the new unitary authority.

The Council unanimously received the Performance Report.

RESOLVED:

That the Performance Report for 2003/04 – 2008/09 as now submitted showing the Council’s tremendous improvement journey from a one star to a three star Authority be noted and received.

08-09cc104 VOTE OF THANKS TO CHAIRMAN, COUNCILLOR ROBIN YOUNGER

At this point of the meeting, with the approval of the Council, Councillor Madeline Russell asked the Council to consider the following motion:

“1. The County Council tender to Councillor Robin Younger their sincere thanks for the service rendered by him in the discharge of the important and exacting duties of the office of Chairman of the County Council for the period from 10th May 2007 until 31st March 2009 and to Mrs Carol Younger, their gratitude for her invaluable support to Robin during this period.

2. That an engrossment be signed ”

The motion was duly seconded and approved by the Council.

At this point in the meeting (12.05 pm) there was a 10 minute adjournment of the Council to enable some guest speakers to attend the last session of the Council meeting.

08-09cc105 CLOSURE OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

The meeting of the County Council resumed at approximately 12.15 pm, at which point the Chairman asked the Council to consider the following motion:

“That the suspension of Council Procedure Rules under Rule 21 be agreed to enable guest speakers to speak at the meeting. Council procedures will re-apply for the final item when, as Chairman I will formally deal with the formal closure of this final meeting of the County Council.”

The motion was wholeheartedly supported by Members and agreed by the Council.

Councillor Robin Younger, Chairman introduced the second part of the meeting which would celebrate the proud 120-year history of the County Council.

He extended a warm welcome to the guest speakers Councillor Margaret Eaton, Chairman of the Local Government Association and Councillor Tim Palmer, Chairman of the County Councils’ Network, both of whom would be giving keynote addresses to the Council.

He also welcomed with pleasure Councillor John Reynolds, Chairman of the East of England Regional Assembly; Councillor Robert Gordon, Chairman of the East of England Strategic Authority Leaders’ group; and Councillor Henry Smith, Chairman of the South East County Leaders’ Group.

Councillor Younger said that it is always a pleasure to see familiar County Council faces of the past and he welcomed the following:

Angela Roberts, former Leader of the Council
Allan Chapman, former Chairman of the Council
Janice Gwilliam, former Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group
Peter Roberts, former County Councillor
David Bell, former Chief Executive of the Council

The Chairman also welcomed some of the Council’s key partners, namely:

Graeme Smith, Acting Chief Fire Officer, Bedfordshire and Luton Fire and Rescue Service; Andrew Morgan, Chief Executive of Bedfordshire Primary Care Trust; and

Tim Allen, Programme Director for Research and Knowledge Management at the LGA.

And last but not least he was delighted to welcome, Alistair Burt, Conservative MP for North East Bedfordshire.

Councillor Younger informed Council that the 68 members of the new Bedfordshire County Council were elected on 24 January 1889. The first meeting of the County Council took place at Shire Hall, Bedford, on 7 February 1889. Charles Magniac of Colmworth, the former Liberal MP for North Bedfordshire, was elected Chairman of the County Council.

They started what was to become an amazing journey for Bedfordshire County Council through two world wars, tremendous social and cultural changes, and much innovation, much of which would be covered throughout this final session.

Councillor Robin Younger, Chairman invited Councillor Margaret Eaton OBE, Chairman of the Local Government Association to address the Council. He reported that Councillor Margaret Eaton OBE was elected Chairman of the Local Government Association in September 2008, having served on Bradford Metropolitan District Council, since May 1986.

08-09cc106 Councillor Margaret Eaton OBE

Councillor Margaret Eaton, Chairman of the LGA thanked Members for inviting her to speak at this final meeting of Bedfordshire County Council. As Chairman of the LGA her intention was to visit as many Councils as she could. She congratulated the present Bedfordshire County Councillors and previous Councillors for their valuable work for the people of Bedfordshire. Councillor Eaton indicated that although Central Government had a key role in setting the national agenda, the Government was in many ways very remote and it was locally elected Members who were the lynchpin of the community. The service demands on Local Government were now greater than ever which required bold decisions and innovative working on the part of the County Council and she paid tribute to Bedfordshire Councillors for continuing to deliver services and keeping morale high during its final year of existence.

She expressed her sadness that after 120 years, the County Council was being abolished and referred to its many outstanding achievements and its modernisation over the years. She concluded by wishing Members a long, bright and very successful future.

08-09cc107 Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council

Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council, spoke to Council as follows:

Bedfordshire County Council ends 120 years of stewardship of the County on Tuesday.

Bedfordshire may seem a small, rural county but history shows that its citizens have always had 'big' ideas and the local authority has often been at the forefront of innovation. Of course, the history of the County Council is only a small part of the heritage of Bedfordshire as a place. The first mention of Bedfordshire as an entity dates back 1000 years to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle of 1011.

The English Shire is one of the most ancient units of local government. Bedfordshire's origins lie with the midland shires created by the Anglo-Saxons following their defeat of the Danes in the 10th century. The county has given people a sense of place for 1,000 years. During that time, its administration has taken many forms.

The Shire Reeve or Sheriff was the principal officer of the County from the 10th century, acting as the King's agent. The Sheriff ran the Assize Court and was responsible for prisons. In 1586, Henry Grey, 6th Earl of Kent, was commissioned as Bedfordshire's first Lord Lieutenant. Since then, except for a confused period in the Civil War, the succession of lieutenants has been unbroken and for over 60 of the last 100 years, the Lord Lieutenant has been a Whitbread –culminating with our current Lord Lieutenant, Sam Whitbread, since 1991.

At the end of the 19th century, changes wrought by the industrial revolution and increasing urbanisation demanded a new form of effective government at the local level. The Local Government Act 1888 created Bedfordshire County Council as one of a new national network of 56 elected County Councils.

The Council chose as its motto 'Constant Be' from John Bunyan's hymn. The usual meaning of the word 'constant' is unchanging. Over its 120 years, the history of the County Council has been rich and varied, certainly not unchanging. But constant can also mean reliable and dependable – which we hope our services are – and resolute and determined – which we have been in pursuing what is best for Bedfordshire.

Our County Council has been groundbreaking in its time –

- Bedfordshire Record Office founded in 1913 was the first of its kind in the Country;
- By serving school meals in Sharnbrook in 1925, we were one of the first councils to do so in rural areas
- Bedfordshire took full advantage of powers granted in 1929 to produce an overall plan for the County. The report published in 1937 paved the way for the County Development Plans required by the 1947 Planning Act.
- In the 1980s, we led the successful campaign against Nirex's plans to store low-level nuclear waste at Elstow – an early example of community leadership.
- More recently, we were one of the first councils to introduce the Cabinet system of governance.

Over the decades, services, functions and responsibilities have been added, expanded or removed from the County's remit. For example:

- Our education service was not set up until 1905.
- With the advent of the motor car, we were given responsibility for licensing both vehicles and drivers. This only came to an end when the DVLA was formed in the 1960s.
- Our health functions were removed when the National Health Service was set up in 1948.
- After the Second World War, we took responsibility for the Fire and Ambulance services.

Through all these changes, the focus has been service to the individual and service to the community. And we continue to be proud of our services and our Council now that we have regained our rightful place in the local government family.

Only a few years ago Bedfordshire was dubbed the 'worst county council in the country'. The Audit Commission assessed the Council as 'poor' in the new Comprehensive Performance Assessment in 2002 and we were in special measures for Children's Social Services.

At the beginning of this Council, we had achieved a one-star rating and the council-wide change programme 'Transforming Bedfordshire' had been launched. But there was still much to be done if we were to achieve our objective of the Council becoming a 3 star authority. We called this challenge our 'Race against Time'.

In November 2005, Andrea and I used a Managers' Action Conference and staff roadshows to talk about our vision for achieving 3 stars in our CPA assessment 17 months later. We said that we needed to quicken the pace of change, that we could not achieve success without the staff, that they were the people who could make a difference. We borrowed the NIKE slogan and told them to 'Just do it'. We also recognised that when you innovate, you sometimes make mistakes. We told staff that they would have our full support if they made a mistake – although we might be a bit annoyed if they kept making the same mistakes! Staff took us at our word. They were motivated and got on and made the changes that they could see were needed.

It was not a straightforward journey and there were brave decisions along the way including ending the contract with HBS and letting staff go who did not want to change with the Council. None of it was easy and it required a great deal of hard work from both staff and Members. It also required a culture change to something much more positive and 'can do'.

But we were successful. Our Corporate Inspection in March 2007 confirmed Bedfordshire as a 'good' council and we officially became a 3 star authority in July 2007. It was an achievement of which we could all be proud and we celebrated in style at the LGA conference in Birmingham.

Achieving three stars was important not only because it demonstrated that the County Council was no longer a poorly performing authority but because it meant we were making a real difference to people's lives. And it showed what a fantastic amount of talent there was in the County Council - everyone had made a contribution

In February 2008, the County Council received the highest rating - 'improving strongly' – in its annual 'Direction of Travel' assessment. This, along with our 3 Stars, meant that we were the second highest performing strategic council in the East of England. And earlier this month, the Audit Commission confirmed that Bedfordshire County Council would end as a 'good' or 3 star authority. We did not receive an official direction of travel statement this year but the improvement in our key performance indicators during the year would have justified a further 'improving strongly'.

We are particularly pleased with our Level 4 for Environment Services – all of us know that this area forms the bulk of our postbags! And we are very proud of our Level 4 for Children's Safeguarding.

But being a good Council is about more than good services – and, dare I say, more than CPA. It is about having a vision for Bedfordshire, understanding our communities and their issues and inspiring everyone to work together to achieve what Bedfordshire needs and wants.

We set up our Countywide Partnership – an LSP by another name – and our Countywide Assembly for wider consultation and reviewed our Sustainable Community Strategy. We produced a first-class evidence base and then gained agreement from our partners on what the priorities are for Bedfordshire. The Local Area Agreement became, effectively, the delivery plan for those aspirations. That evidence base is still valid – Bedfordshire’s needs haven’t changed dramatically – and I am pleased that the new authorities LAAs will take the delivery plans forward.

The part of the Sustainable Community Strategy that was particularly relevant to the County Council was embodied in our own vision document, ‘Making Bedfordshire Thrive’. This was originally launched in May 2005 with short term priorities for turning the Council round and medium and long-term priorities focussing on the needs of Bedfordshire and its residents. We revised it in 2007 when we had achieved the short term priorities.

Making Bedfordshire Thrive gave us a strong vision and enabled us to allocate our budget to our real priorities.

We have planned for the County’s growing need for additional new homes by supporting developments such as the Wixams, which will be one of the largest new sustainable communities to be built in the UK. We have also focused on improving road and rail infrastructure in Bedfordshire to support this growth.

Growth also demands jobs – already too many people commute out of Bedfordshire every day. We have lost our old industries – market gardening and manufacturing – and our future lies with high tech, science-based industries and with tourism. Much of our work has been to encourage both of these sectors.

Links have been built with the University of Bedfordshire and Cranfield University to commercialise the fruits of their research.

The Council has been in discussion with an American consortium looking for locations around the world for implementation of a Science City concept, with huge potential benefits from inward investment and the growth of high tech companies. Bedfordshire is well positioned to take advantage of such opportunities as they arise.

We encouraged Center Parcs to develop their fifth village in Bedfordshire and we have supported the Nirah project for some five years. This is an ambitious scheme to convert a former quarry into the world’s first freshwater sanctuary, for conservation, education, science and entertainment. Nirah will really put Bedfordshire on the map.

And we have worked to bring an end to the importation of waste into the county. We don’t want waste from elsewhere but wish to be self-sufficient in dealing with our own waste. This means trying to recycle as much as possible and dealing with the rest in an environmentally friendly way through providing energy from waste to heat homes.

At the same time as we were putting all this in place, however, we were also getting to grips with the Government’s unitary process.

The LGR White Paper was published in October 2006 and bids were required by January 2007. We were preparing for our CPA corporate inspection and Joint Area Review in March 2007 but the capacity which we had built in the organisation allowed us to do both.

This process would prove to be very convoluted and time-consuming, with the County Council producing four different submissions to government. Through it all, we presented a very strong case but ultimately, for, it would seem, political reasons, the Secretary of State decided that Bedfordshire should have two new unitary authorities.

I have to ask how the smallest county in the country can sustain three viable unitaries? Luton, which became unitary in 1997, has formally decided to ask for a boundary review. Milton Keynes wants to build houses in the west of the county. It is interesting to wonder what local governance in geographic Bedfordshire might look like in 100 years' time – or even a generation.

Anyway, in this round of reorganisation, we know we could not have done more. We put forward a good proposal; we are a good council; our performance, our people and our services are great.

But once we had the final decision, the only way forward was to do everything in our power to ensure that the changes were implemented in the best way possible for the people of Bedfordshire.

We set up a Transition Board to oversee the work needed to support the new councils and to close down the business of the County Council.

We set up a secure website for the Chief Executives of the new councils which contained information essential for setting up the two new authorities.

And we successfully disaggregated some 5,000 staff into two viable teams and through discussions with the new councils, reached agreement on which staff will TUPE where.

The East of England Regional Improvement and Efficiency Partnership commissioned a peer review of the transition process in Bedfordshire to inform any future local government restructuring. This has been led by Mark Lloyd, Chief Executive of Cambridgeshire. The peer review report states:

- Maintaining service delivery while managing transition is a major challenge. The County council focussed on its strengths – maintaining a tough culture of performance and delivery. Its effective performance management system has enabled the authority to focus activity on enhancing front line services whilst more than meeting its duty to cooperate with the creation of two new unitaries.
- Quite rightly, there is great pride in the professionalism of staff during transition maintaining and improving service performance in a highly demanding and stressful period.

We recognised that staff morale was key to maintaining and improving services and the Chief Executive, Martin Reeves, and I made it our top priority to talk to staff, to listen to their issues and keep them informed.

Our staff have been pivotal in our journey of the last few years. We have used the conference/roadshow formula to talk to staff at each critical point over those years and each time we have answered their questions as well as giving our messages. It has been a real privilege to relate to staff in this way.

We used the formula to launch From Good to Great, our programme for continued improvement after we had achieved three stars. It began with our middle managers leading the work on developing our organizational values. Shared values define the character of an organisation. They give a clear message about which behaviours will be encouraged and what is not acceptable. There was wide consultation with staff and the result was

DELIVERY - Do - Excel - Listen - Inspire - Value - Energise - Respect - You

After the final unitary decision, we used roadshows to give staff some key messages:

- We must give a great service to Bedfordshire right to the end – in fact we challenged staff to continue to improve our services.
- As individuals, they must make the most of the possibilities for their own careers
- They must use their expertise to find good workable options for the new councils
- That is how we will protect our services in transition and achieve most for Bedfordshire

And the staff response has been stunning. We had our best quarter's performance to date in the second quarter of last year and two-thirds of our key performance indicators continued to improve in the quarter to December. Staff achieved this at a time of great uncertainty for themselves.

80% of the staff in the new unitaries will be from the County Council and I am sure that, given the right leadership and resources, they will continue to do just as good a job for Bedfordshire.

And our good performance has been backed up by strong financial management and controls; effective use of resources; a well-managed capital programme and efficiency savings well beyond the Gershon requirements. This has provided a firm financial foundation for the new unitary councils to build upon.

Our success has been due to the Council's vision for fast improvement, its bold decision-making, determination and sheer hard work.

Being an external ambassador for the Council, it has been great to see attitudes changing as we improved. And it has been good to hear from people in Bedfordshire how they appreciate the changes. I would particularly like to thank our guests today from local government organisations. They have encouraged us on our journey and have been very supportive to me.

My thanks also go to the senior officers who have done so much to make the last few years such a triumph. Some are going to the new unitaries, others are taking up senior roles elsewhere. Along with their professional expertise, they all take with them our values and the experience of working in a first-class team. I know they will continue to be successful.

And thank you to Members of Council. We have made some tough decisions and faced challenging issues but our work has been very interesting and often fun. It has been a real privilege to be Leader of the Council over the last four years.

Some of you will know of my venture into Gilbert and Sullivan - it was a great way to vent the feelings of anger and injustice about what has happened.

Only those who have lived through the turmoil, insecurity, and numerous humiliations of the last twelve months will really understand the emotional impact for many of us of the loss of the County Council or appreciate the quite incredible achievements we have delivered in our final difficult year BUT my overwhelming feelings as the Council draws to an end are thanksgiving and pride.

Thanksgiving for the privilege of being part of the County Council story; thanksgiving for working with a great team of people.

Pride in all that we have achieved; pride in the 120 years of the County Council's history; pride in the legacy that we will leave through our people and our services.

We are going into the new, unitary era with our heads held high, knowing that as a County Council we have served Bedfordshire well.

And to finish on a philosophical note – Tennyson's poem, The Brook, has a couplet repeated several times - For men may come and men may go, But I go on for ever.

I paraphrase – For councils may come and councils may go, But Bedfordshire goes on forever.

At this stage, the Chairman gave Councillors the opportunity to add their own views.

Councillor Street referred to his election in 2005 (one of the 26 new Councillors elected that year), and the first meeting with Andrea Hill, the then Chief Executive. He recalls her clearly stating that Members did not know what they were letting themselves in for but together they were going to turn the Council around. It had been a breathtaking journey in turning the Council around and he paid particular tribute to the Directors and other Officers from the Customer Services Directorate, who had supported him as Cabinet Member for Customer Services. It had been his privilege to be part of that Team.

Councillor Blaine referred to his early experiences when he first stood for election as a Councillor in West Yorkshire County Council. When he was first elected to Bedfordshire County Council in the mid 80's, he felt most welcomed and proud to be a Member of the Council. He was particularly pleased to be a Member of the current County Council, given its current status as a "good" Authority.

Councillor Kay Burley, the longest serving Member of the County Council, also reflected on the changing role of Councillors over the years. She referred to her preference for the former Committee system with programme and service committees when in her view Councillors felt fully involved in the decision making process and were able to discuss matters in greater detail. The new Cabinet/Scrutiny process was far more removed. She emphasised the need for more women to get involved in politics as they were often aware of the local issues. This was the third reorganisation of Local Government during her period as a Councillor and the County Council had to accept that a decision had been made at national level that would impact on all Councillors. She was very pleased to have been a Councillor on Bedfordshire County Council, particularly the period when the County was a "hung council". She had enjoyed every minute of her role as a Councillor.

Councillor Drinkwater referred to her role as a County Councillor since her election in 2005 and as Cabinet Member for Education for the last three years. She had

enjoyed her term and had found the last four years an inspiration, particularly the speedy turnaround by the County Council to a three star Authority.

Councillor Lynne Faulkner said that she was part of the 2005 new intake of County Councillors, having served on various other local authorities previously. During her time on the County Council, she had served as a Cabinet Member and as Vice-Chairman of the Council. She was very proud of the achievements of the County Council under Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader, together with the support of Councillors and Officers.

Councillor Saunders expressed his privilege at being a Member of Bedfordshire County Council over 20 years. One of his interests was steam engines and he indicated that he was proud to be the owner of the first steamroller bought by the County Council and which was pictured in the official commemorative book.

Councillor Rogers expressed his privilege at being a County Councillor in Bedfordshire and referred to the kindness shown to him by other Members during his recent recovery from a heart attack.

08-09cc108 Address by Councillor Tim Palmer, Chairman of the County Councils' Network

Councillor Younger invited Councillor Tim Palmer, Chairman of the County Councils' Network to address the Council.

Councillor Palmer said that he had deep family roots in Bedfordshire, with his mother's family coming from Silsoe. He explained that the County Councils' Network was a special interest group of the Local Government Association. In addition to its County Council representation, one third of its Members would now be drawn from unitary authorities. Councillor Palmer said that his links with Bedfordshire County Council began some years earlier as Leader of Dorset County Council which was rated an "Excellent" Authority. He was part of a peer review group which included one of their officers, Peter Lewis, who was now Director of Finance with Bedfordshire and they had visited the County at its request following its poor Audit Commission rating, to review the position and to try to assist Bedfordshire in whatever way possible.

He paid tribute to the amazing turnaround that the County Council had made in performance moving from a one star to a three star Authority due primarily to the hard work of its Officers and Members. This tremendous achievement was recognised and talked about nationally.

Councillor Palmer emphasised the importance of County Councils in Local Government as they had a long history of representing the many very rural areas of the country. He paid tribute to the 120 years history of Bedfordshire County Council and all its achievements over those years as summarised by the Leader of the Council. He praised the historic nature of Local Government which comprised local elected people representing local communities as opposed to the increasing number of quangos that were being established comprising non elected people making decisions that impacted on many communities.

In conclusion, he drew attention to the proud 120 years history of Bedfordshire County Council and emphasised that although the County Council would no longer exist, Bedfordshire would continue to live on.

08-09cc109 HISTORY OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

The Chairman asked all present to sit back and relax during the showing of a short DVD which, in some small way, marked the long history of Bedfordshire County Council.

08-09cc110 VOTE OF THANKS TO COUNCILLOR ROBIN YOUNGER, CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL

At this point of the meeting Council, Councillor Madeline Russell, Leader of the Council formally presented an engrossment with a vote of thanks to Councillor Younger for his service as Chairman of the Council since May 2007. The engrossment read as follows:

““The County Council tender to Councillor Robin Younger their sincere thanks for the service rendered by him in the discharge of the important and exacting duties of the office of Chairman of the County Council for the period from 10th May 2007 until 31st March 2009 and to Mrs Carol Younger, for her invaluable support to Robin during this period.”

Councillor Madeline Russell also presented Mrs Carol Younger with a bouquet of flowers to thank her for her support to Councillor Younger during this period as Chairman.

08-09cc111 FINAL CLOSURE OF THE COUNTY COUNCIL BY COUNCILLOR ROBIN YOUNGER, CHAIRMAN

Councillor Robin Younger warmly thanked the Council for the presentation of the engrossment presented to him and formally closed the final meeting of the Council with the following words:

“So this brings us to the final moments of the County Council. We have heard tributes from our speakers and we’ve taken a bit of a journey back in time giving us an opportunity to reflect on the role Bedfordshire County Council has played in shaping our wonderful county. So many thanks to the guest speakers.

I would like to pay tribute to many people, to our partners, town and parish councils and voluntary organisations. The County Council values the partnerships that have been formed and the amazing job they do for the people of Bedfordshire.

To former county councillors who have magnificently served the County of Bedfordshire

I wish to place on record my personal deep appreciation and the grateful thanks of the County Council to the Chief Executive, his Directors and staff. I am on record as saying over my two years as Chairman, that I have never come across such a highly talented cadre of officers.

It is not just their individual skills and professional expertise which has been apparent, it has been the way they have formed the professional element of the County Council into such a high performing overall team.

The amount of awards and plaudits is all too self evident of the calibre of that team work. What might well have been achieved if that team had been allowed to play on! Such great people delivering great services. The public of Bedfordshire has been very well served by all of you.

And crucially, I wish to place on record my personal thanks to you, the final County Council. To the Leader and her Cabinet, who have worked tirelessly to create a better future for Bedfordshire.

As county councillors, it is a tough balancing act to serve your constituents, work within your political parties and serve on the county council and its committees. The achievements over the past four years are part of your story and you can be justly proud of the contribution you have made, and of the knowledge that you will be handing over good services to the new unitary councils next Wednesday.

Meetings of this County Council have provided an enduring symbol of vibrant local democracy and strong public service leadership in Bedfordshire. It has been the setting for impassioned political debate, always conducted within the agreed rules of decency and mutual respect. Over these many years, key decisions have been made and policy set for the future delivery of local services across the County.

The overriding ethos of public duty has never wavered, however tough and challenging the external environment has become. This County Council meeting represents everything that is good about local government. As it comes to a municipal end, it signifies the continuation of the core value of doing the right thing, and being seen to do the right thing, for the people of Bedfordshire.

It is with a sad heart, but with enormous pride, that I have to declare that the business of the County Council, not just this meeting, but its 120 years of service to the people of Bedfordshire, comes to an end.

I wish all Councillors and Officers good fortune in the new era of local government that commences in the County of Bedfordshire on 1 April 2009."

Meeting concluded at 13.35pm