

SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Council held at the District Offices, Dunstable, on Tuesday, 31 March 2009.

Present:

Councillors:

Mrs Gammons (Chairman)
Mrs Freeman (Vice-Chairman)
Berry
Mrs Bird
Bowater
Brandham
Mrs Coleman
Costin
Fahn
Fairbairn
Forde
M Freeman
P Freeman
Green
Guess
Hearty
Mrs Hegley
Hogan
Janes
Johnstone
Jones
Kane
Mrs Ledster

Councillors:

Machin
McVicar
Meakins
Mrs Morgan
Murray
Mrs Mustoe
Nicols
Northwood
Penman
Rawcliffe
Rolfe
Shadbolt
Sharer
Shingler
Snelling
Miss Sparrow
Mrs Staples
Swain
Taylor
Warren
Mrs Wyles
Young

Officers attending: Mr Ruddick, Mr Dean, Mr Keaveney, Mr Dunleavy, Mr Emerton and Mrs Hobbs

37. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

None.

38. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 2 December 2008 as a correct record and to authorise the Chairman to sign them.

39. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

40. CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman of the Council reported that she had looked back to 1974 when South Bedfordshire District Council was formed. She had managed to obtain a copy of the 1974 Year Book containing photos of the Members at that time and commented that in the 1976 Year Book there was a photo of a very young Councillor Costin.

She reflected that back in 1974 the services provided by the District Council had mainly revolved around areas such as housing and waste collection. The services had dramatically changed over the years with the Council now being responsible for the Grove Theatre, provision of open spaces and leisure facilities, planning, recycling, provision for gypsies and travellers and the new Envirocrime Unit. In addition to these services there was now increased pressure on the area to build an additional 43,000 houses in southern Bedfordshire. The Chairman also commented on changes in how the Council had operated since the introduction of the Leader and Executive model.

The Chairman advised that there would be many Members whom she would be sorry not to see standing at the June elections and in particular Councillor Mrs Morgan.

The Chairman also advised that it had been an unforgettable experience being Chairman of the Council and she had thoroughly enjoyed her term of office. It had been good to share the experience with other local authority Chairmen/Mayors known as the "chain gang".

The Chairman had held her Charity Ball on Friday 27 March 2009 at Luton Hoo and it had been a huge success with 222 people in attendance.

The Chairman thanked the following people:

- her husband for being there and supporting her throughout the year
- the Chief Executive
- Reverend Ruth Pyke for attending Council meetings and for the civic service
- the Personal Assistant to the Chairman, whom she thanked for her hard work and congratulated on her new role within Central Bedfordshire.

The Chairman also thanked all Members for their support and wished them good luck for the elections in June 2009.

41. OTHER MEETINGS

Meetings of other Committees which had taken place during the committee cycle, where there had been no recommendations were noted.

42. QUESTIONS

None received.

43. MOTIONS ON NOTICE

The following motion was received from Councillor Costin, seconded by Councillors Snelling and Murray and adopted by the Council:

“In wishing Central Bedfordshire Council every success in the future this Council is invited to reflect on the achievements that have been secured during the life of the Council and which will continue to provide a solid base going forward. The Council is also invited to place on the record the Council's thanks to the many people, both within and outside the organisation, that have played their part in ensuring South Bedfordshire communities have been well served over the past 35 years.”

Councillor Snelling said he had become a Member of South Bedfordshire District Council in 1992, since when there had been many changes. He highlighted the negatives and the positives that the Council had achieved throughout the 35 years, including:

- the collapse of BCCI
- the closure of Toddington Slaughterhouse
- the development of the Grove Theatre
- outsourcing the waste collection service

The few negative experiences such as the collapse of BCCI had enabled the Council to learn from its mistakes, for instance as the Council had not been affected recently as some other local authorities had by losing their investments in Icelandic banks.

Councillor Snelling thanked all Officers at South Bedfordshire District Council, especially those not transferring to Central Bedfordshire. He also thanked the Liberal Democrat Group including those Members, Councillors Mrs Bird, Mrs Ledster, Shingler and M Freeman, who were not standing at the elections in June. He was aware that Members who returned after June would have a considerable workload.

Councillor Murray said he had been a district councillor for 11 years and had experienced many happy and embarrassing memories. He thanked all Officers including the Legal Services Manager for his support and advice at Planning Committee, the Benefits Manager, Committee Administrators and the Democratic and Administration Services Manager. He also thanked Councillor Mrs Coleman as she was not qualified to be a Councillor from 1 April 2009.

Councillor Costin reminded Members of the Council's history. In particular there had been 3 Chief Executives, 34 Chairmen (Councillor Brewer had been Chairman twice) and around 250 different Councillors. He referred to the Leader and Cabinet committee system that came into place in 2000. More topically, he was disappointed that the Northern Dunstable bypass had not yet been achieved.

He had enjoyed his time as a Councillor at South Bedfordshire District Council where he became a Councillor at the age of 29. He stated that Councillors joined the Council for the same reason and that was to make the life for the local community better. He thanked the quality of the work carried out by Officers, including those Officers that had left.

Councillor Mrs Wyles advised that it had been a privilege and a pleasure to be a Councillor serving the electorate. She expressed her disappointment at being unable to act as a Councillor after 31 March as her role as a teacher within the new authority disqualified her from being a Central Bedfordshire Councillor.

Councillors Mrs Staples took the opportunity to reflect and celebrate the success of the authority. She highlighted the areas of achievement within her portfolio including the InformAction publication, improvements within the Downside Estate, Dunstable and Trailblazers. These improvements had transformed the lives of the residents in this area.

Councillor Mrs Hegley paid tribute to the Officers working within ICT and Customer Services as there were huge demands on these services. She was pleased that South Bedfordshire District Council's website had been assessed by SiteMorse as being in the top 10% over the year out of 462 local authorities. On behalf of the Federation of Small Business she thanked the Chief Executive and the Strategic Director.

Councillor Sharer said he had served South Bedfordshire District Council for 18 years. He was proud to have been Chairman of the Council and Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committees. He thanked Members for their support over the years.

Councillor Johnstone stated that South Bedfordshire District Council had been an excellent Council since he had been a councillor on and off since 1982. He had made many friends including Councillors Rawcliffe, Costin, Snelling, M Freeman, Rolfe, Mrs Ledster, the Democratic and Administration Services Manager and the Strategic Director. He also thanked the Legal Services Manager for his advice.

Councillor Shadbolt said he had been on the Planning Committee for 7 years and he had learnt a lot from his predecessor as Chairman, the late Barry Harris, in whose memory, a planning design award had been presented to representatives from Luton Hoo at the Design Awards on 24 March 2009. He thanked Officers for their support on the Planning Committee which had made his life as Chairman easier.

Councillor Penman commented on the Council's history including the achievements of improving the Benefits Service, the success of the in-house investment team and the successful transition to Central Bedfordshire. He was pleased that South Bedfordshire District Council was handing over a clean bill of health to Central Bedfordshire. He thanked Officers for their hard work and Councillor Mrs Ledster for allowing him to attend Local Governance Committee.

Councillor Shingler commented that ex-councillor George Hickenbottom had supported him when he was a new councillor. He expected that Central Bedfordshire would have new younger councillors elected in the future and hoped that the existing councillors would support them.

Councillor Rawcliffe said he had worked over the last 20 years with a keen interest in housing. He was pleased that the Decent Homes Standards would be achieved in 2010. He thanked Mrs Brereton, the Director of Landlord Services and the Strategic Director for their support. He also thanked ex-councillors Hickinbottom, Roberts and Date. He also thanked Councillor Costin for leading the Council over the years.

The Chief Executive reflected back to when he commenced his duties as Director of Finance in the 1990s and then he had the privilege of becoming the Chief Executive. He commented on his good fortune to have had good leading Members. He advised Members that he was taking on the responsibility of Returning Officer for the elections in June and reminded them not to be late with their nomination forms. He thanked all Members for their support.

The Strategic Director stated that he had been with South Bedfordshire District Council for 23 years. He had enjoyed his time with the Council and hoped that he had made a difference for residents. He thanked Officers for their hard work and support.

Councillor McVicar, as the incoming Chairman for Central Bedfordshire, presented the outgoing Chairman of South Bedfordshire District Council with the past Chairman's badge. He thanked her warmly and stated that she had done an excellent job during her term of office.

CHAIRMAN