



<u>Committee and Date</u>
COUNCIL 18 June 2009 10.00 AM

<u>Item</u>
<b>5</b> Public

<u>Paper</u>
<b>A</b>

## MINUTES

OF

MEETING OF SHROPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

HELD ON 26 MARCH 2009  
AT 10.00 AM

### PRESENT:

Mrs J K Allaway  
Mrs J B Barrow  
Mr T H Biggins  
Mr P D Box  
Mrs K D Calder  
Mrs A M Chebsey  
Mr J E Clarke  
Major A H Coles MBE TD  
Mr P J Corston  
Mrs B J Craig  
Mr T Davies  
Mrs J P Drummond  
Mr D Erwin  
Mr D W Evans  
Mr R A Evans  
Mr E J Everall

Mrs D A Gaskill  
Mr D M J Gibbon JP  
Mr J A Gibson  
Mr J B Gillow  
Mr N J Hartin  
Mrs E A Hartley  
Mrs Y K Holyoak  
Mr J Hurst-Knight  
Mr W H Jenkins  
Dr J E Jones  
Mr J M W Kenny  
Mr C J Lea  
Mr G B H Lee  
Mr P J Martin  
Mr C J Mellings  
Mr D J Minnery

Mr A N Mosley  
Mr P A Nutting  
Mr M J Owen JP  
Mrs E V Parry  
Mrs E A Parsons  
Mr M G Pate  
Mr P F Phillips  
Lt-Col G H M Richey  
Mr J Roberts DL  
Mrs S J V Sambrook  
Mrs E D Sandford MBE  
Mr J Tandy  
Mr S J West  
Mr B B Williams RD

### **131. PRAYERS**

Prayers were led by the Bishop of Shrewsbury, the Right Reverend Dr Alan Smith.

At the conclusion of the prayers, the Speaker paid tribute to Bishop Alan for the contribution he had made to civil life throughout the County during his term of office on and, behalf of the Council, wished him well in his new position as Diocesan Bishop of St Albans.

### **132. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Mr G L Dakin and Mrs M E C Winckler.

### **133. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

No declarations of interest were made.

## 134. MINUTES

### RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2009 be received and confirmed as a correct record.

## 135. ANNOUNCEMENTS

(a) Retirement of Mrs Geraldine Childerhouse

The Speaker informed the Council of the impending retirement of the Council's Principal Committee Officer, Mrs Geraldine Childerhouse. He thanked her for the professional manner in which she had undertaken her duties over many years and wished her good fortune for the future.

(b) Chairman's Engagements

The Chairman referred members to the list of official engagements he and the Vice-Chairman had undertaken since the meeting on 27 February 2009. He drew particular attention to his attendance at the Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council Celebratory Service on 23 March, at which he had been presented with the flag of the former Borough Council.

(c) List of Honorary Alderman

The Speaker informed members that the full list of existing and proposed Alderman, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes, had been tabled for information.

(d) Official Photograph

The Speaker advised members that he would soon adjourn the meeting to allow an official photograph to be taken of the Council "in session".

On the resumption he would then proceed with normal business until 12.30 p.m. when the meeting would again be adjourned for the tree planting and lunch. Then given that this meeting not only marked the end of the Council's four year cycle, but also the end of an era in local government in Shropshire, the following four items would provide a fitting finale:

- (a) Presentation of Long Service Awards;
- (b) Statement by Members;
- (c) Statement by Group Leaders;
- (d) Final Remarks by the Chairman.

### **136. PUBLIC QUESTIONS**

The Speaker reported that no public questions had been received in accordance with the Council's Procedure Rules.

The meeting was then adjourned for the official photographs at 10.20 a.m. and resumed at 10.30 a.m.

### **137. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS**

In accordance with Procedure Rule 15, the Speaker announced that the question received from Mr T H Biggins, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes, had been circulated together with the answer with the agenda,.

Mr Biggins thanked the Environment and Sustainability Portfolio Holder, Mr E J Everall, for his reply and confirmed that he did not wish to ask a supplementary question.

### **138. LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT ANNUAL REFRESH 2008/09**

It was proposed by the Leader, Mr M G Pate, and seconded by Mrs E A Hartley, that the report on this subject, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes, be received and adopted.

Reference was made to a number of indicators contained within the report, particularly those relating to the net additional homes (NI154), where concern was expressed as to whether the target could be met. In the current economic climate, the target for the arts (NI011), where the issue related to the reduction in the number of specialist arts officers; and on the re-offending rates of priority or prolific offenders (NI030) which, it was suggested, required the prior approval of the West Mercia Police.

Responding, the Leader advised that, while the targets had not been amended, full account would need to be taken of the current economic situation. He rejected the suggestion that there were insufficient arts officers to achieve the agreed outcomes stating that suitable alternative options had been put in place which would substantially aid arts provision generally across Shropshire. With regard to the re-offending rates, the principles had already been agreed by the West Mercia Police and so no difficulties were anticipated in that regard.

#### **RESOLVED:**

That the refreshed Local Area Agreement 2008/2011, including the latest changes summarised in the update report tabled at the meeting, be agreed.

### **139. SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL'S IMPROVEMENT PLAN 2009/13**

It was proposed by the Leader, Mr M G Pate, and seconded by Mrs E A Hartley that the report setting out the revised draft of Shropshire Council's improvement plan, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes, be received and adopted.

Referring to the item on Housing - Landlord Services at page 8 of the report, a member asked whether the Council would have the ability to meet the Decent Homes standards referred to. Responding, the Community Services Portfolio Holder, Mrs B J Craig, advised that, following a survey by independent consultants on the condition of the stock to be transferred to be the new Authority, an action plan was already in place.

The target was challenging, but the matter would be constantly reviewed to ensure that the necessary rate of progress was maintained.

Other members referred to the excellence of the plan but questioned whether the recent loss of capital resources during the banking crisis would impede its delivery.

Responding, the Leader reported that the £1 million invested by Bridgnorth District Council in Landsbanki had not been included within the overall capital programme. It would therefore have no effect on the delivery of the projects listed. Further, it should be noted Bridgnorth District Council would pass over uncommitted balances of more than £2.5 million.

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft improvement plan be approved.

## **140. MOTIONS**

**140(a)** Received from Mr P F Phillips:

Council requests the new Shropshire Council to give urgent attention to the budget for the care of adults with learning disabilities. In particular, Council expresses its concerns about:

1. Reduction in day centre staff
2. Lack of demographics in the budget
3. Reduction of respite to a cap of 28 days
4. The mothballing of the multi-sensory bus and thus the failure to provide 2,500 clients with treatment.

Mr Phillips withdrew this motion.

**140(b)** Received from Mr R A Evans:

Council moves that council tax is an unfair tax related to the ability to pay. It urges Her Majesty's Government to revisit the Lyons Report and to introduce a system of local taxation which is related to the ability to pay. It further requests the new Shropshire Council to research ways of abating the impact of council tax increases on those with low fixed income; and to investigate the possibility of payments being available by 12 instalments, rather than 10.

Mr Evans withdrew the motion.

## **141. LONG SERVICE AWARDS**

To mark the achievement of completing 20 years service as a County Councillor, the Chairman of the Council presented the following members with a certificate:

Mr P J Corston

Mr E J Everall  
Mr C J Mellings  
Mr M G Pate  
Mr P F Phillips  
Lt-Col G H M Richey

On receiving their certificate, each one thanked the Council and recounted their personal experiences of serving as a member over the years.

## **142. STATEMENT BY MEMBERS**

The Speaker then invited those members who had given notice of their intention to make a statement about their time as members of the Shropshire County Council and reminded the Council that none of the statements would be the subject of debate or discussion.

### Mr T H Biggins

Mr Biggins remarked on the tremendous changes that had occurred within the Council over the years he had been a member. He referred to some of the major political decisions that had been taken, but emphasised what had really mattered to him was serving the people of Shropshire. While the Council had made great strides, particularly in recent years, he highlighted the way in which officers and members responded to the needs of local people and the healthy working relationship between members and staff as the greatest achievements during his term of office.

### Mrs D A Gaskill

Mrs D A Gaskill read a verse she had composed by using each of the letters of the County name. She concluded by thanking her friends and colleagues for an enjoyable 20 years as a County Councillor.

### Mr J Roberts

Mr Roberts stated that village speed limits had been a constant issue in his division throughout his term of office. He added that he had always supported the introduction of a universal 30 mph speed limit through all rural villages, as had been introduced by Suffolk County Council, and hoped that this would one day be introduced throughout Shropshire. Mr Roberts also referred also to his support for the retention of the Council's smallholding estate in recent years which had ensured that the Authority would maximise the value of each, whilst also protecting the interests of the elderly tenants who were unable to afford to purchase their farms.

On the subject of unitary governance, Mr Roberts said that historically he had been a strong supporter, but had changed his stance recently over the future status of the county town of Shrewsbury. He hoped that this position could be retrieved, but felt that the initial outcome would result in a reduction in democracy for local residents.

With regard to the operation of the new Council, it should be noted that the new intake would be unlikely to attend daytime meetings as readily as the current County Council membership would result in a constant need to maintain and reinvigorate the links between the new Council and the rural parishes. He did not think that the introduction of the Cabinet system, following the enactment of legislation in 2000 had improved

matters for backbench members and felt that the old committee system had provided them with greater opportunities to make an more informed and purposeful contribution.

Mr Roberts concluded by stating that he had enjoyed the company of all members and officers throughout his period of office and he wished them all well in the future.

#### Mrs E D Sandford

Mrs Sandford thanked the electors of Harlescott whom she had served for almost 26 years, adding that they had made everything worthwhile.

She remarked that she had felt less belonging since the announcement to seek unitary status, but hoped that all the new members would be welcomed and invited to play a full part within the new Council.

The principal value of the County Council for her had been the contact, knowledge and experience of the members and the officer corps. However, she too was distressed about the position of Shrewsbury, as it was the hub of the County, in the new arrangements. She hoped that in the future the new Authority would use the language of the people and give respect to both the young and the old.

#### Major A H Coles MBE TD

As the longest serving member, Major Coles advised the Council of the day he joined a dignified and august body of gentlemen farmers, county landowners, businessmen and a few senior military officers on the County Council in 1973. He advised members that politics were not overtly to the fore in those days and the forms of address used at the relaxed quarterly meetings were all very formal. Major Coles also remarked on the importance of the events occurring on Bligny Day in 1978 when the County had resolved to change its name from Salop to Shropshire.

He concluded by referring to the honour of having been the twentieth Chairman of the County Council and stating that he had enjoyed his service and hoped that during the time had made a small contribution to the well being of his service and hoped that during that time had made a small contribution to the well being of this local community.

### **143. STATEMENT OF GROUP LEADERS**

The Speaker invited each of the Group Leaders to summarise their personal views of the work of the Council during the last four years. Statements were then made by Mr P F Phillips, Mr A N Mosley and Mr M G Pate in turn.

The Leader of the Liberal Democrat Group, Mr P F Phillips, said that, while this was a moment to celebrate the achievements of Shropshire County Council, over the years he had witnessed local government loose power to guanoes, trusts and other bodies. This had made the role of Councillor more testing and vexatious and the burdens on Local Government had increased in recent times. However, the new authority would be the only democratically elected body to speak on behalf of the people of Shropshire and should therefore have the power to challenge these bodies, something which he was looking forward to greatly.

Mr A N Moseley, the Leader of the Labour Group, stated that he, only having been elected to the Council four years ago, he had no history of the previous regime. Nevertheless, the achievement of Unitary status was an important and significant milestone which the Council should thank the Government for facilitating. He did not

share the sadness others had expressed over the loss of the County Council but celebrated the establishment of the new Authority and the work it would do on behalf of the people of Shropshire in the future.

He complimented the Officers for their help, patience and competent advice and applauded all parties for generally being friendly outside the Council Chamber. These qualities would be help the new Authority to become effective quite quickly after the elections.

Mr M G Pate, the Leader of the Conservative Group, also complimented all Groups on the Council and said that the dissolution of the District and Borough Councils was a sad moment for those colleagues who had served on these bodies with distinction over the years. However, while this should be recognised, the new Council would provide local residents with even more efficient and effective service delivery and achieve significant cost savings.

He too complimented the staff for the assistance that they had provided all Members in bringing about the transition to One Council for Shropshire and said that much credit was owed to the Council's Senior Officers but especially the former Chief Executive, Carolyn Downs, for her inspirational leadership.

#### **144. FINAL REMARKS BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL**

To conclude the business of the Council the Chairman of the County Council announced that he would be joined by Mr Humphrey Salwey, the great grandson of the first Chairman of the Shropshire County Council, at an official tree planting to commemorate the work of the Authority over the 120 years of its existence immediately after the meeting.

He stated how he had enjoyed serving as Chairman for the past four years, having accepted the Office with trepidation. He emphasised the importance of the role of Civic Head and the value in meeting people from a wide cross section of the community, as well as the opportunity to represent the Authority on important national and regional bodies.

The Chairman congratulated all of the Group Leaders for steering the Authority on the correct path through a period of constant change during his term of office, adding that the Authority was now well equipped to take on the mantle of a Unitary Council with effect from 1 April 2009. He concluded the formal work of the Council by reminding Members of the motto of the first Chairman, Alderman Alfred Salwey, which were "efficiency with economy" and wished all Members well in the future.

SPEAKER

DATE

The meeting closed at 12.30pm