

## **MINUTES**

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 14 September 2020 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

**PRESENT:** HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR Councillor Sargeant (in the Chair).

**COUNCILLORS:** Malpas, Ansell, Ashraf, Aziz, Beardsworth, Birch, Bottwood, Cali, Choudary, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Graystone, Hadland, Hallam, Haque, J Hill, Joyce, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, B Markham, M Markham, Marriott, McCutcheon, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Kilby-Shaw, Smith, Stone and Walker

### **1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Stone declared an interest in respect of motion i) by virtue of being involved in various community organisations.

Councillor Patel declared an interest in respect of motion i) by virtue of being involved in various community organisations.

### **2. MINUTES.**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2020 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

### **3. APOLOGIES.**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Russell, Roberts, Chunga and Davenport. It was advised that Councillor Golby would be joining the meeting late and Councillor Hibbert may not be able to join the meeting remotely due to connection issues.

### **4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.**

The Mayor announced that he visited the United African Association last week who were handing out welfare parcels to those in need during the pandemic. The Mayor thanked councillors who had donated to his charity and advised that there was still time to donate if they had not yet done so. Upcoming events included a meeting with the High Sheriff and Mike Ingram, who was releasing a book on the history of the Guildhall

### **5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS**

Anne Wankiiri, from United African Association, addressed Council and advised that the organisation was running out of space for their community work, including storage space for food parcels, and asked for the Council's support in acquiring a space. She thanked Councillor Stone for her help supporting residents struggling during the

pandemic.

## **6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The Mayor advised that thirteen questions had been received from Councillors and that the answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution. Questions and answers were given as tabled unless where stated, supplementary questions were asked as detailed below.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 1, Councillor Hadland commented that improvements had been made to Victoria Street coach station, albeit limited, and that it remained a priority for the town centre.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 2, Councillor Hallam advised that additional funds had been added to the 2020/21 budget in relation to maintaining trees. He informed Councillor Meredith that tree officers attended his ward on last week to conduct tree survey assessments.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 4, Councillor Hallam stated that water refill stations were located mainly on highways which NBC had no remit over.

## **7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS**

Councillor Nunn submitted his report as Leader of the Council and highlighted the salient points. In response to questions, Councillor Nunn advised that capacity regarding covid testing was a national issue; he did not regret earlier advice he gave around getting tested if one had concerns but no symptoms, following the Greencore outbreak it was vital to have as many people as possible tested. The capacity issue was a shame and Councillor Nunn, and others, were urging Public Health England to rectify it as soon as possible. He advised that the videos he and Councillor Stone had worked on alongside the Northampton Association of Youth Clubs, were awaiting Councillor Stone's approval prior to being released. Councillor Nunn reassured Council that he and the Deputy Leader were working every day to safeguard the interests of Northampton and its people. With regard to unitary talks, Councillor Nunn advised that cross-party discussions were taking place and would be willing to have them more frequently if Members felt it necessary

Councillor Larratt submitted his report as Deputy Leader and highlighted the salient points. In response to questions asked, Councillor Larratt commented that due to declining footfall, trade on the market was higher during weekdays than weekends; he would pursue with officers and seek to join any campaigns being run by the National Association of British Market Authorities (NAMBA). Councillor Larratt would seek to arrange member briefing on rail issues and the Transport Strategy consultation. With regard to elections, Councillor Larratt advised that the Council was following the government's updated procedures; he was not aware of any online issues but would raise it with the Monitoring Officer. He further advised that the Council had sufficient capacity to carry out enforcement duties, however officers were not making as many visits due to covid-related restrictions. Regarding town council briefings, Councillor Larratt stated that making them publicly available may stifle debate but would consider alternative ways of promoting the work undertaken. Works

to the Gallery car park lighting was scheduled to finish in November and remedial works would continue afterwards. He assured Council that the work would be completed.

Councillor Hallam presented his report as Cabinet Member for Environment and highlighted the salient points and thanked the Neighbourhood Wardens, Park Rangers and officers in the Environmental Health department for the additional work undertaken during the pandemic. In response to questions, Councillor Hallam stated that although the amount of household recycling had reduced in March, the amount being collected had increased when compared to previous years. With regard to the recently introduced E-Scooter scheme, Councillor Hallam explained that he had not been consulted in his capacity as Cabinet Member for Environment, however he and Councillor King were consulting with NCC to suggest improvements to the scheme.

Councillor King presented her report as Cabinet Member for Community Engagement and Safety and highlighted the salient points. She advised that Diwali and Bonfire night celebrations run by the Council would be online. She advised that an app for the town was being developed by AR Media which would include various engagement tools. Michael Ellis recently joined an LGBTQ Forum meeting and would report back the results of a consultation around the Gender Recognition Act. In response to questions, Councillor King advised that the Council promoted good practice by way of "Days/Weeks of Action" that were held throughout the year. She advised that more applications for covid funding had been received since the report was written but encouraged all Members to continue to promote the available funding to the public. Councillor King stated that she wanted the E-Scooter scheme to work well and confirmed that she was working with NCC, alongside Councillor Hallam, to make improvements.

Councillor Eldred submitted his report as Cabinet Member for Finance and highlighted the salient points; graphs previously requested by Members had been included for ease of understanding. Councillor Eldred thanked the Facilities team for their hard work in keeping the Guildhall safe for officers still coming in to work.

## **8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS**

Councillor Stone made a statement on "Good governance is a democratic issue". She stated that increased public cynicism and suspicion of government and the rise of "fake news" was a concern generally and that it was the job of elected members to build a foundation with residents founded on trust. She noted that since the NTFC loan improvements had been made including the Council investing more in governance, an independent person Chairing the Audit Committee which receives reports on governance strategy and issues. However Councillor Stone stated that the 3-tier audit system was unwieldy and questioned why the audit reports from LGSS did not form part of the internal audit reports. She further stated that an administration could not scrutinise itself and noted that the 2018 Max Caller report into NCC highlighted it as an issue and a failure. Councillor Stone felt that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee should be headed by the opposition and that the Council should be making more use of pre-decision scrutiny. Local government reorganisation would provide the new unitary authority a new start and a new social contract with residents, Councillor Stone stressed the importance of maximising turnout at the polls so that

the administration had a sound democratic base that was accountable to the electorate. With covid, the importance of trust had been highlighted; if people trusted the messengers, they would trust the message and compliance would be high. Councillor Stone commented that governance should be outcome and performance focussed.

Councillor Nunn stated that generally, where larger numbers of people were involved, better decisions were made and supported. He noted that the Governance Acton Plan fed into all aspects of the Council. Councillor Nunn stated that the Council performed well in terms of scrutiny but welcomed any ideas from members about how it might be improved.

Councillor Stone reiterated that whilst Councillor Lane was a highly effective Chair, it seemed good practice for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be chaired by a member of the opposition. She suggested that a Finance Scrutiny panel set up to monitor covid implications and the expected income shortfall. Councillor Stone expressed concern around LGSS and the levels of financial information they provided.

## **9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2019/2020**

Councillor Lane, as the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee submitted a report and thanked every member involved in the work of Scrutiny, specifically the Panel Chairs and members of the public for their suggestions. He thanked the Democratic and Member Services Manager for her continued hard work and noted his appreciation for her dedication to the role over the past 17 years.

Councillor Walker seconded the report.

Members discussed the various panel work that had been undertaken and thanked the officer and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their dedication, and thanked Cabinet for being receptive to recommendations that the Scrutiny Panels put forward.

### **RESOLVED:**

Council noted the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2019/2020.

## **10. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) CAPITAL PROGRAMME BUDGET**

Councillor Eldred presented a report which sought to approve an additional £50M of HRA capital programme expenditure funded through borrowing, for the acquisition of blocks of homes as element of delivering affordable homes on major developments, land and/or existing properties. He noted that over 300 families were in temporary accommodation, as well as homeless families and many on the Council's waiting list for housing. The additional funding would allow the Council to progress with schemes and opportunities for accommodation in the town.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

Councillor Stone stated that she was concerned the housing crisis would get worse

due to the moratorium on evictions soon coming to an end. She stated that retaining homes was just as important as building them.

Councillor Beardsworth commented that the Council had been crippled by the Right to Buy scheme and suggested that it be “frozen” so that more council houses were not lost during the pandemic.

Councillor Eldred confirmed that each housing scheme would come to Cabinet for review and approval and borrowing would take place if and when schemes were brought forward.

## **RESOLVED:**

Council:

- a) Approve an additional £50M of HRA capital programme expenditure funded through borrowing, for the acquisition of blocks of homes as element of delivering affordable homes on major developments, land and/or existing properties.
- b) That Cabinet be authorised to approve new capital schemes and variations to existing schemes, subject to a business case, the funding being available and the schemes being in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the Council

## **11. UPDATE ON CARRIED MOTIONS**

Councillor Larratt presented a report on Carried Motions and asked Members to email Democratic Services with questions or further information on specific motions.

Councillor Smith acknowledged that work around the motions had slowed down during the pandemic and stressed the importance of finding ways to keep up momentum where work had been delayed.

Councillor Birch expressed concern around issues relating to libraries in the town.

Councillor Larratt commented that there was 1 library in Northampton that still had issues outstanding and work was being done with the local community to resolve them.

## **RESOLVED:**

1. Council noted the update on Carried Motions.
2. That a further update would be brought to full Council at its meeting on 8 March 2021

## **12. NOTICES OF MOTION**

- i) Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Ashraf seconded:

“Covid-19 has thrown into relief the need for more, for bigger, for better community hubs.

The pandemic has made already vulnerable households ever more vulnerable. Community groups like Revolution Zero CiC, and Zimwomen with the United African Association, have worked really hard to keep marginalised households fed.

Their success has brought its own pressures. Both organisations need food storage spaces as well as distribution points.

Socially isolated older people need safe spaces where they can engage with each other and carry out activities safely. We need general day centres and specialist day centres, like an African Centre, where the needs of all our communities can be safely met.

Young people need safe spaces where they can engage with each other and carry out activities safely. The need for a youth centre has never been greater. We need to rethink our relationship with the voluntary sector. We need to see them as the warp and weft of our communities. These are the organisations and the people that are keeping our communities going. They all need premises. We call on the council to work with all these agencies to create a community hub with shared storage and safe meeting spaces.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

- ii) Councillor Haque accepted an alteration to the original motion as published on the agenda. The altered motion was seconded by Councillor Birch.

“We are alarmed at the Government’s proposal to give additional development rights to developers. The proposal risks a will bypass of the planning system and potentially leading to development that is neither strategic nor of good quality.

The housing crisis and the climate emergency means we need affordable, good quality, energy efficient homes.

We therefore call on the Council to write to Government expressing our concern at their proposal for deregulation.

We further call on the council to take all necessary steps to ensure that where housing is developed on commercial sites under the new regulations, that 35% of the housing is affordable and all are of a quality consistent with our aspiration to provide the best we can.

We note the cross-Party support from this Council to the substance of this motion and that of the detail in Motion III, and in addition, that the Local Government Association have also raised concerns regarding how it may restrict the decision making that local authorities have in future planning applications and developments.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

- iii) Councillor B Markham accepted an alteration to the original motion as published on the agenda. The altered motion was seconded by Councillor Beardsworth.

Council notes:

1. The publication by Government of the White Paper, 'Planning for the Future' on 6 August 2020, which sets out proposals on reforms to the planning process for the future.
2. That the vast majority of planning applications are given the go ahead by local authority planning committees, with permission granted to around 9 out of 10 applications.
3. That research by the Local Government Association has said that there are existing planning permissions for more than one million homes that have not yet been started.

Council is concerned that the proposals seek to:

1. Reduce or remove the right of residents to have their say on applications in their communities.
2. Grant automatic rights for developers to build on land identified as 'for growth'.
3. Remove section 106 payments for infrastructure and their replacement with a national levy.

This Council Further notes:

1. The Royal Institute for British Architects called the proposals 'shameful and which will do almost nothing to guarantee delivery of affordable, well-designed and sustainable homes'. RIBA also said that proposals could lead to the next generation of slum housing.
2. The reforms are opposed by the all-party Local Government Association.

We note the cross-Party support from this Council to the substance of this motion and that of the detail in Motion II, and in addition, that the Local Government Association have also raised concerns regarding how it may restrict the decision making that local authorities have in future planning applications and developments.

We therefore ask the Chief Executive to write to the Minister of State for Housing & Planning and to our local Members of Parliament expressing our concerns."

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

iv) Councillor Hill proposed and Councillor King seconded:

“This council supports the Government’s ‘Kickstarter scheme’, helping create jobs for young people in Northampton, putting them at the heart of the town’s economic revival from the Covid-19 pandemic. We call upon local businesses to sign up to providing quality, 6-month, subsidised work placements for those aged 16-24 on Universal Credit, helping give them on the job training and experience to launch them into a career. We cannot allow young people to be left behind as a result of the pandemic, and schemes like this will be vital for creating jobs and giving young people the skills to access them. We encourage local employers to sign up today.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

**13. MATTERS OF URGENCY WHICH BY REASON OF SPECIAL  
CIRCUMSTANCES THE MAYOR IS OF THE OPINION SHOULD BE  
CONSIDERED.**

None.

The meeting concluded at 9:17 pm