

## **MINUTES**

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 15 September 2014 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

**COUNCILLORS:** Ansell, Aziz, Beardsworth, Begum, Bottwood, I. Choudary, N Choudary, Conroy, Davies, Duncan, Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Glynane, Gowen, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, Lane, Larratt, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, Stone, Strachan and Yates

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

There were none.

### **2. MINUTES.**

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on the 14h July 2014 were agreed and signed by the Chair.

### **3. APOLOGIES.**

Apologies were received from Councillors King, Capstick, Subbarayan, Palethorpe, Golby and Ford.

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

The Mayor announced that August had been a relatively quiet month but that he was pleased to have recently been invited to an event from the National Association of Women's Club (NAWC) and specifically encouraged women in Northamptonshire to get involved with the charity.

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

Mr Fitzhugh addressed Council and stated that the Far Cotton Recreation Ground had been awarded Town Green Status in 2010. He explained that many people had enjoyed using the recreational ground but the ground had recently deteriorated which was partly attributed to the heavy fair equipment which had damaged the underground drainage system. He asked that the Council halt all bookings on the recreational ground until the issues had been resolved.

Ms Todd spoke as a member of Left Unity and expressed her of the proposed changes to the Constitution. She stated that politics was about the truth and was should not be exclusive and that changes to the Constitution broke the trust between the electorates and the politicians. She requested that Council reject the proposed changes to the Constitution and called for the Leader to resign.

Mr Connelly addressed Council and highlighted his proposal for resolving friction when members of the public do not feel as though they have been consulted with. He proposed that the recent consultations had had an open ended narrative and questioned how the information was quantified. It was suggested that in order to collate information, one option would be to provide a three tier tick box to allow people to state whether or not they agreed, disagreed or were neutral to the plans being consulted on.

Mr Leach addressed Council and stated that the de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street remained unpopular with members of the public. He suggested that the accident outside the bus station should act as a warning to Members.

Mr Adams addressed Council and questioned why there had been a significant underspend in housing for the first part of 2014/15. He also questioned whether tenants would get value for money from the appointment of the ALMO Chief Executive.

County Councillor J Hope referred to the report regarding the Amendment to the Constitution and stated that if there were two primary opposition parties in a Council, then leaders of those groups should be consulted when special urgency was being used. She questioned whether the administration felt threatened by the opposition.

Mr Mallard addressed Council and noted that it was imperative for the Council to engage with people when conducting a consultation exercise which had been successfully undertaken during the establishment of the ALMO. He further stated that it was important that consultation with all group leaders should be carried out when the Chief Executive makes a delegated decision to ensure trust remain between the politicians and the electorate.

Mr Wishart, spoke on behalf of St Edmunds Resident Association and stated that they had resisted the de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street and commented that it was not a conventional layout; originally the plans were to have a carriageway constructed but the lack of kerbs and delineation was not explained during the planning process. He questioned whether the Department of Transport were aware of the situation.

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

The Mayor advised that 18 questions had been received from members of the public and Councillors and that the answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution.

Questions and answers given were as tabled (included in an updated agenda on the website) unless where stated supplementary questions were asked – detailed below.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 1, Councillor Markham explained that she did not have a complete breakdown of the figures but that some of the costs were set against the receipts.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 2, Councillor Markham explained that there had been a planning application by a developer but that affordable housing had not been part of the section 106 agreement as it was not considered sustainable for the developer.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 3, Councillor Hadland explained he could not elaborate on the number 4.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 6, Councillor Markham explained that all the compensation had been paid to date.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 8, Councillor Markham explained that there had been numerous changes in the Housing Department and that during the transitional period to the ALMO, it was necessary for temporary staff to be recruited.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 9, Councillor Eldred explained that it was a question for the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 13, Councillor Markham explained that there was ongoing monitoring of any problems regarding Decent Homes which included 4 project officers for each area, 3 liaison officers from NBC and 3 liaison officers from the contractors and further noted that a help line had been set up and all calls monitored.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 14, Councillor Hadland explained that developers had the right to choose whether to be named and further stated that should they put in a planning application, the information would be available to the public.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 15, Councillor Hadland explained that the business affected by the work on Abington Street had been offered business rate relief.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 16, Councillor Mackintosh explained that information relating to exit interviews was confidential but he would be happy to share the private information with the Leader of the Labour Group.

In response to a supplementary question relating to Question 18, Councillor Hallam explained that he would be happy to raise concerns on behalf of Mr Fitzhugh as it was within the remit of the Cabinet Member for Customers and Communities.

## **7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS**

Councillor Mackintosh submitted his Cabinet Member report and noted that there had

been a busy summer period and that there were numerous ongoing plans for the near future, including the German Christmas Market and a fireworks display to be held on the 5<sup>th</sup> November 2014 at St Becketts Park. It was noted that the Business Incentive Scheme had seen the creation of more jobs in the Northampton area an increase in the amount of investment.

In response to a question asked, Councillor Mackintosh explained that there had been a consultation exercise with residents about the redevelopment of the Greyfriars site which had closed a week ago, and once the information had been gathered, the full consultation results would be published. It was noted that that there was uncertainty whether Southfields Park would qualify for the Green Award, but that he was happy for Councillor Meredith to discuss how to progress it with the Cabinet Member for Environment. It was confirmed by Councillor Mackintosh that all businesses in Abington Street could apply for the Business Incentive Scheme. It was further reported that a public consultation had been undertaken with regards to parking issues in Dallington with a further one due to be held.

Councillor Markham submitted her Cabinet Member report and commented that the new rules regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation (HIMOs) would come into effect on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2014. It was noted that the Decent Homes project was progressing well and that the work was currently on target with customer satisfaction levels as good. It was reported that there was a continuation of work for the ALMO implementation team who were preparing for a full handover to Northampton Partnership Homes. Having been congratulated on the merit of staff working on the Decent Homes project, Councillor Markham reported that the largest phase of the project was underway and noted that anti-social behaviour could lead to the termination of tenancy agreements. In response to a further question, Councillor Markham explained that residents of Far Cotton were going to be consulted on the possibility of being designated under the HIMO scheme but that there was a need to initially quantify it. She further confirmed that any bullying or whistle blowing allegations had been handled extremely well and effectively.

Councillor Hadland submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question he explained that the Railway Station had level access at the back of the building and that appropriate signage would be erected to for disabled access. He further noted that he was happy to pledge that a suitable footbridge would be incorporated into the plan between the car park and the railway station to improve disabled access. He confirmed that 100 new Council homes would be built in Dallington Grange and that investments were being made which would include improvements to St James Mill Road.

Councillor Eldred submitted his Cabinet Report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question asked, it was explained that the Council, on appeal, had not lost museum accreditation but that it had been reversed and that there was to be future £8 million investment in the museum services.

## **8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS**

Councillor Marriott reported that Air Pollution had a significant impact on the quality of life and asked the administration to consider the causes of air pollution. He referred to the 7 air quality management systems that were in areas where there are high levels of air pollution and argued that the administration had encouraged the increase by promoting car and bus use in the town centre. He further noted that an increase in housing developments would lead to an increase in car use which again would impact on pollution levels. He stated that the Labour Group believed in the regeneration of the town centre, but requested that Cabinet conduct an air pollution investigation in conjunction with the County Council.

Councillor Hallam responded by commenting that air pollution was a serious concern to the administration but that it was a multi-agency job to examine and monitor. He noted that it was not a problem that could be apportioned solely to the Council but everyone had an amount of individual responsibility. He reported that much of the air pollution was as a result of static traffic and therefore improving traffic flow would improve the polluted areas and therefore traffic planning was of utmost importance. It was noted that a study was already being conducted which he would share with Councillor Marriott.

Councillor Marriott commented that the de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street would further exacerbate the pollution with an influx of traffic in the town centre and stated that Full Council needs to be aware of the air pollution study.

## **9. CHANGES TO COMMITTEE PLACES**

Councillor Marriott submitted a report that sought Council's approval for the change to Committee Place; Councillor Ashraf to replace Councillor Mason on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Mason seconded the report.

### **RESOLVED:**

That Councillor Ashraf replaces Councillor Mason on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

## **10. EXEMPTION FROM CALL-IN; URGENT KEY DECISION**

Councillor Mackintosh submitted a report that sought Council note the use of the power contained in the Constitution to exempt a decision from call-in where the decision taken has been considered as urgent.

Councillor Hadland seconded the report.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the report be noted.

## **11. AMENDMENT TO CONSTITUTION - SCHEME OF DELEGATIONS**

Councillor Mackintosh submitted a report that sought Council's approval of the Amendment to the Constitution– Scheme of Delegations. It was noted that currently, the Chief Executive had to consult with all Group Leaders when making an urgent executive decision, but that the process could be made more efficient by consulting with the Leader of the Opposition and the Chair of Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Markham seconded the report.

Council debated the report.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the recommendations: Councillors Ansell, Bottwood, I Choudary, Duncan, Eldred, Flavell, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill. Lane, Larratt. Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant and Yates.

There voted against the recommendations: Councillors Beardsworth, Conroy, Glynane, Mennell and Meredith.

There abstained: The Mayor and Councillors Ashraf. Aziz, Begum, N Choudary, Davies, Eales, Gowen, Marriott, Mason, Stone and Strachan.

The report was carried.

### **RESOLVED:**

That the amendment to the Constitution detailed in paragraph 3.1.10 be approved

## **12. NOTICES OF MOTION**

- i) Councillor Hallam proposed and Councillor Hibbert seconded that:

'Council welcomes the recent Green Flag Awards for Abington Park and Delapre Park after being judged to be among the best parks in the country.

'Council notes that Delapre Park receives the award, from the charity Keep Britain Tidy, for the second year running and this is a first award for Abington Park which means they are among just 1,476 parks and green spaces across the country judged to be of a very high standard.

'Council recognises these awards are a tribute to the commitment by all the volunteers who are part of the dedicated Friends groups and other organisations that work alongside the Council staff and our contractor to reach these high standards.

'The Administration renews its commitment to maintaining our town's parks and green spaces and to seek Green Flag Awards across the town in the future.'

Council debated the motion.

The motion was carried.

ii) Councillor Beardsworth proposed and Councillor Conroy seconded:

This Council recognises the incredible stress many visitors and patients are under when they find it necessary to park at Northampton General Hospital.

Problems with not only the expense, but more worryingly, the availability of parking at the Hospital must not be allowed to continue.

This Council therefore resolves to make representation to Northampton General Hospital regarding the concern of residents and to be proactive in encouraging a solution, and working with all partner organisations to overcome these difficulties.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

iii) Councillor Meredith proposed and Councillor Glynane seconded:

There are many areas of the Eastern District where historic planting of the wrong kind of trees in the residential areas cause a number of problems for residents – from light being blocked from homes, to fallen debris, to damage to property from roots.

This Council resolves to develop a plan to remove trees that are identified as problematic and replace them with smaller trees more suited to residential areas. Councillor Hallam proposed and Councillor Markham seconded an amendment:

The amended motion read.

‘There are many areas of the Eastern District where historic planting of the wrong kind of trees in the residential areas cause a number of problems for residents – from light being blocked from homes, to fallen debris, to damage to property from roots.

‘This Council resolves to develop a plan to consider removing trees that are identified as problematic and consider replacing them with smaller trees more suited to residential areas.

‘This Council recognises this issue is complex and many trees are located on housing land that will soon be managed by Northampton Partnership Homes so therefore refers this matter to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider.’

The proposed amendments were accepted and became the substantive motion:

Council debated the substantive motion.

Upon a vote, the substantive motion was carried.

iv) Councillor Mason proposed and Councillor Ashraf seconded that:

This Council notes recent research based on Ministry of Justice statistics shows that

nearly three homes are at risk of being repossessed in Northampton every day. In Northampton between July 2013 and June 2014 952 possession claims were issued to the county courts. This Council is concerned that any rise in interest rates in the near future will put more people at risk of repossession.

Therefore this Council resolves to explore all ways it can help local people with the threat of home repossession, such as supporting advice agencies to provide early help with those struggling financially.

One way Northampton Borough Council can help with the housing crisis is to increase the supply of affordable housing. We need more affordable housing for young families starting out and we need larger family homes for families that are expanding and growing up. We need housing that graduates from the university feel they can afford as a means of retaining some of our students post training.

This Council believes that building social housing can be funded by easing the restrictions on council borrowing for housing, a larger social housing grant programme, and a robust regime of private developer contributions.

Therefore this Council further resolves to lobby central government for such changes to happen so Northampton Borough Council can build more affordable homes.

Councillor Markham proposed and Councillor Hadland seconded an amendment:

The amended motion read:

'This Council notes recent research based on Ministry of Justice statistics shows that nearly three homes are at risk of being repossessed in Northampton every day. In Northampton between July 2013 and June 2014 952 possession claims were issued to the county courts.

'This Council is concerned that any rise in interest rates in the near future will put more people at risk of repossession.

'Therefore this Council recognises the work already done to work with local charities and support services to help and advise vulnerable people and resolves to explore all ways it can help local people with the threat of home repossession, such as further support to advice agencies to provide early help with those struggling financially.

'One way Northampton Borough Council can help with the housing crisis is to increase the supply of affordable housing. We need more affordable housing for young families starting out and we need larger family homes for families that are expanding and growing up. We need housing that graduates from the university feel they can afford as a means of retaining some of our students post training.

'This Council believes that building social housing can be funded by easing the restrictions on council borrowing for housing, a larger social housing grant programme, and a robust regime of private developer contributions.



'This Council welcomes the new borrowing powers for extra borrowing for affordable housing announced by the Government in April 2014 and the announcement by this Administration to bring forward plans for housing in Dallington Heath which will include affordable housing and 100 new Council houses.

'Therefore this Council further resolves to continue to lobby central government for such changes to happen so Northampton Borough Council can build more affordable homes.'

The proposed amendments were accepted and became the substantive motion:

Council debated the substantive motive.

Upon a vote, the substantive motion was carried.

v) Councillor Stone to propose and Councillor Gowen to second that:

Northampton Borough Council notes that large supermarkets, whilst bringing certain benefits to the local area, also have a detrimental impact on local communities, the local economy and the environment;

Therefore welcomes the fact that Brighton & Hove, Chorley, Cornwall, Coventry, Crawley, Derby, Islington, Lambeth, Lancaster, Lincoln, Oxford, Preston, Sefton, South Hams, Southend-on-Sea, Southwark, Thanet, Wakefield, Weymouth & Portland and Wyre Forest Councils have submitted a proposal to the government under the Sustainable Communities Act for Local Authorities to be given the power to put a modest levy on very large retail outlets, or just supermarkets, in order to redress this detrimental impact, the specific wording of the proposal being:

"The government give local authorities the power to introduce a levy of up to 8.5% of the rateable value on supermarkets or large retail outlets in their area with a rateable annual value not less than £500,000 and for the revenue to be retained by local authorities in order to be used to help improve their local communities."

This Council also notes that the proposal also documents the detrimental impact, for example research has shown that for every pound spent in a large supermarket only 5p remains in the local economy while for independent retailers it is over 50p, that whilst in the last year large supermarket chains expanded their floor space by 2,750,000 square feet the number of people they employed fell by over 400 and that one of the largest supermarket chains has stated that it generated 28,500 tonnes of food waste at its stores and distribution centres and it threw out two-thirds of its bagged salad and 40% of its apples in the first six months of 2013;

Notes that the inspiration for the proposal has come from similar levies that have existed in Northern Ireland and Scotland for over two years and that the proposal notes the positive impact seen in those parts of the UK;

Notes that the VAT rise in 2011 was thirty five times higher as a cost to large retailers than this proposed levy would be and that following the VAT rise the major

supermarket chains embarked on a price war where thousands of items were reduced in price;

This Council further notes that if this power was acquired it would present the opportunity to raise further revenue for the benefit of local businesses and local communities if the Council wished to use it;

This Council resolves to support the proposal and inform Derby City Council of this in writing”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

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

There were none.

The meeting concluded at 9.37pm