

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 20 January 2014 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

COUNCILLORS: Caswell, Ansell, Aziz, Beardsworth, Begum, Bottwood, Capstick, I. Choudary, Conroy, Duncan, Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Glynane, Golby, 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

Councillor Strachan declared a personal interest in Item 11 as the Chair of the Environment, Development & Transport Scrutiny Committee at Northamptonshire County Council.

Councillor Capstick declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Cabinet Member reports as a member of WNDC.

Councillor Hadland declared a personal interest in Item 7 – Cabinet Member reports as a member of WNDC.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 9th December 2013 were agreed and signed by the Mayor following an amendment to the recording of Motion v – had been carried but recorded as lost.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors Subbarayan, Wire, Davies, N Choudary, Palethorpe and King.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor commented that Community Awards was being launched from Monday 27th January 2014 and commented that a letter would be sent out to community groups asking for nominations and urged Councillors to nominate any person who they considered deserving. He further thanked Officers and Members for their contribution during the 'Poppy Appeal' and noted that £311, in total, had been collected. The Mayor further noted that he was holding a Fundraising Event for the Mayor's Charity, at the Tamarind Curry Club on the 2nd February 2014.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Coles addressed Council and commented that he was the owner of a property in Northampton and had experienced a flooded cellar at his property which was the responsibility of Anglian Water and an environmental health concern. He expressed his concern for other residents of Northampton who may suffer similar experiences.

Mr Huffadine- Smith commented that he would like to applaud the information contained within the Cabinet Members report – Leader of the Council, that Councillor Mackintosh and Councillor Markham would be participating in the 'Big Sleepout' in order to raise money and awareness for the Hope Centre. He commented that there should be cross party support for this and urged all parties to participate as this was an issue that demanded the full attention of all parties.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that twenty one 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).

In response to a supplementary questions asked relating to question 8, Councillor Markham confirmed that encouragement was given to people who were homeless who refused to use services but could not force them against their will.

In response to a supplementary questions asked relating to question 9, Councillor Mackintosh stated that there was an obligation to work with other agencies and partnership which included data-sharing.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 10, Councillor Markham explained that the allocations policy an alert was provided for those who were 2 weeks or more in arrears and that the Council would contact them to assist in early intervention. It was noted that there was also a Discretionary Housing Panel but that a number of these had been cancelled as to lack of people coming forward.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 11, Councillor Markham explained that the some homeless people were assisted by the third sector but that this was due to the fact that it was not within the Council remit to provide some individuals who did not qualify for the necessary benefits

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 12, Councillor Hadland explained that the provision of affordable housing was dependent on the market as there was a percentage that had to be provided by NBC policy. He commented that there was never enough affordable housing but the administrations were trying their best.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 15, Councillor Bottwood explained that reviews were constantly being undertaken but that they could only be conducted if issues were brought to the attention of the Cabinet

Members.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 16, Councillor Eldred commented that he did not know when the Sekhemka statue would be sent to the auction house but he would inform Councillors when he had the information.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 17, Councillor Eldred explained that no decision had been made relating to the location of the Francis Crick statue.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 19, Councillor Hadland explained that he was unsure what incentives were being offered to encourage people into unlet units owned by NBC, but would let Councillor Conroy know the answer at a later date.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 20, Councillor Hallam explained that he would not could not confirm whether there would be more fly tipping and whether he was for or against the decision to charge for Household Waste recycling as it could potentially predetermine the decision being discussed with Northamptonshire County Council.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

At this point, each of the Cabinet Members made a presentation of their respective portfolios that had been circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Mackintosh submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. He noted that there were many dates in the calendar for major events which included the Alive@delapre event, the opening of a new bus station and the demolition of Greyfriars. In response to a question from Councillor Stone, Councillor Mackintosh commented that increased homelessness was largely due to the previous governments' policies and failures and noted that completed work had been undertaken with various agencies. Responding to a question from Councillor Mennell, Councillor Mackintosh explained that he and the Cabinet Member for Environment would meet with her to explore the possibilities of installing recycling facilities in flats in Blackthorn. In response to a question from Councillor Mason, he stated that the opening up of Abington Street to traffic was a key manifesto policy and further responded to Councillor Glynane's comments by noting that there had been discussion about the de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street and that a motion had been brought at the last Council meeting (9th December 2013) and noted that no single member of the public had turned up to speak against the proposal. In response to a question asked by Councillor Meredith, Councillor Mackintosh noted that no decision had been made about the location of the Francis Crick statue.

Councillor Markham submitted her Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. She noted that the first tenants panel meeting had been held, with 35 members from the Stock Option Review and a further 14 new members. It was further noted that the Service Improvement Panel was going very well and the consultation on the new proposed scheme to tackle rogue landlords was underway. In response to a question asked by Councillor Mason, it was explained that ideally, those living in

accommodation where adaptations had been made to accommodate a disabled person, would be able to remain, but that there was not always the facilities and funding to allow this. Responding to a comment from Councillor Capstick, it was noted that Councillor Markham was working alongside the Overview and Scrutiny Panel but was not willing to wait for their recommendations to be made before she commenced any work.

Councillor Hadland submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. He explained that there had been huge progress with various projects within Northampton, specifically referring to the University accommodation and the huge amount of construction work that had been bought forward very quickly. In response to a question from Councillor Stone, it was noted that the poll taken by the Herald and Post whereby 93.5% of people disagreed with the opening of Abington Street to traffic mostly consisted of responses of people vehemently against the notion. He further stated that there is always a high percentage of negatives in similar cases and it was noted that the £3 million was a provision made in the Capital Programme but expectation was the final amount would be a lot less. In response to Councillor Beardsworth question, he explained that a low number of respondents to question from residents and business on the opening of Abington Street could only lead to an assumption that those who did not respond were content with the scheme, which he noted was technically the best scheme as recommended. Responding to Councillor Glynane, it was explained that whilst there may have been no mention of the opening of Abington Street in the Central Area Action Plan, he was still committed to providing a walkable and driveable town centre that would provide access and growth. It was noted that provisions for the cost of free parking would balance over time and costs would decrease. Responding to Councillor Larratt, Councillor Hadland commented that there was a need for reliable lifts at the new Railway Station and that they had campaigned for a year during the planning process for more lift facilities. He also confirmed that Brian Binley MP would be meeting the Secretary of State with regards to the implications and potential disruptions to train services when Euston would be accommodating HS2.

Councillor Eldred submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question asked by Councillor Stone, he stated that the 'Women and Rising and the men who love them event' was an official event as it was organised through the Women's forum. It was noted that Resident's Associations would be written to and given information about the Forums. He further confirmed that staff in the one stop shop had been fully trained in dealing with people requesting assistance with fuel and food issues and noted that the public facing Police enquiry desk had been opened in the one stop shop. Responding to concerns expressed, it was noted that the majority of customers in the one stop shop had no problems in discussing issues with the police in public view and stated members needed to speak to the police directly about their consultation process with regards to them opening their enquiry desk. In response to a request from Councillor Meredith to simplify the Councillor Empowerment Fund form, Councillor Eldred stated that they had worked with the voluntary sector when designing the form.

Councillor Bottwood submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. He noted that there had been efforts to increase footfall in the town centre and that

the free parking incentives had been very successful, especially over the Christmas period. It was reported that there was proposals for a capital programme investment of more than £13 million to be spent on infrastructure projects and in response to a question from Councillor Beardsworth, confirmed that as funding became available, major projects would be completed.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Beardsworth addressed Council and commented the point of consultations was for the general public to have their opinions heard and taken on board. She stated that there was a need for the administration to use their own Consultation Matrix prior to undertaking major projects. She championed the extensive consultation that was conducted during the Housing Stock Options Review, for which they received cross party support. She further reported that with regards to opening up of Abington Street to traffic, there had been 3 options considered but that they had not been properly consulted on. She questioned why the Traffic Regulation Order consultation had been undertaken by Northamptonshire County Council during the month of December (2013) when residents and businesses were too busy to participate in the consultation. Having spoken to numerous traders along Abington Street, she stated that 14 of them were vehemently against the proposal.

The Leader, in response, stated that the Liberal Democrats were against the proposals as a consequence of them being voted out at the last election and suggested that they had failed on every issue. He stated that they had failed the town and that the responsibility and onus lay with the current administration and that they were determined to get the Northampton back on track with assistance being given to the Cobblers, the Saints, the Railway station and the skatepark.

Councillor Beardsworth commented that a number of the aforementioned projects had been started by the Liberal Democrats whom had built the foundations for the projects that were now being completed. She asked that the administration do not manipulate the consultation process as she stated she had seen it conducted excellently under Councillor Markham's review of Housing Stock Options.

9. LOCAL COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME - YEAR 2 - PROPOSED CHANGES

Councillor Bottwood submitted a report that outlined the proposed amendment to the local Council Tax reduction scheme from an 8.5% reduction in support in 2013/14 to a 15% reduction in 2014/15. He stated that it had been designed to be fair to all and that consideration had been given to other local authorities and that any person identified as needing support would be assisted on an individual basis.

Councillor Beardsworth commented that the reduction was almost double what had been in the previous year and expressed concerns that it would have a detrimental effect on the most vulnerable people.

Councillor Mason commented that the 6.5% increase was above the rate of inflation. She further noted that many residents were still suffering the effects of the Welfare Reform Act and whilst she realised that there were still some people exempt from

this, the increase in costs was an attack on the poorest people.

Councillor Bottwood responded by noting that it was a government lead initiative.

Councillor Mackintosh seconded adoption of the report.

RESOLVED:

That Council approved the amendments to the scheme from an 8.5% reduction in Council Tax Support (CTS) in 2013/14 to a 15% reduction in 2014/15.

10. COUNCIL TAX BASE

Councillor Bottwood submitted a report that sought Council's approval of the tax base for 2014/15.

Councillor Beardsworth commented that it was nonsensical for there to be an increase in the Council Tax Base and suggested that a more prudent approach would be to not decrease the non-collection rate from 3.513% to 2.7% for 2014/2015.

Councillor Conroy asked whether the Council Tax Base for Billing was correct and not at a similar rate as other Parish Councils.

Councillor Stone stated that she was not able to support the recommendations contained within the report as residents were suffering the cumulative effect of having had a Council Tax freeze and requested that a consultation be conducted on increasing Council Tax.

Councillor Glynane commented that when the administration took over, Council debt was at zero and asked why the debt issues were not being addressed which he suggested would be left after the election.

Councillor Mackintosh seconded adoption of the report.

RESOLVED:

1. That the tax base for 2014/15 was approved at 60,651.14 Band D equivalent properties and associated parish tax bases within this report.

	2014/15	2013/14
Billing	2,402.29	2,394.26
Collingtree	508.64	443.35
Duston	5260.40	4,748.13
Great Houghton	279.44	246.80
Hardingstone	757.93	658.39
Upton	2,006.64	1,687.65
Wootton & East Hunsbury	6,214.60	5,442.79
West Hunsbury	1,585.70	1,447.71
Hunsbury Meadow	475.24	369.95

Northampton (Unparished)	41,160.27	40,635.31
Total tax base	60,651.14	58,074.34

11. NOTICES OF MOTION

- i. Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Mason seconded:

“This council is mindful of our responsibility to protect our citizens in the event of bad weather, flooding and other environmental disasters.

This Council asks Cabinet to put in train the necessary refresh of all emergency policies and procedures and training for local authority staff, members and partners”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote the motion was lost.

- ii. Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Captstick seconded:

“This Council notes fuel poverty is becoming an ever increasing issue in the town. In order to ameliorate this and to help bring down the cost of domestic consumption this council resolves to work with energy companies on a favourable tariff for consumers willing to bulk switch to the same provider”.

Council debated the motion

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote:

There voted for the motion: Councillors Aziz, Beardsworth, Begum, Capstick, Conroy, Eales, Glynane, Gowen, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Stone and Strachan.

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

There abstained the Mayor.

The motion was lost.

- iii. Councillor Glynane proposed and Councillor Beardsworth seconded:

“This Council notes that since the current administration has overseen shocking decline of the town centre, highlighted by:

- A record number of empty shops
- Dropping footfall

- A misunderstanding of what people want from the town centre, evidenced by public resistance to Administration plans. (i.e the removal of the market square fountain, reopening of Abington Street etc.)
- The stalling of the Legal and General agreement that was progressing under the Liberal Democrat administration, even in the worst economic climate for regeneration.

The Council therefore concludes that:

- The current Administration is failing the town centre, and as such, the town.
- A radical policy shift is needed to undo the damage caused by the Administration over the last three years.
- The Administration either lacks, or is not motivated by a clear understanding of what is required for the health of the town centre

This Council resolves:

- Embrace, promote and deliver the “town centre first; policy.

Council debated the motion

The motion was lost.

12. 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 9.10pm