

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 10 March 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, N Choudary, Conroy, Davies, Duncan, Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Ford, Glynane, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, Lane, Larratt, Lynch, Mackintosh, Malpas, Markham, Mason, Mennell, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Palethorpe, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, Stone, Strachan, Subbarayan, Wire DL and Yates

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Capstick declared a personal non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 – Cabinet Member Reports as a board member of WNDC.

Councillor Hadland declared a personal non-pecuniary interest in Item 6 – Cabinet Member Reports as a board member of WNDC.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Gowen and King.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor informed Council a painting had been commissioned by the pupils and staff of the Caroline Chisholm School and was on display in the Mayor's parlour. It was noted that a book of condolences for the former Councillor Don Edwards was still available for members to sign and noted that the tributes paid at the last meeting of Council were much appreciated by the widow of Mr Edwards, who had written to express her appreciation. The Mayor reminded members that there would be a tree-planting occasion, carried out by the Mayoress on the 24th March 2014 at 11am and invited all members to attend.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mrs Sibley addressed Council and expressed concern about the amount of dog faeces that was on the streets. She stated that as a dog owner she was responsible in clearing up after her animal and requested that other people do the same or face being fined. She noted that it was against the law and people should adhere to the law or face a fine from the wardens.

Mr Leach addressed Council and thanked Councillor Beardsworth and Stone for organising the meeting with regards to the de-pedestrianisation of Abington Street and urged that the administration listen to the concerns expressed by the residents of Northampton, not only with regards to Abington Street but also the Bus Station. He urged Councillors to help with the plight of Northamptonshire couple Paul and Sandra Dunham who faced extradition to America, on fraud and money – laundering charges.

Mr Hewitt addressed Council and suggested that the new Northgate Bus Station had put Northampton back 30 years and noted that the people of Northampton would be paying for it for the next 25 years. He further expressed concerns that there would be a fatality at the bus station as he considered there to be issues with road safety in the area.

Mr Griffiths addressed Council and noted that the new bus arrangements had placed a number of challenges on the older residents of Northampton using the bus service and disabled people. He commented that he was aware of people who had missed their connections between the Bus Station by not getting to the Drapery on time, which had been an inconvenience. He further noted that the Council should pay further attention to the disabled parking facilities in the town.

Ms Wisharrt addressed Council and noted that when St Edmunds hospital had been sold by the NHS, it had been in a good condition and well secured but that it had over time, become dilapidated and derelict and asked that residents within close proximity of the building be compensated and question what the impact of the building was on tourism to the area. She asked that the Council undertake a Compulsory Purchase Order on the building.

Ms Murtagh spoke as a the joint Chairperson of the P.EM.B.A Residents Association and noted that there had been numerous ongoing problems with the building which included an increase in feral cats, pigeons and rats in the area. She further stated that the building had attracted drug users, squatters and prostitutes and not only was an eye sore to the area but caused health and safety concerns and asked that the Council redevelop it giving sympathy to the local estate.

Mr Adams addressed Council and referring to the Cabinet Member report for Housing, stated that the Tenant Panel would 'elect' and not 'select' tenants to join the ALMO Implementation Board. Referring to service improvements, he questioned whether the Council had a grasp of their current contracts. With regards to Toms Close he asked whether this would be owned by the Council and questioned if the properties would be for social rent.

5. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that 14 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 question asked addressing questions one to three, Councillor Mackintosh confirmed that information with regards to the take up rates would be given at a later date when figures were available.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 4, Councillor Hadland confirmed he would not be too busy to meet with businesses.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 5, Councillor Markham confirmed that complaints were dealt with on an individual basis.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 6, Councillor Markham confirmed that levels of work were undertaken seriously and that they continued to work closely with tenants.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 7, Councillor Mackintosh commented that the administration listened to residents and were keen to consult which was demonstrated in the recent decision not to dispose of land at Blackthorns.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 8, Councillor Hadland commented that it was too early to say if the discovery of asbestos in the Greyfairs bus station would result in an extended demolition period and stated that it was unlikely that additional costs would be incurred.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 9, Councillor Markham confirmed that she could not confirm if the new homes in Toms Close would be for social rent but that they would be in the best interest of the tenants.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 11, Councillor Eldred confirmed that information had been made available and was within the usual timescale.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 12, Councillor Eldred confirmed that the Leader made decisions about appointments to forums and this was not changing.

In response to a supplementary question asked, relating to Question 13, Councillor Eldred confirmed that training was available for Councillors and that they were most qualified to decide where money was to be spent in the local wards.

6. 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 commented that normal services had resumed with regards to the North Gate Bus Station. He gave

his apologies to the people affected and noted that nearly all major projects experienced some teething problems but noted that those should be kept in perspective. The Leader announced that there were plans for 100 new Council homes to be built in Northampton and would be the largest social housing development in 20 years. Northampton has topped a poll highlighting the best UK towns and cities to do business in. It was further noted that research recently undertaken had shown Northampton as being awarded top marks for business turnover growth, as well as having high company start-up rates and low insolvency rates. In response to questions raised, Councillor Mackintosh commented that the problems experienced by the North Gate Bus Station was not structural, but had been caused by road traffic. He further noted that he would consider the possibility of a Scrutiny Panel being established to examine where improvements could have been made. Responding to questions regarding local businesses, Councillor Mackintosh commented that there were numerous businesses, such as Cosworth, who had demonstrated their commitment to developing in Northampton by applying for planning permission to expand their facilities in the Enterprise Zone. In relation to questions relating to Community Safety, Councillor Mackintosh commented that there had been an increase in police presence in the town centre and that the crime figures had reduced and noted that there would be continued assistance in supporting people through partnership working with the County Council and other agencies.

Councillor Markham submitted her Cabinet Member report and commented that the houses at Toms Close were being decommissioned as it was becoming increasingly expensive to run and would cost in excess of £80,000 per property to bring them up to Decent Homes Standard. She thanked officers who had worked on the project which was echoed by Councillor Hill. In response to questions asked, Councillor Markham stated that she was unable to release the specific dates of the next phase of the Decent Homes Standard due to the size of the ongoing project. She reiterated that she was unable to comment at present on whether the development on new homes would remain as Council stock, but that they would be built to a much better standard than present.

Councillor Hadland submitted his Cabinet Member report and commented that work being undertaken on the fountain in Market Square was going well. He thanked officers and partnership organisations who worked tirelessly to resolve the issues that had been experienced during the launch of the Bus Station. He requested that Members make businesses aware that there was a reserve of £50,000 Business Rate Relief for business moving into the Enterprise Zone and hoped that this would lead to an increased uptake. In response to a further question asked relating to the Bus Station, Councillor Hadland explained that with many major projects, it was not uncommon for there to be some fine tuning needed after a launch.

Councillor Eldred submitted his Cabinet Member report and commented that he was pleased to announce Simple Minds would be playing at Delapre Abbey as part of the Alive at Delapre concert. In response to a question, Councillor Eldred commented that he would not be able to release information about the sales of tickets as it was subject to commercial sensitivity but explained that it was ticket sales were doing very well.

Councillor Hallam submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to a question, it was noted that the course of action for illegal taxi ranking

was that they were dealt with through the proper channels and were brought before the Licensing Committee.

7. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Palethorpe expressed his appreciation for the work of West Northamptonshire Development Corporation (WNDC) for the assistance given in regenerating Northampton Town Centre and commented that they had significant steps in improving the future for residents of Northampton. He commented that in terms, less than one hundred jobs had actually been created and requested that the Administration address the matter and stated that there was a need for support in taking the Enterprise Zone forward. It was noted that he considered it essential that the Director of Regeneration, Enterprise and Planning be given the resources to continue to develop major projects within the Town Centre.

The Leader, in response, stated that there was joined up working with a number of business and organisations within the Enterprise Zone and commented that he was committed to future developments within Northamptonshire.

Councillor Palethorpe commented that the regeneration of the Town should be about the people within it. He suggested that it is the people within the town who should be asked about what they want for the future and what would attract them back into the town; without this there would be a decrease in footfall and would ultimately be less desirable for businesses to invest in.

8. PAY POLICY STATEMENT

Councillor Mackintosh submitted a report that sought the approval of the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2014/15.

Councillor Bottwood Markham seconded adoption of the report.

Councillor Begum referred to the equality implications and asked the Leader provide a breakdown of council employees pay by gender and ethnicity.

Councillor Capstick commented that more transparency was needed and requested that information be included in future where the ratio between the lowest paid and the highest paid be displayed.

Councillor Mackintosh requested that Councillor Begum's questions be submitted in full, by writing and a response would be given in due course and noted that Councillor Capstick request be considered for next year's Pay Policy Statement.

RESOLVED:

Council approved the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2014/15 attached at Appendix 1 of the report.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr Adams addressed Council and expressed his support for the motion,

i) Councillor Beardsworth proposed and Councillor Conroy seconded:

“This Council notes the good work done by the administration and members of the opposition in developing the “Arm’s Length Management Organisation” that is intended to take control of the Borough’s Housing Stock, with a target date of 1st January 2015.

The relationship between the Housing Revenue Account and the General Fund is important aspect of delivering cost effective services to Northampton council tax payers.

It is important that the Council has a detailed understanding of the support provided by the General Fund to the Housing Revenue Account, and the reverse.

Council therefore requests that Scrutiny undertakes a detail review of the services provided and cost associated with the change between the two budgets presenting their findings in time for the ALMO start up and the preparation of the 2015/16 budget”

Council debated the motion

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

ii) Councillor Glynane propose and Councillor Meredith seconded:

“The Council notes that low air quality can have serious consequences for the health of people and of the environment, making good air quality fundamental for the ongoing good of our town.

Given plans to reopen Abington Street to traffic, it is therefore essential that current air quality levels are established, so any changes in them can be properly managed in the future, and the health of residents, town centre users and the environment can be assured.

Council resolves to establish and publish air quality levels at a number of points along the stretch of Abington Street between St. Giles Terrace and Wellington Street before any work begins, and regularly afterward, so that any changes can be clearly identified and mitigated.

Council debated the motion

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

iii) Cllr Mackintosh proposed and Councillor Hadland seconded:

“This Council recognises the importance of the St Edmund's site as a key gateway to the town.

“It is regrettable that the buildings have fallen into a state of disrepair, but Council welcomes the fact that this Administration is working with the developers of the site and English Heritage to drive forward the renovation of the buildings and bring them

back into an appropriate use.

“Council looks forward to a planning application being submitted later this year and will keep all options open to ensure that the site is properly redeveloped.”

Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Eales seconded an amendment:

That the final paragraph be deleted and this final paragraph be inserted instead so that the motion reads:

“This Council recognises the importance of the St Edmund's site as a key gateway to the town.

It is regrettable that the buildings have fallen into a state of disrepair, but Council welcomes the fact that this Administration is working with the developers of the site and English Heritage to drive forward the renovation of the buildings and bring them back into an appropriate use.

This Council asks the Administration to accelerate negotiations with developers and English Heritage. This site has been derelict for long enough. This Council therefore would welcome a planning application for the site but in the meantime asks the Cabinet to immediately explore all options including the serious possibility of a Compulsory Purchase Order.”

Council debated the amended motion.

Upon a vote the amended motion was lost

Council debated the original motion.

Upon a vote the original motion was carried.

10. 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 8.42pm