

## **MINUTES**

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 24 February 2020 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

**COUNCILLORS:** Ansell, Ashraf, Beardsworth, Birch, Choudary, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Haque, Hibbert, J Hill, Joyce, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, B Markham, M Markham, Marriott, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Russell, Sargeant, Smith, Stone, Walker and Roberts

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

There were none.

### **2. MINUTES.**

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 20 January 2020 were agreed and signed by the Mayor following the correction that Councillor Birch declared an interest in respect of Item 9 as a trustee of Community Spaces Northampton.

### **3. APOLOGIES.**

Apologies were received from Councillors Aziz, Bottwood, Cali, Caswell, Chunga, Davenport and Graystone.

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

The Mayor invited all to attend a Silent Art Auction Mixer at 78 Derngate on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2020 and asked that they contact the Mayor's Secretary for further information. He explained that The Lowdown would be hosting a Councillor briefing session on Thursday 27 February 2020 at 6pm. He had been invited to visit Northampton's twinned town of Marburg next month, and would provide an update at the next meeting.

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

Mr Richard Dimpleby addressed the Council explaining that he lived in Kingsthorpe. He wanted to stress the strength of feeling there was against the Community Governance Review proposal. He had not received a letter during the consultation period. He understood that less than 5% of residents had responded to the consultation indicating there was not an appetite for change. He urged the Council to reconsider the boundaries proposed. He urged the Council to support the amendment being proposed by Councillors Beardsworth and Birch. It was felt that the change was being imposed rather than being done with the residents.

Katie Abu addressed the Council expressing her happiness that another opportunity to discuss the Community Governance Review proposal had arisen. She believed that this was being done too quickly and felt it would be good to defer the proposal. There was a natural cohesion to the three wards of Whitehills, Obelisk and Sunnyside without including Kingsthorpe and St David's. The three wards already worked together and it made sense for this to continue. She felt that not everyone in the area was consulted with and that fewer than 5% responded because they did not understand the consequences of the consultation.

Tony Mallard addressed the Council explaining he was the Chair of Eastfield Residents Association. The association wanted to purchase a bench to place in the park and hoped to do so using funding from the Councillor Community Fund. The bench would need to be provided by the Council at a cost of £1600, which he felt was very high. A company called Workbridge could provide two benches for the park for less than £1000. He asked that the Council grant permission to purchase the benches from Workbridge in order to reduce the cost spend from the Councillor Community Fund.

Arthur Newbury addressed the Council saying he was the Chair of the Investigation Action Group. He raised concerns that a member had posted something inappropriate on social media regarding another member. He felt that this behaviour should not be tolerated and requested that the member who made the inappropriate post apologise to the other member and that they should take responsibility for their actions.

## **6. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

Councillor Larratt submitted a report explaining that a lengthy process had been undertaken by the cross-party working group where upon it proposed that the Council made a Community Governance Reorganisation Order be made. This would create a Northampton Town Council, a Far Cotton and Delapré Community Council and a Kingsthorpe Parish Council.

During the consultation period, letters were sent to every household in the parishes through the support of the Elections team. He understood that some people felt the consultation had not been fit for purpose however the same process had been used in previous Community Governance Reviews proposals. The proposals could not be altered without further consultation being undertaken, incurring additional costs. There would be an option to reconsider the governance options in two to three years' time.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report and reserved his right to speak.

At this point Councillor Birch proposed an amendment to the Community Governance Review report. She called the Council to separate consideration of the three new councils in order that each could be voted upon separately. She called upon the Council to respect the views of the ward councillors and residents of Kingsthorpe, and St David's and the views of WASPRA. It was felt that the parish could be too large, being larger than the town councils of Brackley and Towcester.

The area consisted of very different demographics and it was felt that the consultation was flawed. The elected members for those wards were not consulted with, nor were community groups or key stakeholders. It was suggested that Kingsthorpe and St David's could join the Town Council. It was asked that a review be held in eighteen months' time to enable further consultation.

Councillor Beardsworth seconded the amendment indicating the parish wanted to start small and grow over time. It would be beneficial to delay and consider alternative options at another time. She felt the proposal was being rushed and was too complicated. She believed that people felt forced into this option and didn't fully understand the implications.

Councillors discussed the amendment expressing disappointment that the proposals had been submitted in this format. The proposed Northampton Town Council would become the largest town council in the country. The proposal regarding Kingsthorpe Parish Council should be delayed to ensure all available options had been considered. Benefits for everyone were created when diverse communities worked together. The report did not contain financial information regarding the precepts for the new councils.

In response Councillor Larratt thanked everyone for their comments. Members had expressed concern regarding the size of the proposed Kingsthorpe Parish Council however no such concerns had been raised regarding Northampton Town Council which was larger. The proposal had been discussed for the past eighteen months' therefore it had not been rushed. He understood that Kingsthorpe was a community with its own identity and needed its own parish council to represent it.

At this point the Mayor called for the amendment to be voted upon. This was a recorded vote with the following result:

Voting for the amendment: Councillors Choudary, Ashraf, Beardsworth, Birch, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Haque, Joyce, B Markham, Marriott, Meredith, Russell, Roberts, Smith and Stone.

Voting against the amendment: Councillors Ansell, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Hadland, Hibbert, Hill, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, M Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Parkekh, Patel, Sargeant, and Walker.

Upon the vote the amendment to the Community Governance Review fell.

Further discussions were then held on the main report. Some councillors felt there was not enough time for the proposal regarding Kingsthorpe Parish Council to be considered adequately. It was acknowledged that there were no restrictions on what parish councils could add to their precept and the true costs of setting up this parish council were not yet known. The process would be clearer after the Unitary Councils were in operation.

At this point another amendment was tabled by Councillor G Eales. He proposed that

the term of office of the new councillors shall be for 4 years from 2021 rather than the proposed 5 years from 2020 onwards for four-year terms.

Councillor Marriot seconded the amendment with those speaking indicating the report did not clearly define the finances involved.

Councillors discussed this amendment agreeing that the report was unclear as to how much the parish council would cost to establish and its operational costs for the first two years. The new parish councils would need time to settle and establish themselves as the lower tier of local government. They would also be supported by Northampton CALC.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the second amendment presented suggested that elections were moved to 2021. The Structural Change Order for Northamptonshire stated that elections could not be held in 2021 therefore the amendment if agreed could be unlawful. If the Council was minded to agree the proposed amendment then further investigation would be needed to check if it was lawful.

In response Councillor Larratt indicated there was a need to ensure the parish councils were operational before the unitary councils to ensure they were supported. The Council would grant fund the new parish councils for the first year of operation enabling them to plan with and for their local areas.

At this point the Mayor called for the amendment to be voted upon. 15 members voted for the amendment and 20 voted against the amendment therefore the amendment fell.

Councillor Larratt asked that the Council supported this proposal within the report which would enable local areas to have a say going forward.

At this point the Mayor called for the recommendations to be voted upon. 20 members voted for the recommendations and 14 voted against the recommendations and there was 1 abstention, therefore the amendment fell.

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

**RESOLVED: That the Council**

- a) Considered the recommendations of the Cross-Party Working Group at its meeting on the 18th February, 2020 and set out in full, in its report and plan now attached as Appendix 'A', and which were:**
  - i. That a Community Governance Reorganisation Order be made creating a Northampton Town council of 21 wards and 25 councillors as shown in red on the enclosed plan; a Far Cotton and Delapré Community Council (unwarded) with 12 councillors; and a Kingsthorpe Parish Council of five wards and 15 councillors both as shown in blue on the enclosed map (see Appendix 1).**
  - ii. That the term of office of the new councillors shall be for 5**

- years from 2020 onwards for four-year terms.
- iii. That the Chief Executive be authorised to convene the first meetings of the new councils. The first meeting of the Town Council being planned for Monday 18th May at 6.00pm at the Guildhall.
  - iv. That it be noted that the new Town Council and likewise the new Parish and Community Councils will not be exercising their full civic functions until April 2021
  - v. That from 1st April 2020 until the first meetings of the new councils, those borough councillors serving borough council wards in those new Council areas shall have responsibility for those new councils
  - vi. That the Chief Executive, after consultation with the Cross Party Working Group and subject where necessary to reports to Full Council, be authorised to prepare schedules of land and property to be transferred to the new councils including civic plate and historic artefacts to the new Town Council and to approve the budget requirement (grant to be paid) of the new councils and this delegation to also include any necessary amendments to the reorganisation orders for other matters that need to be included.
  - vii. That the new councils will be known/titled as:
    - Northampton Town Council
    - Far Cotton & Delapré Community Council
    - Kingsthorpe Parish Council

## **7. GENERAL FUND REVENUE AND CAPITAL BUDGETS 2020-2021**

The Mayor proposed a suspension of standing orders under Rule 25 to enable the mover and seconders the opportunity to speak for a maximum of 10 minutes and that no other speech exceeds 5 minutes in relation to items 7, 8, 9, and 10. This was agreed by Council.

Councillor Eldred submitted a report which reported the outcome of the consultation process on the 2020/21 general fund revenue and capital budget and the government funding settlement for 2020/21. He thanked his Cabinet colleagues, the Section 151 officer and staff for their help to make this budget possible. The proposal was recommending an increase to the council tax of £5 per year per band D property for 2020-21. Investment had been made to the capital programme.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

At this point Councillor Stone introduced the Labour Groups budget statement indicating that the budget included £1.5m of savings and nine proposed redundancies. The Council's accounts had failed external audits value for money test for a number of years. The risks regarding failure to secure the additional funding from the disposal of garden waste income was highlighted, along with the reduction of the Councillor Community Fund.

It was felt that an anti-poverty strategy to reduce inequalities and improve residents'

lives was needed and this would reduce overall costs to the county. The Council should work in partnership with Homes England and the councils housing stock outside of the HRA and the Right to Buy schemes needed to be replenished. It was suggested that a grants officer should be appointed to source additional funding. It was felt that the budget presented did not meet the growth agenda and that it did not include the additional costs regarding the Community Governance Review.

Councillor Birch seconded the budget statement expressing that Northampton could consider becoming the first electric bus town which would enable climate change targets to be met. It was felt that the town had a number of marketable assets, such as its parks and the Guildhall which could be used to generate more income. A fee could be charged for holding a commercial event in a park for example.

There were currently seventeen utilities companies supplying council properties which could be switched to one, greener energy, provider saving money. LED lighting could be installed in all council buildings and all council vehicles could be converted to run on electric.

In response Councillor Eldred clarified the Council was investing in properties because it was cheaper to do so and the number of people claiming job seekers allowance had fallen by 38% over the last ten years.

At this point Councillor B Markham introduced the Liberal Democrats budget statement indicating there was nothing new in the budget proposed. The main objective of the budget was to ensure it balanced and did not pass on any debt or commit the unitary authorities to spending. The budget pressures regarding homelessness had been indicated previously however it was felt little had been done to address them.

It was felt that charging for the disposal of garden waste had been introduced to supplement the budget and would be an environmental disaster and could lead to more fly-tipping.

Councillor Beardsworth seconded the Liberal Democrats budget statement indicating that less environmentally friendly options would be sought to dispose of garden waste due to the additional charge. The Councillor Community Fund was used to help small organisations and the reduction would be noticed.

In response Councillor Eldred explained that many people had already subscribed to pay for the disposal of their garden waste and new collection routes would be implemented and would achieve additional savings.

During discussions it was noted that many of the housing issues stemmed from the 'right to buy' scheme because the housing stock could not be replenished fast enough. The use of food banks and universal credit had not diminished. The Councillor Community Fund enabled many residents' associations to be viable. It was felt the budget focused on the removal of things such as the deletion of vacant posts rather than growth and regeneration. The general fund budget included funding for temporary accommodation and new housing throughout the year.

In response Councillor Eldred explained that the return on installation of solar panels on buildings was twenty to twenty-five years and LED lighting was being installed.

At this point the Mayor called for the recommendations to be voted upon. This was a recorded vote with the following result:

Voting for the recommendations: Councillors Ansell, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, M Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, and Walker.

Voting against the recommendations: Councillors Ashraf, Beardsworth, Birch, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Haque, Joyce, B Markham, Marriott, Meredith, Russell, Roberts, Smith and Stone.

The Mayor Councillor Choudary abstained from the vote.

Councillor Kilbride was not present for the vote on this item.

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

**RESOLVED: That Council agreed:**

1. That the feedback from consultation with the public, organisations and the Overview and Scrutiny and Audit Committees be considered and welcomed (detailed at appendices 9, 10 and 11).
2. That a general fund revenue budget for 2020/21 of £27.770m (excluding parishes, or £29.006m including parish precepts) be approved (detailed in appendices 1 and 2).
3. That the Council increases the council tax for its own purposes (excluding County, Police, Fire and Parish Precepts) by £5.00 (2.21%) per year per average band D property for 2020/21.
4. That the Council approve the general fund capital budget and outline programme and proposed financing for 2020/21, including the schemes in the development pool, as set out in appendix 4.
5. That Council confirm a minimum level of general fund balances for 2020/21 of £3.0m that reflects the risks being faced by the Council, with a prudent level of £4.0m included in the budget setting, and also note the position on earmarked reserves (appendix 7).
6. That authority be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Finance, and where appropriate the relevant Head of Service and Cabinet Member to:
  - Transfer monies to/from earmarked reserves as appropriate during the financial year; and
  - Update prudential indicators in both the prudential indicators report and treasury strategy report to Council, for any budget changes that impact on these.
7. That the draft fees and charges set out in appendix 8 be approved, including immediate implementation where appropriate. Note the one small amendment to the fees and charges schedule as detailed at section

### 3.1.3.

8. That Council approve the treasury management strategy (and associated appendices) for 2020/21 at appendix 5 of this report.
9. That authority be delegated to the Council's Chief Finance Officer, in liaison with the Cabinet Member for Finance, to make any temporary changes needed to the Council's borrowing and investment strategy to enable the authority to meet its obligations.
10. That Council delegate authority to the Chief Executive, Heads of Service and Chief Finance Officer to implement all budget options and restructures.

## 8. ROBUSTNESS OF BUDGET ESTIMATES AND ADEQUACY OF RESERVES

Councillor Eldred submitted a report which sought to advise the Council on the robustness of the estimates in the budget and the adequacy of the proposed financial reserves for the general fund and housing revenue account (HRA) and recommended the medium term financial plan (MTFP) 2020-2024, the revenue budget for 2020-21, capital programme 2020-24, reserves levels and the treasury management strategy 2020-21.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

During discussions it was noted that the report did not contain any information on the effects of Brexit or the local government reorganisation costs. No costs had been listed for the creation of the town and parish councils discussed in the previous item. There was no information regarding the use of reserves or how equality and health issues would be addressed. It did not contain any reassurance that the issues regarding temporary accommodation would be addressed.

At this point the Mayor called for the recommendations to be voted upon. This was a recorded vote with the following result:

Voting for the recommendations: Councillors Ansell, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, M Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, and Walker.

Voting against the recommendations: Councillors Beardsworth, Birch, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Haque, Joyce, B Markham, Marriott, Meredith, Russell, Roberts, Smith and Stone.

The Mayor Councillor Choudary abstained from the vote.

Councillor Ashraf was not present for the vote on this item.

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

**RESOLVED:** That Cabinet recommend to Council to carefully consider the content of this report with regards to the general fund and HRA prior to recommending the approval of the Council's MTFP 2020/21, the revenue budget

for 2020/21, capital programme 2020/24 and the treasury management strategy 2020/21.

## **9. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT (HRA) BUDGET, RENT SETTING 2020/2021 AND BUDGET PROJECTIONS FOR FUTURE YEARS**

Councillor Eldred submitted a report which indicated investment in the capital programme whilst being mindful that it was the first rent increase proposed for a number of years.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

In response Councillor Eldred explained the Council was currently considering locations for additional housing however details could not be provided at the meeting.

At this point the Mayor called for the recommendations to be voted upon. This was a recorded vote with the following result:

Voting for the recommendations: Councillors Ansell, Ashraf, Beardsworth, Birch, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Haque, Hibbert, Hill, Joyce, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, B Markham, M Markham, Marriott, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Russell, Roberts, Sargeant, Smith, Stone and Walker.

There were no votes against the recommendations.

The Mayor Councillor Choudary abstained from the vote.

The recommendations in the report were agreed.

### **RESOLVED: That Council:**

#### **1. The Council approved:**

- a) **An average rent increase of 2.7% per dwelling, in line with the legislation and the government's national rent policy, to take effect from 6th April 2020.**
- b) **The HRA budget for 2020/21 of £53.7m expenditure detailed in Appendix 1.**
- c) **The HRA capital programme for 2020/21, including future year commitments, and proposed financing as set out in Appendix 2.**
- d) **The proposed service charges listed in Appendix 3.**
- e) **That Cabinet be authorised, once the capital programme has been set, to approve new capital schemes and variations to existing schemes during 2020/21, subject to the funding being available and the schemes being in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the Council.**
- f) **The Total Fees proposed for NPH to deliver the services in scope for 2020/21 detailed in Appendix 4.**

#### **2. That the Cabinet acknowledges the issues and risks detailed in the Chief**

**Finance Officer's statement on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of the reserves.**

- 3. That the Council be recommended to confirm the reserves strategy of protecting balances wherever possible to allow the option of supporting future years' budgets, aiming for a minimum level of unallocated Housing Revenue Account balances of at least £5m for 2020/21 having regard to the outcome of the financial risk assessment.**
- 4. That authority be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer to make any technical changes necessary to the papers for the Council meeting of 24 February 2020.**
- 5. That Council be recommended to delegate authority to the Chief Executive and Chief Finance Officer to implement any retained HRA budget options and restructures.**
- 6. That authority be delegated to the Chief Finance Officer in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance, and where appropriate the relevant Head of Service and Portfolio Holder to:**
  - Transfer monies to/from earmarked reserves should that become necessary during the financial year.**
  - Transfer monies to/from HRA working balances between the Council and NPH for cash flow purposes should that become necessary during the financial year.**
  - Transfer monies, within the Capital Programme, between Developer Affordable Homes opportunities (budget head) and Buy backs and Acquisitions (budget head) during the financial year subject to the funding being available and the schemes being in accordance with the objectives and priorities of the Council.**
  - Update the budget tables and appendices, prior to Council should any further changes be necessary.**
  - Update prudential indicators in both the Prudential Indicators report and Treasury Strategy report, for Council for any budget changes that impact on these.**

## **10. COUNCIL TAX 2020/21**

Councillor Eldred submitted a report which detailed the final precept determinations from the major precepting authorities.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

During discussions it was noted that the proposed increases needed to reflect that lower income households did not always receive an increase based on the rate of inflation from the Bank of England. People who lived on their own only received a small reduction to the expected fee and there was a need to understand how these fees affected people's wellbeing. A special exemption for care leavers had been requested but not granted.

At this point the Mayor called for the recommendations to be voted upon. This was a recorded vote with the following result:

Voting for the recommendations: Councillors Ansell, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, M Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Sargeant, and Walker.

Voting against the recommendations: Councillors Ashraf, Beardsworth, Birch, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Haque, Joyce, B Markham, Marriott, Meredith, Russell, Roberts, Smith and Stone.

The Mayor Councillor Choudary abstained from the vote.  
The recommendations in the report were agreed.

**RESOLVED: That Council approved the council tax resolution shown at appendices A, B, and C.**

**11. 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 9:10 pm