

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 15 June 2020 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting held 9 March 2020 and the meeting of Annual Council held on 21 May 2020 were agreed and signed by the Chair as a true and accurate record.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cali, Davenport and Walker.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor referred to the recent meeting of Annual Council and Mayor making that had taken place remotely over Zoom and that there were a number of past Mayors who were serving on the Council. He had undertaken 48 engagements last year as Deputy Mayor and his first event as Mayor of Northampton for 2020 2021 had been Oak Apple Day. The Mayor confirmed that he was looking forward to future events and the forthcoming flag raising for Arms Forces Day.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

There were none.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that six 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 Hallam confirmed that he was aware of an issue with trees in Southfields and remote meetings had taken place. He had also met with residents on site and the case was

under review. Councillor Hallam confirmed that the Tree Policy had been reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 2, Councillor King confirmed that remote meetings with various Groups and the Association of Residents' Associations had resumed recently.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 3, Councillor King confirmed that a full response had been provided and the Police had also been involved regarding the installation of CCTV cameras at Thorpeland.

In answer to a supplementary question relating to question 5, Councillor Hallam advised that feedback is important and there would be learning from the trial.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 6, Councillor Hallam confirmed that he would provide an update on progress regarding the Billing Road cemetery.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

Councillor Nunn submitted his report as Leader of the Council and highlighted the salient points. He commented that he was delighted that staff had gone over and above in all activities during the Covid19 pandemic. He conveyed his thanks to staff. Councillor Stone echoed the thanks of the Leader to staff. In response to a question regarding Councillors being involved in the question and answer session with Parish Councils regarding the Town Council; the Leader confirmed that this session had been organised and hosted by National Association of Local Councils (NALC). In answer to a question of whether Covid19 had impacted on Northampton Forward spend, the Leader advised that he was not aware of any negative impact but a board meeting was scheduled shortly. In answer to a question regarding the re-implementation of on-street parking charges, the Leader confirmed that he had not been involved in discussions regarding on street parking charges but careful consideration had been given regarding re-implementing car park charges.

Councillor Larratt submitted his report as Deputy-Leader of the Council and highlighted the salient points. He highlighted the work that Democratic Services and Legal Services had undertaken regarding training on remote meetings and hosting remote meetings. In response to a query regarding a business deal with the Cobblers, Councillor Larratt confirmed that there was no agreement and that it had been made clear that any development would only happen when the stadium stand was completed. The Leader advised that at no point has an acceptable agreement been concluded, this Council has a clear process and no deal would be taken until it is ready to be taken. Councillor Larratt added that supporters had always been kept informed. In answer to a question about the importance of improved entrances to the town, Councillor Larratt confirmed that East West Rail was mindful of the situation and drafts were included with the Local Plan. He added that there is shortly going to be a final consultation on the Local Plan. In response to a query regarding the inclusion of water courseways in the Plan, the Deputy Leader advised that

Nothamptonshire County Council had published its plan and it was publicly available on line. NBC's reports fall out of those reports. A consultant had been engaged and provided updated drawings that are currently being looked at by Officers. The report would be published in due course.

Councillor Eldred submitted his report as Cabinet Member for Finance and highlighted the salient points. He thanked the Finance Team for its hard work in reducing the budget overspend to £283,000. He confirmed that some businesses might not have survived without the grants provided by the Council during the Covid19 pandemic. In response to a question regarding the setting up of a Cross Party Working Group to look at finances of the Council; Councillor Eldred confirmed that the Council already has the Audit Committee and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Councillor Eldred advised that he has been asked to attend the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to provide details of expenditure in relation to Covid19. The Finance Team is working hard looking at potential funding streams. In answer to a question regarding the support provided to residents over the next 3-6 months, Councillor Eldred confirmed that there was the Council Tax Reduction Scheme and the Hardship Fund. In addition, the repayment scheme had been extended to 24 months. Residents are also referred to partner organisation such as CAB, Community Law and the Authority has its own advisors also. There has not been a drop in the collection of Council Tax but if this does happen, schemes etc. can be investigated.

Councillor Hibbert submitted his report as Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and highlighted the salient points. He confirmed that a new Homeless Strategy was in place. 61 rough sleepers were now residing in hotels, 42 have been moved into settled and supported accommodation. It had been a successful exercise.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Birch made a statement on lessons learnt so far on the Covid-19 crisis. She commented that the arrival of Covid-19 has made everyone face unprecedented pressures, and changes to every aspect of everyone's lives and families. This generation has never had to face the challenges of an emergency such as this. Working patterns, family routines, social and cultural activities have all been curtailed or greatly altered. It is unimaginable that things can go back to normal in the coming months or years when everyone is overshadowed by a virus which took fewer than 100 days to shut the world down. Councillor Birch went on to state what she felt had been learnt, she commented that communities, neighbours and friends had rallied round and set up support groups, neighbours were contacted and the elderly and vulnerable were identified and offered help. This was replicated at a higher level by the Community Resilience Hub. Over 600 volunteers in the town have come forward and local organisations have played their part, adapting their work to cater for the increased demands on their services. Councillor Birch highlighted that the value of key workers, the

health professionals, care workers, teachers, police, ambulance drivers, transport staff, environmental teams, postal workers, delivery drivers, supermarket staff had been learnt. She commented that often, they are undervalued, poorly paid, working on zero hours contracts, no job security. Councillor Birch commented that this must be changed. Councillor Birch also advised that it had been learnt that an overly centralised response is not what people want to hear. There is a need for local decisions made at local level. Local Councils working in partnership with local organisations know their communities best. She emphasised that what is wanted is messaging by trusted and familiar community leaders to cut through the confused and ambiguous national broadcasts. There needs to be agile and for there to be swift responses to local needs and information directing people to local services such as testing and tracking facilities. She added that it the vital role played by digital connectivity; the need for reliable broadband, IT equipment available for home workers; laptops for home schooling was learnt. With the closure of offices, virtual meetings such as this, are vital to maintain good governance and ensure access, engagement and accountability with decision makers. There had been effects of 10 years of austerity on families and council services. Local Government funding has reduced year on year. Many services cut to the bone, with no resilience to fight back in an emergency. Council posts cut or unfilled, the non-essential supports reduced. Emergency supplies run down, local knowledge lost or out of date. Families with precarious finances, debts, insecure jobs and housing. Delays in welfare pay outs, real poverty, hunger, poor physical and mental health. Councillor Birch added that it had been learnt that this pandemic has highlighted inequalities and with Government funding emergency accommodation for the homeless could be found, with Government funding businesses could be helped, Council Tax to the most vulnerable could be subsidised, food boxes could be distributed, staff could be furloughed to preserve jobs and Government financed sick pay for those experiencing Covid -19. As a consequence of the hopefully temporary collapse of the global economy, our environment is cleaner and fresher. People are walking and cycling, discovering and enjoying our wonderful parks and open spaces. People now notice and appreciate wildlife and nature and can manage without using cars as much. This is an opportunity to expand and invest in the green economy, to develop public transport, cycle lanes and pathways; NCC has a grant of £351,000 to do this. It has been recognised how important schools, teachers and education is, along with youth activities are to children and young people. Six months out of school for the majority of children will result in a huge educational deficit. Some children are well supported

with their home learning by teachers, parents and carers. Some will not have IT equipment to work with. Some will have to share a laptop with other members of the family or try to work from a phone. For some children it will take many months of catching up to return to the same levels and learning patterns. For some this will never happen and their life chances will be limited due to lack of qualifications and a good standard of education. For some young people, school is a place of safety, away from scenes of domestic abuse, substance abuse and violence in their homes. The hidden harm, depression and anxiety will become apparent only when schools are fully open. The demands on safeguarding and child mental health provision will overwhelm an already stretched service. Young people will need support with jobs and skills training to prevent them becoming the 'pandemic generation'. With the prospect of an economic recession and subsequent depression it is a gloomy prospect for many.

Councillor King commented that she agreed with Councillor Birch's statement and thanked Officers involved in the Local Resilience Forum. Meetings were taking place weekly regarding youth provision. A Covid-19 response pack had been produced in conjunction with partners and had been issued by email. City Fibre had provided laptops to a number of children. Lots of information is available and a questionnaire had been issued to volunteers to ascertain what else was available. A book would be produced consisting of stories and photos to demonstrate the outstanding work that has been undertaken during this period.

Councillor Birch added Covid-19 has highlighted inequalities in society. Inequalities in health, housing, jobs and opportunities, life expectancy, education, digital inclusion, poverty, hunger, debt. Older people are much more vulnerable to the virus. BAME groups are twice as likely to die from Covid -19. These groups must be offered greater protection if there is to be a second or third spike in infections. Before Covid-19, the greatest areas of growth nationally were the creative industries, leisure and tourism. Leisure and cultural activities are going to be essential to people's wellbeing as everything returns to a more normalised society. Work patterns will change. There will be more working from home. Meetings may be physical or remote. The need for vast office space may be reduced. Councillors and council staff will need a greater level of IT skill and support as this happens. The notion of a balanced budget may be a thing of the past. There will be debt and overspend. There has been 60% loss of income from commercial fees and charges, business rates, council tax and car parks. Overtime payments for staff to deal with

the extra administration and extra expense for Covid-19 related spending, extra costs for cleaning and social distancing arrangements.

9. NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL'S PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2020/21

Councillor Nunn presented the Northampton Borough Council's Pay Policy Statement 2020/21 to full Council. He explained the basis of the Policy and highlighted paragraph 9 – Dying to work that had been included in the Policy.

Councillor Larratt seconded the report.

Councillor Stone confirmed that the Labour Group fully supported the Pay Policy and was very pleased that Dying to work and the Living Wage Foundation is included in the Pay Policy. She added that NPH and the Leisure Trust had adopted the Living Wage Policy. Councillor Stone added that she was surprised that the Pay Policy did not make reference to gender pay gap and asked if information relating to gender, age and ethnicity could be provided to the next meeting. Councillor Stone commented that it would be good for staff to be back on national terms and conditions.

At this point the Mayor called for the report's recommendations to be voted upon. All Members present voted in favour. The recommendations in the report were agreed.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2020/21 as attached at Appendix 1 to the report is approved.

10. NOTICES OF MOTION

Councillor Beardsworth proposed and Councillor Meredith seconded:

“Over the last three months Council staff have worked hard with partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors to meet increased demand for services and in particular to give support to the vulnerable and families in most need.

There will come a time when we will need to review what has gone well and what could have been done better but I believe now is the time for us as, elected representatives to say thank you to everyone at NBC and to our contractors and

partners, for the job they do on behalf of our community.

Mr Mayor may I ask if you will lead us as we show our appreciation in the usual way.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was Carried.

The Mayor then asked full Council to join him in a round of applause for the staff.

Councillor Smith proposed and Councillor T Eales seconded:

“The recent resolution at Cabinet to pass the Homelessness Rough Sleeping and Action Plan 2020, represents a huge amount of collaborative work and investigation completed on Homeless in Northampton over the past five years.

The resolution also follows a remarkable shift in the challenge of tackling entrenched rough sleeping during the Covid-19 pandemic. The support made available for rough sleepers and NBC’s quick and robust response transformed the look and approach to rough sleeping in Northampton. Rough sleepers being offered good quality accommodation in line with the principles of Housing First, excellent communication between different agencies and the placement of organisations where people were living created an environment in which people felt supported and empowered to access help allowing them to move on from rough sleeping.

As the situation with Covid-19 evolves and changes, it is vital that the excellent progress in the rough sleeping approach seen during it is not lost and that the new strategy is able to meet its full potential. The Cabinet papers recognise that the continuation of this strategy in its current form requires the continued input of the MHCLG Rough Sleeping Initiative funding created out of the government’s Homelessness Reduction Scheme. It is vital that the government continue to provide this funding, as its loss or reduction would have a detrimental impact on NBC’s ability to continue to deliver, develop and grow this strategy.

Therefore:

This council recognises and applauds the work completed by the NBC Housing Team, its partners from other agencies and the wider voluntary sector, together with the Overview and Scrutiny panels. progressing the new, transformative homelessness strategy.

This council resolves to write to the West Northants MPs to ensure that the government continues to fund this vital body of work.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was Carried.

Councillor Nunn proposed and Councillor Stone seconded:

'That this Council, under, and in pursuance of the powers conferred by virtue of Section 249 Local Government Act, 1972, proposes that the local National Health Service be recommended for admission into the Freedom of the Borough of Northampton, in recognition and appreciation of the outstanding services rendered to the residents of the town during the COVID19 Emergency.

This will be done through the immediate establishment of a cross-party working group and a subsequent report recommending how this honour should to be granted, followed by a Special Meeting of the Council where it will be voted on.'

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was Carried.

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 8:25 pm