

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON MONDAY 13 JULY 2009 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

COUNCILLORS: Beardsworth, Capstick, Caswell, S. Chaudhury, I. Choudary, Church, Clarke, Collins, R. Conroy, Crake, De Cruz, Davies, Edwards, Golby, Hadland, Hawkins, B. Hoare, Lane, C. Lill, Malpas, B. Markham, I. Markham, Mason, Matthews, Meredith, Mildren, Palethorpe, Scott, Simpson, Taylor, P. D. Varnsberry, P. M. Varnsberry, Woods and Yates

4. MAYORS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced the recent death of Joan Massey, a former Mayoress.

The Mayor referred to his announcement at the meeting on 29 June 2009 in respect of the death of the former Mayor, John Gardner BEM.

The Council stood for a minute's silence for John Gardner and Joan Massey.

Councillors paid tribute to John Gardner BEM.

The Mayor commented that he had attended the 45th Anniversary of the creation of Malawi celebrations.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hadland declared a Personal and Prejudicial interest in Item 12 – Appointments to the Coles and Rice Charity, the Charity of Hervey and Elizabeth Ekins and Northampton Municipal General Charities, as being a Co-operative Trustee and the current Chair of the Northampton Municipal General Charities.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting of Council held on 29 June 2009 were signed by the Chair.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors J Conroy, Duncan, Flavell, Garlick, Glynane, M Hoare, Hollis, Larratt, J Lill, Perkins and Reeve.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Swinn referred to the Leader of the Council's Portfolio Holder presentation and referred to a statement made by John Healey, Minister for Housing, at the Corporate Institute of Housing Conference, referring to the return of a 100% of council house sale receipts to local councils and also the end of the negative subsidy system. He noted that tenants, by a majority, had already signified that they were happy with the Council, as landlord and therefore it seemed a waste of £2m to survey tenants when it was already known what they wanted. He then referred to the Portfolio Holder for Housing's portfolio update and comments in it about sheltered housing. He noted a Freedom of Information inquiry in November 2008 from Mr Adams, which revealed that in November 2006 there had been fifty two housing wardens and by December 2008 this had reduced to thirty eight. He commented that sheltered housing tenants were angry and felt that the consultation that had taken place had been misleading. He noted that Government had reduced the funding available for this activity.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that four questions had been received from members of the public and Councillors and that these and the answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution. The Mayor advised he would take the questions in the order in which they had been received. Mr Adams asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, in respect of a tender document for "The Provision of Asbestos Sampling" and whether the results from the survey would be made available to the tenants on request. Mr Adams noted the response as tabled and asked how many tenders had been received, would tenants be involved in the choice of contractor and how would those tenants be chosen? Councillor Beardsworth commented that tenants would be encouraged to participate in the contract vetting and she would write to Mr Adams to answer the points he had raised.

Councillor Golby asked a question of Councillor P D Varnsberry, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, in respect of the charge made to Duston Parish Council for the use of Errington Park. Councillor Golby noted the response as tabled and commented that Duston Parish Council had objected to the charge and he queried why it could not be waived. Councillor P D Varnsberry noted that Errington Park was not actually within Councillor Golby's ward and stated that as far as he was aware, Duston Parish Council had the funds available to them to pay the charge but would consider suitable assistance if this was not the case.

Councillor Malpas asked a question of Councillor Woods in respect of introducing a "Motions Update" on future Council agendas. Councillor Malpas noted the answer as tabled and stated that if there was not an agenda item on Council agendas then Councillors could not question the Administration about them. Councillor Woods commented that he would consider the best way of presenting this information.

Mrs Mennell asked a question of Councillor Woods in respect of issues concerning a refusal of a booking at The Guildhall for a group of tenants. Mrs Mennell noted the response as tabled and asked what confidence tenants could have if consultation arrangements were based around only five meetings and 67 returned slips as compared with over 12,000 tenants. Councillors Woods commented that

tenants would be given the opportunity to reply but it was important for whatever process of tenant engagement was agreed upon for it to work, as previously it had failed to do so.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

At this point each of the Cabinet Members made a presentation on their respective portfolios, which had been circulated with the agenda. Councillor Woods, as the Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement, submitted his portfolio update. Councillor Palethorpe echoed Councillor Woods statement in respect of the time it was taking for a formal letter of disengagement from DCLG.

Councillor Woods, in Councillor Perkins' absence, presented the Portfolio Holder's report for Finance. Councillor Hadland noted that recent post to Councillors seemed haphazard and that it was important that Councillors received papers in sufficient time for meetings. Councillor Woods concurred and commented that it may be necessary to consider alternative ways of distributing papers to Councillors.

Councillor B Hoare, as the Portfolio Holder for Engagement, submitted his portfolio update and was pleased to accept Councillor Palethorpe's congratulations on the running of the recent County Council and European elections. He noted that the statement attributed to the Audit Commission should refer to "Government monitoring" rather than "Government intervention".

Councillor Beardsworth, as the Portfolio Holder for Housing, submitted her portfolio report. Councillor Clarke commented that through the Freedom of Information inquiry referred to earlier in the meeting it was clear that the number of housing wardens had reduced from 53 in November 2006 to 38 in November 2008. He compared this with the Portfolio Holder's statement that "the current Administration has not reduced the amount of support to its sheltered housing residents". He asked that Councillor Beardsworth remove this statement from her report. Councillor Beardsworth commented that she would not remove this statement and that the advice that she had been given was that no cut in service had been made. She commented that there were currently 42 warden/coordinators. Councillor Palethorpe expressed surprise given the response to the Freedom of Information inquiry as at the end of 2008. Councillor Palethorpe commented that following his comments previously, in respect of the numbers of young people in temporary accommodation, he had not yet received a response. Councillor Beardsworth agreed to write to him with the details that he sought. In answer to a question from Councillor Meredith, Councillor Beardsworth commented that there was no further news at the moment in respect of the PFI bid and that a decision was awaited from the Minister.

Councillor Crake, as the Portfolio Holder for Environment, submitted her portfolio update. Councillor Malpas noted that he had observed Council workers using a shopping trolley in which to collect rubbish. He queried whether there was a lack of suitable equipment. Councillor Crake queried why Councillor Malpas had not made his enquiry through the Councillor Contact Centre but she would ascertain the

details and write to him. Councillor Lane queried that since the introduction of charges for the collection of bulky waste items, whether there had been a reduction in the requests for this service. He also queried which parts of the town had been subject to action in respect of unauthorised car sales. Councillor Crake commented that in respect of unauthorised car sales she did not wish to identify the areas where action was to be taken and undertook to write to him in respect of the query on bulky waste collections.

Councillor Davies commented that, in respect of market testing, the Administration needed to be careful how this matter was dealt with in respect of staff who were likely to find the whole process very traumatic. Staff were the Council's most valuable asset and the object of the exercise must be broader than merely effectiveness and cost. Councillor Crake acknowledged Councillor Davies' comments. Councillor Clarke asked whether the Portfolio Holder could give an assurance that no discussions had taken place with Daventry District Council in respect of joint service provision and that no notice had been placed in the European Journals ahead of the Cabinet decision the previous week. Councillor Crake commented that no discussions had been held with Daventry District Council and that no notices had been placed in the European Journals ahead of Cabinet's discussions the previous week.

Councillor Church, as the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Regeneration, submitted his portfolio update and commented that the draft Joint Core Strategy had now been published following a meeting of the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee on 6 July. He noted that a report on the Joint Core Strategy was to be considered by Cabinet on 15 July 2009. Part of Cabinet's consideration would be how all Councillors could be involved in the consultation process. He noted that the Central Area Action Plan would also be considered by Cabinet on 15 July and that this represented an exciting and ambitious document for the town centre. He also commented on Legal & General's announcement that the redevelopment of the Grosvenor Centre was a project that they wished to proceed with. He noted that they had not yet signed a Development Agreement. He cautioned that it would still be a number of years before a scheme would be completed. Councillor Davies commented that in supporting the growth of the town, he hoped that the regeneration within Northampton would be handled sensitively and made reference to the proposals for development in North Northampton. Councillor Church commented that the public consultation now taking place was the first stage before a pre-submission draft of the JCS needed to be sent to the Secretary of State. The timetable for the process had been set by a Local Development Scheme over a year ago and this was a requirement from Government. He noted that comments could be received after the six week consultation period up to the date of the November meeting of the West Northamptonshire Joint Strategic Planning Committee. He further noted that there would be public consultation on the pre-submission draft and a public inquiry. Councillor Clarke queried that once a Development Agreement was signed with Legal & General whether this would include penalty clauses for delays in the development taking place and also cover the situation if a third party were to come along with an alternative development proposal. Councillor Church commented that he could not comment on what should be included in the Development Agreement

but he noted that the Central Area Action Plan did identify alternative locations for development should the Legal & General proposal fail. Councillor Golby queried whether the redevelopment of Grosvenor/Greyfriars would have been started by 2026. Councillor Church commented that he hoped it would have been completed by that time and noted that the Central Area Action Plan showed anticipated developments in five year phases. Councillor Simpson referred to a letter circulated to residents by the MP for Northampton North in respect of locations for proposed housing and industrial sites. Councillor Church commented that the letter did not appear to match the plans shown in the Joint Core Strategy.

Councillor P D Varnsberry, as the Portfolio Holder for Communities, submitted his portfolio update and noted the Thriller dance on the Market Square organised by Flashmob on 11 July and the overflight by the Lancaster Bomber in conjunction with the Dragonboat Race. Councillor Lane queried in respect of Bands in the Park, when the Abington Wind Band would be playing. Councillor P D Varnsberry undertook to write to Councillor Lane with the details. Councillor Davies queried whether screens would be placed in the Market Square for the World Cup in 2010. Councillor P D Varnsberry indicated that a programme of events was being considered. Councillor Clarke noted that in respect of Councillor Golby's question earlier in the meeting about the charge levied for the use of Errington Park that a charge had not been levied for the recent celebrations in Victoria Park. This did not seem consistent. Councillor P D Varnsberry undertook to check the situation and write to Councillor Clarke. Councillor Palethorpe noted the 200th Anniversary celebrations of the Battle of Talavera on 25 July 2009 and thanked Tony Ansell for closing his business in All Saints Church for that afternoon. He also passed congratulations on to the Portfolio Holder for the Armed Forces Day celebrations.

Councillor Woods, in response to comments made by Mr Swinn in respect of the Minister of Housing, John Healey MP, commented that a ministerial statement on 2 July indicated that a change to the system of negative subsidy would require primary legislation and that this was likely to happen after the next General Election. Therefore the Council had to plan for the future on the current rules.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Palethorpe commented that there was no disagreement that Strategic Business Reviews needed to take place but that the Council needed to be open and transparent as to what services and what level of service was to be reviewed. Staff should be fully involved and have an opportunity to put in a bid if they wished to do so. The Council needed to be open in terms of expectations, for example, how many times would grass be cut, how many refuse collections would there be, etc. Councillor Palethorpe commented that there should be a genuine partnership with other Councils and the private and voluntary centres.

Councillor Woods commented that he generally agreed with this and that the levels of required service should be clearly understood and be fair and understandable. He commented that the Administration had no preconceptions about in-house services or total externalisation. They wished to achieve improved service quality and value for money. He felt that details would not be too explicit so as to allow a

partnership agreement to work properly. He believed that staff were providing improved services at a better quality and that if these services could match the private sector the Administration would accept this. The end result would probably be a mixed economy.

Councillor Palethorpe commented that the issue was also about size of backroom services and that if a mixed economy was achieved then this should also carry through to the size of the backroom services. This might also include the total number of Councillors. Strategic Business Reviews should be holistic and requested that Overview & Scrutiny look at the detail of how the exercise was to be carried out. It was important for it to be right at the very start.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09

Councillor Simpson submitted a report and elaborated thereon. Councillor Lane seconded the adoption of the report.

RESOLVED: That the Overview & Scrutiny Annual Report 2008/09 be noted.

10. COMMITTEE PLACES

Councillor Woods circulated a list of Committee appointments and consequent changes to representatives on outside bodies. The Mayor announced that the Conservative Group wished to replace Councillor Duncan on the Licensing Committee with Councillor Flavell. He also announced that Councillor Garlick would replace Councillor Brian Markham on the NCC Adult Services and Health Scrutiny Committee.

RESOLVED: That the Committee place changes and consequent changes to the representation on outside bodies as circulated by Councillor Woods and announced by the Mayor be agreed.

11. SHADOW CABINET PROTOCOL

Mr Swinn commented that he supported the proposal to have a Shadow Cabinet Protocol. Councillor Woods submitted a report that sought the inclusion of a Shadow Cabinet Protocol within the Council's Constitution. Councillor Palethorpe seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: That the Shadow Cabinet Protocol as set out as Appendix A to the report be approved and included in the Council's Constitution.

12. APPOINTMENTS TO THE COLES AND RICE CHARITY, THE CHARITY OF HERVEY AND ELIZABETH EKINS AND NORTHAMPTON MUNICIPAL GENERAL CHARITIES

Councillor B Hoare submitted a report that sought confirmation of the appointments to the Coles and Rice Charity, the Charity of Hervey and Elizabeth Ekins and Northampton Municipal General Charities. Councillor Crake seconded the proposal.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That Mr Peter Newham be reappointed to the Coles and Rice Charity for a period of four years.
 - (2) That Mrs Margaret Greenwell be reappointed to the Charity of Hervey and Elizabeth Ekins for a period of three years.
 - (3) That Mary Clarke, Councillor Andrew Simpson, Reverend David Wiseman, Ruth Williams and Councillor Anthony Woods be appointed to the Northampton Municipal General Charities as Representative Trustees for a period of four years and that the Chief Executive and Town Clerk, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, agree a further appointment if required.

13. NOTICES OF MOTION

- (A) Mr C Grethe supported the motion in respect of sheltered housing commenting that this was an important and valued service, which provided support to vulnerable people.

Mr Adams spoke in favour of the motion and hoped that the Portfolio Holder would listen to tenants. He referred to Freedom of Information Enquiry NBC759-1012, which gave the total of wardens as at the end of 2006 as 53 and that at the end of 2008 as 42. He also referred to an answer given to a question to Mr B Oldham on 8 December 2008 indicating the total number of wardens as 38. This appears to be a reduction of 30% of Housing Wardens. He hoped that a review would be honest about the situation.

Mr Oldham commented that originally the Sheltered Housing Service had Residents Wardens, which then become Housing Wardens and were now Floating Wardens that provided three levels of service from one visit a month to seven visits per week. He commented that the service appeared to be based on brevity and that the Wardens and tenants were demoralised. He noted Councillor Beardsworth's statement that resources had not reduced but clearly they had and although 85% of tenants were apparently satisfied with service, this figure was questionable given the nature of the questionnaire that tenants were asked to complete which tended towards skewed responses and what about the 15% of tenants who were not happy. He hoped that the review would result in a better service. He supported the motion.

Mr Swinn commented that he supported the motion and there did not seem to be much point to a once a month visit. He related his own experience of hospital treatment and subsequent return home to premises that had been agreed as unsuitable by OTs and although he had now moved to a ground floor flat, his home was still unsuitable for his needs. He commented that a holistic solution between health and social care was needed and noted the different situation that applied in most of Europe and in Australia. Any review needed to be all embracing and needed to be honest.

Councillor Palethorpe moved and Councillor Lane seconded:

“That this Council knows the concerns of many local residents in Northampton about the sheltered housing system and the lack of personal contact they receive under the “Floating Support” scheme and believes it was a mistake by the Government to take sheltered housing out of the Housing Benefit budget, leaving sheltered housing within the under funded Supporting People Budget, making it difficult for district councils to manage.

This Council therefore calls on the Chief Executive to urgently instigate a review of the system and listen to the concerns of local residents.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote the motion was agreed.

- (B) Mr C Grethe commented that community centres were important to local communities and noted that some areas of the town did not have access to them. He would like each local community to have access to a community centre.

Mr Swinn supported the motion and commented that community assets should be owned by the local community. He referred to the Development Trust Association who could give advice on community based assets and asset transfers and who had funding available to them to buy community centres from the Council and help run them. He commented that the best community centres were run and managed by a local management association.

Councillor Malpas proposed and Councillor Lane seconded that:

“This Council fully supports the valuable contribution that community centres and their staff make in supporting and sustaining our local communities. By facilitating the meeting and business of a diverse range of associations, clubs and community and faith groups, these facilities continue to have a positive impact on the overall well being of our town.

This Council looks forward to supporting community centres in the future and playing its part in facilitating community life across Northampton.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was agreed.

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

None.

The meeting concluded at 21.05 hours