

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 18 January 2021 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting held on 14th September, 28th September and 2nd November 2020 were agreed and signed by the Mayor.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Markham, McCutcheon and Beardsworth. It was announced that Councillor Beardsworth would be joining the meeting late.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor announced that he had attended several socially-distanced engagements, including carol singing at St Crispins Retirement Village with BBC Radio Northampton, delivering festive gifts to 10 local care homes and participating in a pre-recorded Christmas concert at Delapre Abbey, and a Santa Fun Run for the Rotary Club, in costume. Over 150 gifts were sent to those eligible under the Mayor's Fund for the Housebound. The Mayor advised that the Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration had been pre-recorded and would be streamed on the Council's website and the Mayor's Facebook page.

The Mayor announced the sad passing of former MP for Northampton South Brian Binley on Christmas day, and of Dr Ahmed Mukhtar on 7th January, former High Sheriff of Northamptonshire. The Union Jack had been lowered to half-mast this week to honour these losses.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

None.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that 6 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 3, Councillor Hallam explained that air quality was monitored monthly (measured against general trends), statistics put on the Council's website and an annual report published.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 4, Councillor Hibbert stated that between March and December 2020, 8 NPH staff members were confirmed to have had Covid-19; in the last almost 3 weeks, 11 staff members had contracted the virus. 25 staff members were shielding.

In response to a supplementary question relating to question 6, Councillor Hibbert stated that current government advice specified that evictions were only considered if rent arrears exceeded a 6-month period, however NPH were only looking at cases where rent arrears exceeded 1 year.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

Councillor Nunn presented his report as Leader of the Council and highlighted the salient points. Noting issues around the recent migration to Office 365, he asked that any Member having ICT difficulties contact the Democratic and Member Services Manager as soon as possible. In response to questions, Councillor Nunn explained that the Council were given a small allowance for issuing grants, but this did not completely cover the cost. He was not aware of any plans currently for a new hospital, however having built a strong relationship with the health sector throughout the pandemic, the Council was now in a better place to lobby for one and agreed that there was a definite need for one.

Councillor Larratt presented his report as Deputy Leader of the Council and highlighted the salient points. In response to a question regarding the recent flooding in Collingtree, he advised that the contractor for the rail freight interchange was undertaken an investigation but were confident that their works were not having an impact. The Lead Flood Authority were also conducting an investigation. He further advised that the Lead Flood Authority had written a report including their findings with regard to watercourses; resolutions were being worked on in consultation with Veolia and the report would be published once this work was complete. Councillor Larratt noted that the Constitution Working Group for the West Northants shadow authority had recommended that meetings be webcast. Regarding Southfields streetlights, Councillor Larratt confirmed that works were now complete apart from slagging and cabling issues which were being addressed; he asked councillors to let him know of any more outstanding issues.

Councillor Hadland presented his report as Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Enterprise and highlighted the salient points. With regard to the Future High Street Fund, Councillor Hadland confirmed that the Council would be spending the awarded

£8.4m on the Market Square, with further details to be sent to central government. This money was ringfenced to the Market Square improvement project. The Town's Fund was also ringfenced for specific projects that were put in the Towns Fund bid and Councillor Hadland noted that £1m had already been received to enable the Council to begin preparation works for the demolition of the Marks & Spencer building. These would become West Northamptonshire Council projects once NBC was dissolved. Regarding to Albion House, it was explained that it would be sold to a trust to accommodate various leathercraft museum facilities; the Trust were acquiring the building with tenants in place and the tenants were aware of the transaction.

Councillor Hibbert presented his report as Cabinet Member for Housing and Wellbeing and highlighted the salient points. In response to questions, he confirmed that the process around collecting information on rogue landlords was onerous; the Council worked closely with the Police and Tax Office to gather the necessary information to bring about prosecutions. Councillor Hibbert advised that the HMO register was available for members of the public to view on the Council's website and the Housing Department were working on making it an easier document to digest.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Stone gave a statement on "Looking Ahead" and began by thanking staff for their work around local government reform and thanked the Mayor for his work during a difficult year for the Mayoralty. Councillor Stone noted several national positives including the Covid-19 vaccine rollout, the dedication of health workers and commitment of other key workers and locally, the CEO and senior officers' work in maintaining various regeneration and homelessness projects and also expressed thanks to the various youth projects and food banks in the town. Councillor Stone stated that structural inequalities undermined attempts to curb Covid-19 and commented that those inequalities threatened the NHS and would further undermine the country's economic recovery. She noted that impact that the pandemic had on children. Councillor Stone advised that there was a "hidden need" within Northampton communities which had been uncovered by the large uptake of food parcels to struggling families and further stated that statutory services were only as good as the volunteers within the community. Councillor Stone advised that the strategy for West Northants Council was agreed before Brexit and the pandemic and she felt it unsuitable for current times and asked that the Council stand up for Northampton's most disadvantaged.

Councillor Nunn echoed the thanks given by Councillor Stone and agreed that uncovering more residents with "hidden needs" and finding solutions for those people should be a priority and that he would be willing to discuss these issues further with Councillor Stone.

Councillor Stone advised that depending solely on schools to look after children during these times was insufficient; everybody had a responsibility and that the Council should be thinking creatively about what needed to be happening in communities to make sure no children were going without food, education and play time.

9. NORTHAMPTON LOCAL PLAN PART 2: SUBMISSION VERSION

Councillor Hill presented a report to Council which sought agreement to submit the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 to the Secretary of State for independent examination.

Councillor Hadland seconded the report.

Councillor B Markham highlighted the importance of the Local Plan and voiced his pleasure that the climate emergency was addressed within the document.

Councillor Davenport stated that land banking (in reference to Ransome Road) was an ongoing issue and asked that it be raised by Council with Northampton MPs.

Councillor Joyce thanked Councillor Hill for the report but voiced concern around the size and weight of the papers and questioned whether there was not a “greener” way that agenda could be sent to Members.

Councillor Stone noted that air quality around the traveller site on Ecton Lane was very poor and further noted that children walking to the nearby village school were forced to walk in the road since there was no paving or verge.

Councillor Hadland stated that public engagement during the consultation phase had been very high. He agreed with Councillor Davenport regarding land banking and advised that there were approximately 1 million housing planning permissions currently outstanding.

Councillor Hill commented that he would discuss with the Director of Planning and Sustainability how to best lobby MPs regarding land banking. He acknowledged comments made by Councillor Joyce regarding the size of the agenda but highlighted the importance of ensuring that all Members had access to the document.

RESOLVED:

1. Council approved the submission of the Northampton Local Plan Part 2 to the Secretary of State for independent examination by a Planning Inspector under Regulation 22 of the Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations 2012 as amended.
2. That the Officer responses to the representations made on the Proposed Submission Local Plan Round 2 be agreed (Appendix 2 of the report).
3. That the Proposed Schedule of Minor Modifications be agreed (Appendix 3 of the report).
4. That the Director of Planning and Sustainability may approve any necessary supporting documentation to the Plan required for submission.

10.COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - NEXT STEPS (A)

Councillor Larratt presented a report to Council which sought to report the recommended suggestions for a first-year base budget from the Cross-Party Working Group held on the 9 December 2020. He explained that the report had been

amended and circulated to all Members prior to the meeting.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report.

Councillor Stone commented that whilst this was not the preferred option, it was in everybody's interest to set the new town and parish councils up to succeed for the benefit of the residents. She noted that areas within the new town and parish councils were those with previously mentioned "hidden needs" and hoped that the new councils would find a way to work with the unitary authority in a way that benefitted both, as well as residents.

Councillor Birch noted that the unitary authority may not fully understand the pressures that residents of a large urban area dealt with and that the new town and parish councils would be better equipped to deal with these issues, and that residents would have more say in how money collected through precepts was spent in their local areas.

Councillor Davenport voiced her concern around the cost of precepts in addition to increased council tax; she felt that she had betrayed residents because she had been advised, and in turn advised residents, that local government reform would save them money.

Councillor B Markham commented that he anticipated the cost of town and parish council precepts to increase in the coming years.

Councillor Roberts commented that previous reports to the Cross-Party Working Group were lacking in some respects (costings, background information etc.) and she did not feel able to support the recommendations if this was still the case.

Councillor G Eales stated that he was opposed to Town Council Member allowances or proposed council tax increase and precepts, and that no councillors had a mandate to make decisions on behalf of residents since local elections had been postponed, apart from Councillor Roberts who had been elected in a by-election.

Councillor T Eales noted that many public sector workers would not see a pay rise and noted the increase in food bank use nationally and felt that Member Allowances were distasteful given the circumstances.

Councillor Meredith commented that many residents in his ward relied on food banks and many would struggle to pay for the new precept and increase in council tax.

Councillor Nunn commented that the Council Tax Reduction Scheme in Northampton would increase as rates were harmonised across the different areas in the West. He noted that it was for the individual councils to set their own budgets and that the report was merely a recommendation. He further noted that Councillor Allowances were included to ensure that childcare could be paid for in instances of single parents wishing to become councillors.

Councillor Larratt highlighted the importance of Northampton residents having a

strong voice within the unitary authority and believed that town and parish councils were an effective way of making those voices be heard.

Upon a requisition of a recorded vote:

There voted for the recommendation:

Councillors Ashraf, Ansell, Aziz, Birch, Bottwood, Duffy, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Graystone, Hadland, Hallam, Haque, Hibbert, Hill, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, Marriott, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Kilby-Shaw, Smith, Stone, Walker.

There voted against the recommendation:

Councillors Cali, G Eales, T Eales, Joyce, Meredith, Roberts.

There abstained the Mayor, Davenport, B Markham, Russell.

RESOLVED:

1. Council accepted the suggested base budgets for Northampton Town Council, Kingsthorpe Parish Council and Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council, as set out at paragraph 4.3 of the report, and in turn suggested to the Northampton Town Council, the Kingsthorpe Parish Council and the Far Cotton & Delapre Community Council to set these budgets for their respective Councils for 2021/22 to ensure their safe and legal operation.

11.COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW - NEXT STEPS (B)

Councillor Larratt presented a report to Council which sought approval for the transfer of assets from Northampton Borough Council to the new town and parish councils, including a long-term lease of the Guildhall to Northampton Town Council. He noted that a revised report had been circulated amongst Members prior to the meeting.

Councillor Birch commented that the Guildhall would remain a centrepiece of the town as well as the town council's headquarters and noted its significance, both historically and personally to the people of Northampton.

Councillor Stone echoed comments made by Councillor Birch around the importance of keeping the Guildhall in the possession of the new town council and reiterated her point that the people of Northampton were best placed to deal with Northampton-specific issues.

Councillor B Markham advised that the amendments made to the report were essential and he was happy to support the recommendations now that these amendments had been made.

Councillor Roberts asked for clarity around what the report enabled town and parish councils to do.

Councillor Meredith voiced his support for the report and commented that it was

important to secure the Guildhall for the benefit of residents.

Councillor Nunn seconded the report and commented that the new town council would be provided with all of the costs associated with running the Guildhall and it would be for the town council to decide whether it chose to take it on.

RESOLVED:

1. Guildhall

- The old part of the Guildhall (Town Hall) is the recommended headquarters for Northampton Town Council.
- The tenure recommended is to be a long leasehold let on an internal repairing basis.
- The recommended rent is a peppercorn but the costs for maintenance and services will be recharged based on a fair proportion.
- The lease is subject to detailed negotiations between the Town Council and the West Northampton Unitary Council to agree the exact terms, including for instance defining the common parts, service charge services, any break options, etc.
- Both parties to pay their own professional fees including legal costs.

2. Far Cotton Recreation Centre and Playing Field

- The recommended headquarters for the Parish Council is space in Far Cotton Recreational Centre.
- The property is let with rental income generated for Northampton Borough Council; this will pass to West Northamptonshire Unitary Council.
- It is recommended that the Parish enters into negotiations with West Northampton Unitary Council to transfer the recreational centre and playing field from the Unitary to the Parish.
- Any transfer would be subject to detailed negotiations between the Community Council and the West Northampton Unitary Council to agree the exact terms.
- Both parties to pay their own professional fees including legal costs.

3. Kingsthorpe Community Centre and the Pastures Community Centre

- It is recommended that the Parish will use space in both of these Centres, which are let to community organisations on internal leases.
- It is recommended that the Parish enters into negotiations with West Northampton Unitary Council to transfer these community centres from the Unitary to the Parish.
- Any transfer would be subject to detailed negotiations between the Parish Council and the West Northampton Unitary Council to agree the exact terms.
- Both parties to pay their own professional fees including legal costs

4. This is an enabling measure which has to be agreed to allow the transfer of assets, if that is what the Community and Parish Councils of Far Cotton & Delapre and Kingsthorpe and the Northampton Town Council choose. It is not a commitment to transfer. Commitment to transfer will be the second step.

This will be the decision of the Community, Parish and Town Councils, whereupon

more detailed work will be conducted by them, looking at feasibility, governance and cost.

12. NOTICES OF MOTION

Councillor Stone advised that the Labour Group had withdrawn the motion.

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

The meeting concluded 21:05pm