

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON MONDAY THE TWENTY SIXTH DAY OF JUNE 2006 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

PRESENT: The Deputy Mayor Councillor Mason (in the Chair).

COUNCILLORS: Acock, Allen, Barron, Boss, Caswell, Church, Conroy, Duncan, Edwards, Flavell, Glynane, Hadland, Hill, B. Hoare, Hope, Lane, Larratt, McCutcheon, Malpas, Miah, B. Markham, I. Markham, Marriott, Matthews, Palethorpe, Patterson, Perkins, Pritchard, Robinson, Roy, Tavener, Taylor, Wire, Woods, Yates.

1. MINUTES.

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting held on 22 May 2006 amended under Item 6 the last paragraph regarding Councillor Roy's question to Councillor Hadland in terms of publishing questions submitted to Portfolio Holders to record the fact that Councillor Hadland had agreed that the issue of advance publication of questions would be looked into, and also amended to record Councillor Marriott's apologies and the minutes of the annual meeting held on 25 May 2006 were signed by the Deputy Mayor.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from the Mayor, Councillors Beardsworth, Crane, Eldred, Evans, Hollis, M Hoare, J Lill, Massey, Simpson and Stewart.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

At this juncture the Deputy Mayor paid tribute to the excellent work that Doreen Mackintosh had undertaken over the years and which had been recognised recently with her being awarded an MBE to mark her work with the Northampton Federation of Residents Associations and as a mark of appreciation for her work Doreen was presented with a bouquet of flowers on behalf of the Council.

The Deputy Mayor then, on behalf of the Council, expressed sincere thanks to the Mayor's Sergeant, Alan Hughes, for his invaluable expertise and advice over the years. She stated that although Alan had officially retired some years ago, he had continued to support the Mayoralty at official functions but that he was now finally retiring this was his last Mayoral function.

The Deputy Mayor then announced that Wendy Howes, Guildhall Assistant, had retired the previous week after some twenty five years service with the Borough Council and on behalf of the Council thanked Wendy for her support and assistance to the Councillors over the years.

The Deputy Mayor referred to a recent visit from Poitiers Twinning Association who had presented the Council with a silver dish upon their visit.

4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES/QUESTIONS.

RESOLVED: That Mr R Connell and Mr A Scott be permitted to address the Council in respect of Notice of Motion Item 6B regarding Delapre bunding and that Mr C Grethe, Mr R Adams and Mr Fitzmorris be permitted to address the Council in respect of Notice of Motion Item 6A regarding Community Care Services.

At this juncture, Mr Forsythe from the Herald and Post Newspaper presented a petition contained some three thousand signatures protesting over the Borough Council's latest car park charges increase. The petition urged Northampton Borough Council to reconsider its latest parking charge increase which would discourage even more shoppers from visiting the Town Centre and would deprive workers of even more of their hard earned wages. The petition asked Councillors to withdraw the increase and freeze the charges at their 2005/06 prices for the coming year. The petition also insisted that any future increases be made at no more than the rate of inflation.

5. TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ASKED UNDER COUNCIL PROCEDURAL RULE 5.2.

Councillor Roy asked a question of Councillor Hadland as the Portfolio Holder how much revenue had been lost through the empty properties on Park Square between 2005 and 2006 and the mean length of time taken to let the shops on Park Square between 2003 to date. Councillor Hadland stated that the amount of rental income that was lost for the three empty units on Park Square for 2005/06 was £8,800 and the empty business rate for these three units was £2,020.75. Re-letting the empty units at Park Square had been difficult as there was a problem finding a use that did not compete with existing businesses and there had been additional delays in letting numbers 2 and 3 because two earlier applicants had withdrawn at the last minute after being offered new leases on the shops. With regard to number 2, a new lease was due to be completed for a boutique use and number 3 for an Afro-Caribbean grocery use. Number 14 was under offer for an Internet café. In response to a supplementary question Councillor Hadland confirmed that he would take the point of there needing to be a proactive approach regarding the re-letting and that he would keep her updated on this.

Councillor Roy then asked a question of Councillor Larratt as the Portfolio Holder. She asked what the administration's position was regarding picking up revenue on costs for the development of play/sports areas in neighbourhood renewal areas such as the Spencer Estate when there were opportunities for external capital and time limited revenue investment. Councillor Larratt stated that Council were aware that there would be implications on revenue of capital developments and these would be assessed on a case by case basis as they were developed. Future revenue implications would be built into the planning and risk assessment in every

development of this nature. These programmes would be increasingly undertaken in collaboration and partnership with other stakeholders and with the added development of neighbourhood management, each area management team would be looking at these issues within their local areas.

Councillor Roy then asked a question of Councillor Palethorpe as the Portfolio Holder. She asked when the residents of Park Walk would have community safety gating improvements implemented and the length of time these improvements had been being discussed. Councillor Palethorpe stated that security gates at the South Oval entrance to Park Square were installed by the CASPAR project. At this time they also considered the suitability of installing additional gates at the Park Walk entrance to the maisonettes. However following concerns from the Fire Services, the gates were put on hold. There had also been other problems with youths. He stated that a feasibility study was to be carried out with regards to the safety aspect of installing additional gates but before this could be done floor plans of the area were required and officers were in the process of obtaining those floor plans. Once these had been provided then a more detailed plan with costs etc could be drawn up and a proposal to the budget holders could be made to see if funding was available. In response to a supplementary question, Councillor Palethorpe agreed that the local community would be kept updated on the situation.

Councillor Marriott then asked a question of Councillor Palethorpe as the Portfolio Holder. He asked how the effectiveness of the CCTV system that had been installed to cover the Briar Hill area was measured. Given the continuing high levels of anti-social behaviour that were reported in this area he asked Councillor Palethorpe how many people had been caught carrying out such acts and/or deterred from doing so by the presence of the cameras. He also asked whether the system was giving the people who lived in the Briar Hill area value for money. Councillor Palethorpe advised that there were two CCTV cameras in Briar Hill, one at the front of the shops and one to the rear of the shops and that most issues of anti-social behaviour observed from these cameras were off-road motorbike nuisance. This was reported on a regular basis to the Police. In addition, other criminal activity had been reported and arrests had been made. Figures as to the number of incidents and arrests were collected on a Town-wide basis and not a camera basis. The cameras on Briar Hill and Limehurst Square, Duston were by far the busiest on the Borough's housing estates at present. The average cost of a camera was £3,000 per year for monitoring and maintenance. Briar Hill was part of one of the six areas that had been identified for neighbourhood management. It was aimed to have this rolled out across the Town this year. This meant that they would see an increase in multi-agency activity in this area and eventually a Police Saver Communities Team. It was noted that the area already had a CBO and Neighbourhood Warden. Generally Briar Hill did see a slight reduction in overall crime for 2005/06 compared to 2004/06, however there was an increase in criminal damage which was how the Police measured anti-social behaviour but this was a pattern seen Town-wide. Councillor Marriott asked a supplementary question and in doing so commented that three cameras had been installed in Briar Hill as part of the CASPAR project. Crime and anti-social behaviour in that area had been the highest area for crime outside the Town Centre. He sought assurance that he would be kept closely involved and informed in terms of this project. Councillor

Palethorpe advised that he would do so and hoped that the Ward Councillors would be able to take a place on the multi-agency team.

6. NOTICES OF MOTION

- (A) At this juncture, Councillors Edwards, Hill, Lane, Malpas and Tavener declared a prejudicial interest in the following Notice of Motion as members of Northamptonshire County Council and left the meeting.

Councillors Church, Glynane, B Hoare, Patterson, Wire and Yates, also members of Northamptonshire County Council, declared a personal interest in the motion but considered it not prejudicial and therefore did not leave the Chamber. In addition, Councillors Roy and Allen declared a personal interest

Mr C Grethe, Mr Adams and Mr Fitzmorris then addresses the Council, all speaking in favour of the motion and urging the Council to give it support. Points were made that it was the vulnerable and elderly in the community that would be affected and issues such as this should not be measured in terms of finance. Reference was also made to the questionnaire that had been sent out as part of the consultation process and concerns expressed over the complexity of its content and the fact that this in itself was causing further distress and anxiety to those being required to complete it.

Councillor Roy then moved and Councillor Wire seconded that Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the motion to be discussed.

The motion was carried.

Councillor Roy then moved and Councillor Wire seconded,

"1. This Council notes the consultation by Northamptonshire County Council on who can receive community care services.

2. This Council expresses grave concern that the proposals to only invest and allow access to services to residents that are "critical" and "greater substantial" and believes it will:

Leave local citizens with care needs at risk

Leave vulnerable tenants in our housing with inadequate support

Risk destabilising voluntary and community groups in the Town which the Borough Council jointly fund to provide support services for these citizens currently by the decommissioning of services.

3. This Council instructs the Chief Executive to write to the County Council putting forward these concerns as the formal position of the Borough Council.

4. This Council instructs the Leader of the Council to make representations in the strongest possible terms to the Tory administration of the County Council.”

The motion was duly debated, voted upon and carried unanimously.

- (B) Prior to the discussion of this motion the Deputy Mayor, Councillors Hill, B Hoare, Malpas, Robinson, Edwards, I Markham.McCutcheon and Boss, as members of the Planning Committee, declared a non-prejudicial interest in the motion and left the Chamber while it was discussed.

Councillor Hadland was then duly proposed and seconded to reside as Chair for this item.

Councillor Hadland then assumed the Chair.

Mr Connell and Mr Scott then addressed the Council asking that the motion be supported and referring to the problems that had been encountered with the bunding. Mr Scott commented that the bunding had in fact proved to be an attraction for even more illegal activity and had as a result made Delapre park a less safe and attractive place for the law abiding majority. He appreciated that to remove the bunding there would be cost implications but this was the price that had to be paid for the error.

Councillor Glynane then proposed and Councillor Allen seconded that Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the motion to be debated.

The motion was carried.

Councillor Glynane then proposed and Councillor Allen seconded the following motion:

“This Council instructs officers to submit a planning application to remove Delapre Park bunding along London Road from the pond to the Park gates.

This Council instructs officers to review and investigate the possibility of implementing all other appropriate measures to prevent unauthorised vehicles entering Delapre Park.”

Councillor Palethorpe then moved and Councillor Caswell seconded an amendment to the motion as follows:

“This Council instructs officers to submit a planning application, investigate the full cost of a scheme to remove Delapre Park bunding along London Road from the pond to the Park gates and identify possible funding sources.

This Council instructs officers to review and investigate the possibility of implementing all other appropriate measures to prevent unauthorised vehicles entering Delapre Park.”

Following some discussion and with the addition of the word “and” so that it read, “submit a planning application and investigate the full cost of a scheme” the amendment was accepted.

The amendment was voted upon and carried.

The motion as amended was then voted upon and carried.

7. DRAFT CORPORATE PLAN 2006/07

Councillor Hadland presented the report on the draft Corporate Plan 2006/07, copies of which had been circulated, and which he commended to the Council. He drew particular attention to page 10 of the Plan advising of the latest position regarding the target figures. He stated that under Housing Benefit the average time for processing new claims should read “40 days” rather than “36 days”, the Housing Benefit average time for processing changes in notification was currently 17 days but would reduce to 8 over a three year period. Also with regard to Housing Benefit accuracy of processing, this was 85% in the first year rising to 99.9% over three years.

RESOLVED: That the Corporate Plan be received noting the amendments made from comments received during the draft Plan’s consultation period and the comments made above.

8. PROGRESS ON RECOVERY PLAN

Councillor Hadland stated that the last Government Monitoring Board had been held on 18 May and since then the Corporate Plan and the Best Value Performance Plan had been completed. The next Government Monitoring Board had been scheduled for 20 July but in order to accommodate a meeting with the Minister, it had been rescheduled to 27 July. Work was currently underway regarding the new Recovery Plan and it was expected that it would be presented to the Government Monitoring Board on 27 July. All Councillors would be kept updated and circulated with details when they became available.

9. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN WORKING GROUP

Councillor B Hoare, as Chair of the Best Value Performance Plan Working Group, presented the report stating that the Overview & Scrutiny Committee had set up this working group in response to Councillors’ concerns over the last two years regarding the Best Value Performance Plan preparation and approval process. The Group consisted of himself together with Councillors Hill and Roy. He stated that it was not a scrutiny of this year’s Best Value Performance report but a scrutiny of processes and procedures. He then referred to page 9 of the report which listed the recommendations. Under recommendation 5.9 it was noted that this should read “2006/07”.

RESOLVED: That the report of the Overview & Scrutiny Best Value Performance Plan Working Group be received and noted and the recommendations as set out be agreed.

10. BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN

Councillor Hadland presented the Best Value Performance Plan advising that a replacement copy had been circulated displaying the correct signature on page 3 and referring to the addendum which had been circulated detailing a number of amendments to be made to the final version of the Best Value Performance Plan. It was noted that these amendments included as mentioned the correct signatures for Councillors Hadland and Woods. Further amendments were under our Priorities change to delete “meet and exceed all targets set out in our Recovery Plan” (page 11, paragraph 3.1) and amendments to Performance Targets for Housing and Residential Operations Services on pages 15 and 16 of the Plan as detailed on the addendum and as advised earlier under the item on the Corporate Plan. It was noted that the Best Value Performance Plan had been considered and approved by Cabinet earlier in the evening.

RESOLVED: That the Best Value Performance Plan 2006/07 be agreed.

11. CONSTITUTION - REPORT OF SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL

Councillor Palethorpe as a member of the Constitution Working Party presented the report which was seconded by Councillor Handland and which sought approval to the various changes to the Constitution as set out in the recommendations. Councillor Church, as one of the members of the Working Party, made a number of comments regarding the report stating that he did not agree with Recommendation 2. Councillor McCutcheon, as another member of the Working Party, also expressed some doubts on a number of the recommendations and suggested that the report be referred back to the Constitutional Working Party to look at again. Some further discussion then ensued with Councillor Barron taking the view that the matter should be dealt with outside the Constitutional Working Party and referred back to the next Council meeting in July. A further suggestion was made that the coaches, who had been working with the three Party Leaders, could be involved to assist with the process of amendments to the Constitution.

RESOLVED: (1) That recommendation 4 be approved, namely that Councillor Palethorpe be appointed to the Chair of the Community Enabling Fund Advisory Panel instead of Councillor Hadland.

(2) That in terms of the remainder of the report, this be deferred and a further report be submitted to the July meeting of the Council and that in the interim discussions/actions regarding the Constitution take place as appropriate.

12. REVENUE OUTURN 2005/06

Councillor Hadland submitted for approval the Statement of Accounts for 2005/06

which had been considered and approved by Cabinet prior to this meeting and which were being referred to Audit Committee for observations the following evening.

RESOLVED: That the Statement of Accounts be approved subject to any observations the Audit Committee may have.

13. 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 9:15 pm.