

MINUTES

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

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

COUNCILLORS: Acock, Allen, Barron, Beardsworth, Boss, Caswell, Church, Conroy, Crake, Edwards, Evans, Flavell, Glynane, Hadland, Hill, B Hoare, M Hoare, Hollis, Lane, Larratt, J Lill, Malpas, B Markham, I Markham, Marriott, Mason, Matthews, McCutcheon, Miah, Palethorpe, Patterson, Pritchard, Roy, Simpson, Tavener, Wire, Woods and Yates

1. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Duncan, Eldred, Hope, Massey, Perkins, Robinson, Stewart and Taylor.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Council held on 26th June 2006 were signed by the Mayor. In moving the minutes the Mayor referred to item 11 "Constitution" at the previous meeting when it had been suggested that a further report would be submitted to this meeting and said that due to the political issues still outstanding this matter had been unable to be progressed and there was nothing further to report at this meeting. A report would be brought to the September meeting.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor advised that he had carried out 56 engagements to date which had involved meeting with various groups, organisations and that he would continue to promote the town during his mayoral year.

The Mayor then advised that he had agreed to take an emergency motion with regard to the Racecourse.

He then asked Councillor Beardsworth to say a few words about a recent event that she had attended. Councillor Beardsworth stated that he had attended the Special Olympics in Boston, Lincolnshire which this town had hosted in 1995. However in the last two years Northampton had not hosted a team and she hoped that perhaps this would be possible in future. She stated that a plaque had been presented on behalf of the town. The Mayor thanked Councillor Beardsworth for her comments and stated that he hoped this could be taken forward and Northampton could host a team for future years.

3. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES/QUESTIONS.

RESOLVED: That Tracy Gilbey and Steve Winder be permitted to address the Council in respect of Notice of Motion Item 6B regarding the Racecourse.

At this juncture it was agreed to consider Item 6 Notices of Motion as the next item including the emergency motion. Item 6B was considered first.

6. NOTICES OF MOTION

At this juncture copies of the emergency motion were circulated and the Mayor pursuant to Procedural Rule 3.6.10 moved that the meeting be adjourned for five minutes to enable the tabled motion to be considered.

The meeting resumed

Councillors Church Simpson and Woods declared an interest in the motion as members of Friends for Northampton Racecourse.

- (B) Tracy Gilbey stated that she was speaking on behalf of Friends of Northampton Racecourse and a supporter of the Healthy Living Hub Project. She explained that this had been set up by Friends of Northampton Racecourse and had generated some funding to carry out a feasibility study to consult widely with the community regarding ways of improving and enhancing the Racecourse. She stated that early indications showed that there was a lot of support for the project. A Racecourse summit meeting the previous week had been attended by key stakeholders. She stated that the main reason she was speaking this evening was to highlight the amount of enthusiasm and support about the project which was extremely well supported by the local community and residents.

Steve Winder then addressed the Council stating that much of what he wanted to say had been covered by the previous speaker but stressed the importance of the involvement of the local community in such projects and stressed that this should be the way forward with all the Borough's open spaces. He stated that he hoped there would be consultation in any areas that were dealt with.

Councillor Wire then moved and Councillor Boss seconded that Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the following motion and the emergency motion to be debated.

The motion was carried.

Councillor Simpson then moved the motion as printed under item 6B on the agenda and in so doing asked that the word "lottery" be deleted from the

second resolved point and to add a final resolved point “to nominate relevant Councillors and senior officer to represent the Borough on the new Racecourse Partnership Board”.

Councillor Church in seconding the motion proposed an amendment that the emergency motion regarding the Racecourse summit as circulated be treated as an amendment and added on to the existing Racecourse motion.

The emergency motion which Councillor Church was suggesting being taken as an addition to this existing motion was as follows:-

“This Council welcomes the Racecourse summit held on Thursday 20 July 2006 and congratulates the Chronicle and Echo for their initiative and involvement. This Council also welcomes the contribution and attendance of all other Partners and Stakeholders especially the Friends of the Racecourse. In particular this Council welcomes the Healthy Living Hub Initiative and appreciates the effort put in by stakeholders to take this forward.

This Council requests the Cabinet to discuss and address the outcomes of the summit and work with partners and stakeholders to drive them forward. Council also requests Cabinet to identify resources and support and develop a viable action plan and long term vision for the Racecourse in partnership with partners and stakeholders”.

Following some discussion on whether to accept the emergency motion as an amendment to be appended to the existing motion a vote was taken and it was carried. As such the emergency motion became part of the original motion as printed on the agenda.

A vote was then taken upon the motion as amended and carried. The motion would read as set out below:-

This Council recognises Northampton Racecourse as one of the most important parks in the town.

Further this Council;

Acknowledges that recent occurrences of anti-social behaviour and crime on the park have led to concerns about the safety of the environment on the park.

Welcomes the initiative by the Chronicle and Echo in its “Reclaim the Racecourse” Campaign, the recent summit held jointly with Friends of Northampton Racecourse.

Welcomes the “Healthy Living Hub” Initiative as a possible way of leveraging funds and resources to create a new public facility on the park.

Notes that it passed policy in 2003 to draw up a rolling five year plan for the

park and that this has not happened.

This Council resolves to;

Work with all stakeholders and partners to draw up a master plan for the park.

Support the idea of the Healthy Living Hub to seek funding for plans to improve the park and develop new public facilities.

Set up a Racecourse Action Team headed by a Northampton Borough Council Manager that draws together all NBC stakeholders and external partners.

Actively seek external funding opportunities for improvements to the park.

To nominate Councillors and senior officers to represent the Borough on the new Racecourse Partnership Board. This Council welcomes the Racecourse summit held on Thursday 20 July 2006 and congratulates the Chronicle and Echo for their initiative and involvement. This Council also welcomes the contribution and attendance of all other Partners and Stakeholders, especially the Friends of the Racecourse. In particular this Council welcomes the Healthy Living Hub Initiative and appreciates the effort put in by stakeholders to take this forward.

This Council requests the Cabinet to discuss and address the outcomes of the summit and work with partners and stakeholders to drive them forward. Council also requests the Cabinet to identify resources and support and develop a viable action plan and long term vision for the Racecourse in partnership with partners and stakeholders.

- (A) Councillor B Hoare moved and Councillor Hollis seconded; "That Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the following motion to be discussed.

The motion was carried.

Councillor B Hoare proposed the motion which Councillor Hollis seconded and in so proposing he asked Council to approve an amendment in that the whole of paragraph three be deleted. This was accepted.

Councillor Patterson then moved an amendment which was seconded by Councillor Evans in terms of the second paragraph to read "The Council requests Overview and Scrutiny to review the existing energy strategy and to delete the rest of the second paragraph. Councillor Hoare duly accepted this amendment.

A vote was taken and the amendment was carried.

The motion as amended was then duly debated, voted upon and carried.

The motion to read as set out below:-

This Council welcomes the LGA Report entitled "Leading The Way: How Local Authorities Can Meet the Challenge of Climate Change". This Council recognises the importance of promoting a clean environment for the citizens of Northampton especially a clean air environment for the children of our town.

The Council requests Overview and Scrutiny to review the existing Energy Strategy.

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

Councillor Roy asked a question of Councillor Hadland as Leader whether, given the emphasis in the Improvement Plan on the role of the individual Ward Councillor, he could give details of the results so far into investigating the potential of questions being submitted to Portfolio Holders sufficiently in advance to enable publication in the Council Agenda.

Councillor Hadland advised that various constitutional amendments had been recommended to Council at the last meeting which had included the issue of questions however a decision on this was deferred and the Constitutional Review Working Group would consider the changes again and report to Council in September. The issue of questions would be considered then. In response to a supplementary question Councillor Hadland stated that the Constitution Working Party had discussed both types of questions ie those from members of the public and those to Portfolio Holders.

Councillor Roy then asked a question of Councillor Caswell as the Portfolio Holder whether he could give details on partnership working with the WNDC on the development of the Blueberry Hill Diner Site in the town centre and his opinion on the time taken to progress to date.

Councillor Caswell stated that this site was purchased earlier this year on the Council's behalf by EMDA following a meeting with the Regeneration and Growth Team. The site was immediately adjacent to landholdings held by the Council and was secured to provide an opportunity for bringing forward regeneration of the St Johns Area. Further funding had also been secured by the Regeneration and Growth Team from EMDA for the demolition of the existing buildings and this demolition was almost complete. Discussions were in hand with the stakeholder partners including WNDC to discuss the Central Area Framework document recently produced by consultants BDP. This work would be presented to Councillors after the summer and would form the basis of the Central Area Action Plan work and wider consultation thereafter.

NB Councillor Larratt declared an interest in the above question.

Councillor Roy then asked a question of Councillor Palethorpe whether he could give details on the progress or otherwise on the completion of security measures on Park Square flats since the last full Council given the admission that progress up to the last full Council had been unacceptably slow.

Councillor Palethorpe advised that there was the need to look at a technical feasibility study and he would be asking for consultation with the community and those who would be responsible for security measures which would involve the CASPAR Group. In response to a supplementary he stated that he would put a response in writing to Councillor Roy.

Councillor B Hoare then asked a question of Councillor Caswell as the Portfolio Holder regarding the Bullen Report. He stated that in March 2003 Northampton Borough Council commissioned Bullen Consultants to undertake a strategic Flood Risk Assessment of Northampton. This was duly considered by the Planning Transportation and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee on 17 March 2005 and that Committee resolved to make eight recommendations to the Executive. The second recommendation was as follows:-

The Executive consider identifying the 430 homes in the Borough (Wootton Brook and Collingtree) areas that were at risk of flood in consultation with the Environment Agency to see what measures could be taken to address the risk. He asked if the Portfolio Holder could advise what programme had been made to identify these 430 homes at risk. Councillor Caswell stated that the Executive in July 2005 had accepted the Scrutiny report and resolved that reference to the named areas be replaced with Nene Valley and West Hunsbury Wards. The document had been published together with maps which identified all homes in Northampton Borough subject to flood risk and these maps were available to the general public and identified individual properties. The full report and map was available on the Council's website and there were over 600 recorded viewings of the maps covering the Nene Valley and West Hunsbury Wards which identified properties at high risk of flooding. The Council would be seeking to address flood risk ensuring that its development plans took account of the evidence of flood risk and policies helped to mitigate flood risk and where possible reduce risk. Flood risk areas would be clearly identified and the Council would ensure that site specific risk assessments would be carried out in accordance with Environment Agency requirements in order to examine the individual nature of all new development.

NB Councillor Wire declared an interest in the above as a member of the Environment Agency Northern Area Committee and Councillor Glynane declared an interest as Chair of the Nene Flood Prevention Alliance.

Councillor Hollis then asked a question of Councillor Flavell. She stated that with reference to the recent report on Neighbourhood Management and the involvement of Councillors as Community Leaders could the Portfolio Holder confirm how Neighbourhood Wardens were allocated to Wards. Given the decision earlier this year made without consultation with Councillors to move Neighbourhood Wardens around the Borough how would the Portfolio Holder ensure the continuity with

regard to the work being undertaken within the Ward by Neighbourhood Wardens. She also asked what plans were being developed for Wardens to support Councillors in their role as Community Leaders. Councillor Flavell stated that to date Wardens had been allocated according to the Executive report of 23 May 2005. The roll out allocations had been decided in parallel to the Police service rollout in order to ensure that the resources were targeted to meet demands identified in the areas on a priority basis. As the roll out continued in 2006/07 all of the areas would receive the benefits of this service. A further five Wardens were due to be recruited in this financial year and the next areas would be New Duston, Kingsthorpe, Parklands, East Hunsbury and West Hunsbury but this would be reviewed in line with the recent report on Neighbourhood Management Areas and it might be more beneficial to double up on some areas that required a greater input. Councillor Flavell elaborated further upon the current position commenting that Kingsley and Abington would be covered by the St Davids and Weston Area Wardens but would be reviewed together with Nene Valley in 07/08 dependent upon the funding available and those priorities determined by Councillors. The decision to rotate the Wardens should not be detrimental to any of the areas and would assist in ensuring the Wardens were alerted not compromised. It was envisaged that this change would occur every two years and the Wardens would ensure that they worked together to ensure the continuity of work currently being undertaken. The first move was envisaged for September 2006 and all Councillors would be informed when their Wards were affected. Councillors would be contacted by their Wardens following completion of their initial training. Alternatively Councillors could establish meetings through contact via the Neighbourhood Warden Team Leader. Also up to date information on the Neighbourhood Wardens was available on the Council's website. Councillor Flavell welcomed Councillors comments on how this service may be developed to ensure Councillors were supported in meeting their future expectations. She added that a new officer was organising the Wardens and she would let Councillor Hollis have details of this.

Councillor Glynane then asked a question of Councillor Larratt whether given the recent thunderstorms and heavy rain causing increased surface water flooding across Northampton and in particular the St James and Far Cotton areas whether he could advise how many incidents of surface water flooding in Northampton were reported to the Borough Council and the County Council, how regularly the drains should be cleaned, to what standard and what provision was made to clean the drains when the gully was obstructed by parked cars and the service standard set for drain clearance and how under the Borough Council's duty of care to the citizens for Northampton could this be effectively monitored. Councillor Larratt stated that in terms of the incidents of surface water the Borough Council did not receive calls directly as the responsibility for this area of work fell directly with the County Council. In terms of the cleaning of drains again this responsibility fell within the remit of the County Council but the County's policy stated that water should not lay around a gully for more than two hours following any rainfall. Thirdly, in terms of the service standard set for drain clearing Northampton Borough Council did not operate a duty of care as this element of work also fell within the remit of Northamptonshire County Council. However the Borough did provide Northamptonshire County Council with direct information in relation to any complaint received which could be logged against a unique reference number. In response to a supplementary Councillor Larratt

reiterated the Borough Council was not the responsible authority for this area of work and that it was the County's responsibility and therefore Councillor Glynane should take up any issues with the County accordingly.

Councillor Church asked a question of Councillor Larratt stating that Northampton Bowls League had announced with effect from 17 July they would cease to use the Racecourse Bowling Greens after 80 years of continuous use. They cited problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour and stating they were willing to return at the beginning of next year season provided conditions were acceptable. Councillor Larratt stated that this was deeply regrettable Unfortunately this Bowling Green was subject to a considerable amount of anti-social behaviour and vandalism. The Council did endeavour to ensure that all damage was reinstated as soon as possible and the presence of Park Rangers and the Neighbourhood Wardens service to patrol the particular area had been increased. Unfortunately unless a continued presence was available it became increasingly difficult to police the situation on a permanent basis. Meetings had been held with Bowls League officials to discuss the current situation and the issue of safety fencing around the perimeter was discussed. They were advised that the situation would reviewed later in the financial year. Councillor Larratt stated that he had subsequently looked into the financial situation and was pleased to confirm that subject to member approval if a proportion of the works could be sourced externally then the remaining funding could probably be found.

Councillor Matthews then asked a question of Councillor Laratt with regard to Hunsbury Country Park. He stated that the park had seen a steady decline over the past 20 years with very little work other than the usual grass cutting and the removal of damaged items. A tour of the park had been organised earlier in the year and he asked if as a result of this tour a programme of maintenance had been drawn up and if so the details of that programme. If a programme had not been drawn up he asked what action would be taken to include the park in the winter work schedule and what work would be done. He added that the Hill Fort within the park was an ancient monument which was in need of urgent attention and asked whether the Council had entered into a dialogue with English Heritage with regards to its conservation. Councillor Larratt stated that works carried out last winter in Hunsbury Park included the pruning of Green Lane, the pruning of shrubs around the car park and tidying up around the disused toilets which had received numerous complaints from local residents. A start had been made on edging up the pathways and litter picking was carried out across the park on a regular basis. This winter it was intended to carry out the pruning of shrub beds and continuing with the edging up of the paths in the park. The trees had been inspected and it was understood that there was a programme of work in place to carry out the necessary works. With regard to the Hill Fort Councillor Larratt stated that he did not know what the position was with regard to this but he would take up the issue and let Councillor Matthews know.

7. PROGRESS ON RECOVERY PLAN

Councillor Hadland read out a joint statement on behalf of the three party leaders, copies of which were circulated. Essentially the joint statement advised that the

leaders of each political group had worked together to agree a method of cross party working between now and the election which was more appropriate to the Borough's circumstances than the current Improvement Board arrangements. They had agreed to strengthen decision making in the Council by ensuring that all key decisions were taken by the Cabinet with Portfolio Holders making delegated decisions. Other processes had been streamlined to improve cross party knowledge of the issues the Council was dealing with and involvement in decision making by the introduction of four new political functions to focus on namely; (1) Leadership Briefings; (2) Cross Party Consultative Group; (3) Quarterly Performance Reviews; (4) Development, Improvement and Performance Panel. The statement advised that Scrutiny would continue and Improvement Clinics would be developed further based on the pilot study. A review of the Area Partnerships was currently being undertaken to ensure better public consultation, Ward Councillor involvement and feedback from these groups into and from Council decision making. Following the visit to the Minister the previous week the Council were pleased that the Minister had welcomed our efforts to date but it was clear that we must accelerate the pace of change. All Councillors and staff needed to focus on improving the weakest services, that we ensured a stronger customer focus, that our budget setting followed our priorities and that we continued to work with partners offering clear community leadership.

A joint Powerpoint presentation by the three party leaders and the Chief Executive was then made entitled "New Working Arrangements for Political Governance and Recovery", copies of which were circulated. The presentation outlined the way forward in terms of the operation of full Council, Cabinet it being noted that Cabinet would meet six weekly. There would be cross party leadership briefings and a Development, Performance and Improvement Panel to replace the Improvement Board. This would meet on a six weekly basis to receive and monitor reports and provide advice and comment on Councillor and Managerial Development, Performance Management and Recovery Plan Milestones. Meetings would be open to all Councillors. Details were also given in terms of the budget setting process for 2006/07 and in terms of the new Meeting Cycle the Senior Leadership Team would meet weekly on a six week rota at Cabinet, Leadership Briefing, Development Performance Improvement Panel and Consultation for Cabinet.

Reference was also made to a 20:20 Vision Forum which would aspire to become a revitalised LSP. In considering the presentation comment was made that the LSP (Local Strategic Partnership) was a partnership involving other bodies and organisations and not just a Borough Council body and therefore a structure of the actual Local Strategic Partnership could not be changed without wider consultation with the other partners.

RESOLVED: That the new working arrangements for Political Governance and Recovery be received and noted and the point regarding the 20:20 Vision Forum duly noted.

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

There were none.

At this juncture the Mayor took the opportunity to wish Northampton Town Football Club all the best in the forthcoming season and it was agreed that the Chief Executive send a letter on behalf of the Council wishing them all the best. This was duly agreed.

The meeting concluded at 8.50pm