

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON THURSDAY THE TWENTY EIGHTH DAY OF SEPTEMBER 2006 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

PRESENT:

Councillor Beardworth (in the chair)

COUNCILLORS:

Acock, Allen, Barron, Boss, Caswell, Church, Conroy, Crake, Duncan, Edwards, Eldred, Evans, Flavell, Glynane, Hadland, Hill, B. Hoare, M. Hoare, Hollis, McCutcheon, Miah, B. Markham, I. Markham, Marriott, Matthews, Palethorpe, Patterson, Perkins, Pritchard, Roy, Simpson, Tavener, Taylor, Wire, Woods and Yates.

1. MINUTES.

In the absence of the Mayor and the Deputy Mayor Councillor Hadland, as Leader of the Council, called for nominations for a Chair for this meeting. Councillor Crake proposed and Councillor Woods seconded that Councillor Beardsworth be elected Chair for this meeting. The proposal was put to the vote and carried. Councillor Beardsworth then assumed the Chair.

At this juncture Councillor Beardsworth announced with deep regret the deaths of Mr. George Pollard a former Borough Councillor, Sir Malcolm Arnold and former Councillor Mary Davies and the Council held a minutes silence as a mark of respect.

Tributes were then paid to Mary Davies by Councillors Pritchard, Hadland and Church to George Pollard by Councillor Hadland, and to Sir Malcolm Arnold by Councillors Woods and Hadland.

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Council held on 24 July were then signed by Councillor Beardsworth. In moving the minutes Councillor Glynane referred to the fact that he had requested an update at the last meeting in terms of the planning application in relation to the Delapre bunding and had asked this of Councillor Hadland. Councillor Hadland undertook to let Councillor Glynane have the information. Councillor Marriott then raised an issue that he had requested that Council be given an update on recent notices of motion and again it was agreed that this would be undertaken.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from the Mayor, the Deputy Mayor, Councillors J Lill, Malpas, Massey and Robinson.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

It was noted that a Fair Trade Certificate had been awarded to the Borough Council and Councillor's Pritchard's work and efforts in achieving this were placed on record.

Councillor Conroy then presented a petition on behalf of Dallington residents regarding overgrown trees which were causing problems in Dallington Haven.

4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES/QUESTIONS.

RESOLVED: That Mr Varnsverry be permitted to address the Council in respect of Notice of Motion Item 6B regarding Climate Change and Mr Adams and Mr.Swinn be permitted to address the Council in respect of Notice of Motion Item 6C regarding the Council's Housing Stock.

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

(A) Councillor Church asked a question to which Councillor Hadland responded. Councillor Church stated that in 2003 Northampton Borough Council published an Energy Strategy in response to growing concern about the environment and the impact of climate change. Amongst the aims of the strategy were specific targets including the following:- by 2004 establish annual Northampton Design Awards to promote good sustainable design in buildings and public spaces, to complete a programme of improved flood defences by 2004, to ensure at least sixty percent of new housing between 2000 to 2008 was built on brownfield land, develop at least one Council owned property accessible to the public as a flagship for renewable energy and energy efficiency. He asked what progress had been made towards these aims. Councillor Hadland in responding to the question firstly made a plea to members that given current pressure under which the Council was operating that they, as a general principle, exercise an element of restraint in requesting information and perhaps source information through other channels thus keeping the pressure down so that the priorities could be concentrated upon. He then responded to the question stating that no progress had been made towards establishing a Northampton Design Awards. However the Upton housing area being developed by English Partnerships continued to be a national and local example of best practice in sustainable design and buildings and the Council had participated in various seminars and events to promote its design and development principles. The programme of flood defences for areas at high risk from flooding was implemented by the Environment Agency and completed in 2004. Annual proportions of housing built on brownfield land had been consistently higher than 60% since the year 2000. The latest figure for 2005/06 was 84%, which was the highest proportion ever recorded. No Borough Council property had as yet been accessible to the public to demonstrate renewable energy and energy efficiency. In response to a supplementary question in terms of promoting sustainable housing by having an exhibition house on Council property, Councillor Hadland stated that the Council would endeavour to do its best as resources permitted.

(B) Councillor Beardsworth then asked a question dealing with the same issue, i.e.

the impact of climate change and energy strategy, and asked what progress had been made towards the following aims to reduce fuel poverty in vulnerable households across the Borough by a third by 2004, a 30% improvement in domestic energy efficiency between 1996 and 2011 and to set a minimum standard for energy efficiency for new build in the local plan during 2006. Councillor Hadland again responded to the questions. He stated that the replacement to the local plan would enable the Council to set minimum standards for energy efficiency by ensuring developers adopted an approach to assessing the environmental performance of new build and converted residential property. Policies on energy efficiency and promoting renewable energy would be contained in the Core Strategy and Development Control policy documents of the Local Development Framework.

- (C) Councillor Hollis then asked her questions which again were on the same theme, She asked what progress had been made towards developing a green transport plan to promote car sharing and from a 1996 base to double cycling by 2002. She also asked how the aim to double cycling rates in the Town related to the County Council's recently published local transport plan with its very un-ambitious target of maintaining cycling rates at the current level. Councillor Hadland again responded stating that in February 2005 officers put forward a project initiation document for an NBC green travel plan, although at the time it was not deemed a high priority issue and was not pursued. However a full time sustainable development officer was now in post and the sustainable development strategy was being reviewed and it was intended to re-evaluate this along with other carbon reduction measures. The County Council were responsible for cycle routes and the National Cycle Network Route 6 was put in place within this time period and would have increased the facility available. He stated that currently there was no dedicated cycling officer at the County although they were looking to recruit one. The Borough Council's Regeneration and Growth Service Area was also actively looking at planned cycle routes in the Borough to ensure that this was part of a future economic strategy now that additional resources were being put in place.
- (D) Councillor Crake then asked questions based around the same issue. She asked what progress had been made towards improving home energy efficiency and reducing CO2 emissions by over 30% over fifteen years from April 1996 to foster the development of appropriate renewable energy resources and to work with other districts to develop a positive regional approach, to ensure NBC contributes to national target of 12.5% CO2 saving, reduce CO2 emissions to 20% below 1990 levels by 2010 and undertake a study to establish full extent of Northampton Borough Council's current and potential future bio mass resource. Councillor Hadland again responded to the question. He stated that to respond to the first point, actual energy demand figures were required which were not available. However a Countywide project was being developed called climate friendly communities which would help groups measure their own energy demand and put in place mitigation programmes. Northampton Borough Council has purchased renewable energy for some of its buildings and works with Councils across the County to provide grant schemes for domestic households wishing to improve their own energy

efficiency or install renewable energy resources (the Northants Home Energy Efficiency Partnership). Northampton Borough Council organised a regional sustainable building expo last January promoting sustainable development in general but a major focus area was renewable energy in housing and energy efficiency to combat climate change. This event highlighted other work done on the design of the nationally acclaimed housing development at Upton and used it as a best practice model as it met the highest environmental building criteria defined by a design code for which the Borough Council co-wrote with other project partners ensuring renewable energy sources and high building efficiency standards are implemented. With regard to the last point there was no knowledge of this study what so ever.

At this juncture Councillor Roy proposed and Councillor Barron seconded that the order of business be varied to consider the notice of motion under Item 6(B) as the next item.

The motion was carried.

6 NOTICES OF MOTION

- (B) At this juncture Mr Varnsberry addressed the Council supporting the motion and encouraging the commitment to a Council wide environmental audit. He stated that, in speaking of environmental issues, he wished to bring to attention an environmental issue that should be one of the first things to be dealt with under this initiative regarding Delapre bunding. He stated that he wished to talk about the planning conditions, which needed to be put in to protect the environment. At this point Mr Varnsberry was halted in his address, as his comments were not adhering to the spirit of the motion. However, after some discussion, it was agreed to let Mr Varnsberry continue his address for a further minute. He expressed the view that there had been continuous breaches in the planning conditions and elaborated further upon this.

Councillor Hollis then moved and Councillor Simpson seconded that Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the following motion to be discussed and a vote taken.

The motion was carried.

Councillor Hollis then formally moved and Councillor Simpson seconded the motion:

“While this Council appreciates the need to focus on improvement, it also recognises the urgent need to address the causes of climate change.

This Council calls for a Council-wide environmental audit to be undertaken as soon as possible to identify ways in which we can improve the environmental performance of the Council, reduce our environmental footprint, mitigate the effects on climate change and identify future savings in tax payers money. We encourage our partners to do the same.”

The motion was duly debated, voted upon and carried and stood referred to Cabinet for further discussion and identification of resources.

- (C) At this juncture, Mr Adams addressed the Council stating that he had no problem with paragraph one of the motion, but asked what was meant by “affordable housing” in paragraph two as he had never received a clear answer to this. He also referred to the last line of the motion stating that, “this Council will continue to support tenants’ right to buy”. He stated that he was sure all three parties would support this sentence, but asked what had happened to right to buy receipts over the last twenty years.

Mr Swinn then addressed the Council stating that he had some concerns about the motion in that it was a statement of known facts and Government policy. He referred to previous motions on this subject back in 2005 stating that these had not yet been answered and referred specifically to Items 7A and B from 7 March Council meeting in 2005. He also added that the “right to manage” had been omitted from the Tenancy Rules.

Councillor Miah then moved and Councillor Palethorpe seconded that Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the motion to be discussed and a vote be taken.

The motion was carried.

Councillor Miah then moved and Councillor Palethorpe seconded the motion:-
“This Council reaffirms its commitment to support tenants’ wishes for housing to remain under the control of Northampton Borough Council. This Council is committed to working with tenants and the Tenants Participation Panel to identify future ways of managing the stock and giving the tenants a greater role in the management of their homes.

This Council recognises the need for more affordable housing in Northampton. The Council will continue to ensure through the planning framework as well as working with partners and agencies to develop options to meet the needs of those on the housing waiting list, first time buyers and key workers.

This Council will continue to support tenants’ right to buy.”

Councillor Church then moved an amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Woods, that the first paragraph be deleted and replaced with “This Council reaffirms its commitment to meeting the Decent Homes Standard for Council Owned Properties by 2010. This Council will seek to ensure the best means of management of the Council’s housing stock in order to achieve better quality housing and full tenant participation and recognises that any decision to transfer ownership of the Council’s stock will require the consent of the tenants in a referendum.”

Councillor Miah, as mover of the original motion, accepted the amendment.

The motion as amended was then debated.

Councillor Marriott then moved, and Councillor Hadland seconded, a further amendment that the first sentence of the original motion to be re-introduced. Councillor Church accepted this amendment.

The motion as amended was then voted upon and carried to become the substantive.

The substantive motion was then voted upon and carried as was as follows:-
 “This Council reaffirms its commitment to support tenants’ wishes for housing to remain under the control of Northampton Borough Council. This Council reaffirms its commitment to meeting the Decent Homes Standard for Council owned properties by 2010. This Council will seek to ensure the best means of management of the Council’s housing stock in order to achieve better quality housing and full tenant participation and recognises that any decision to transfer ownership of the Council’s stock will require the assent of the tenants in a referendum.

This Council recognises the need for more affordable housing in Northampton. The Council will continue to ensure through the planning framework, as well as working with partners and agencies, to develop options to meet the needs of those on the housing waiting list, first time buyers and key workers.

This Council will continue to support tenants’ right to buy.”

- (A) Councillor Hill then moved and Councillor Duncan seconded that Procedural Rule 3.4 be suspended to enable the following motion to be discussed and a vote to be taken.

The motion was carried. Councillor Hill then moved and Councillor Duncan then seconded the motion:

“Council welcomes the decision of Cabinet on 11 September to support the preparation of a joint core strategy for West Northamptonshire and commends all involved for their hard work.

Council agrees with the Administration that completion of the Local Development Plans is vital to the future prosperity and improvement of Northampton and that they should be produced as quickly as possible, taking into account the available resources and due process.

The motion was carried and referred to Cabinet.”

QUESTIONS UNDER PROCEDURAL RULE 5.2

Councillor Roy then asked a question of Councillor Hadland as Leader. She asked what was being done to ensure that portfolio holders were keeping abreast for ensuring that the Authority played its critical role in emergency planning for the Town. Councillor Hadland stated that emergency services were provided to the Borough Council by Northamptonshire County Council under a service level

agreement. An exercise to test the emergency plan and the potential evacuation of the Town Centre took place in April, which included the Leader of the Council. Future exercises would also involve Councillors and the County Council had held awareness raising sessions for Councillors (from across Northamptonshire) in June and again in September. The Borough's revised emergency plan was in its final draft and once senior managers had signed it off it would be communicated to Councillors.

Councillor Roy then asked if she could be advised as to the amount of money spent on replacing boards in housings originally for glass in the changing room building on Dallington Park since April 2006 and whether any cost benefit analysis had taken place for replacing the boards with a more durable and attractive structure. Councillor Eldred, in the absence of Councillor Larratt, stated that since April 2006 a total of £91.25 had been spent repairing the glazing to Dallington Park pavilion and changing rooms. A request had been made to the building manager to identify if the building remained suitable for current and future use prior to any major investment to refurbish. To date no response had been received. This building had been subject to heavy vandalism in previous years, resulting in repeated damage. The design of the building was fundamentally poor with regard to robustness against vandalism and break-ins, particularly the flat roof structure and the large areas of glazing. Whilst investment and refurbishment was an option it was considered important that the option of demolition and reconstruction was re-evaluated and took into consideration current standards for its intended use.

Councillor Roy then asked the Portfolio Holder whether there had been any progress in letting the site of the previous Post Office (unit 5) on Park Square, Kings Heath. Councillor Palethorpe responded to the question. He stated that the lettings of two of the empty units at Park Square had recently been completed, i.e. no 2 Park Square (ex-Post Office) with a new three-year lease for a boutique completed on 30 June 2006 and no 14 Park Square a new five year lease for an Internet café, which was completed on 12 September 2006.

Councillor Roy then asked a question regarding the progress of the installation of the existing gates on Park Square flats and the progress or securing the other side of Park Square. Councillor Palethorpe stated that the security gates at Park Square were installed as part of the CASPAR Project on Kings Heath and was undertaken independently of property maintenance. The CASPAR officer had been approached for further details regarding this. However it was understood that there were no plans to undertake additional works in this year's capital programme. All door entry/flat blocks were being monitored to inform future investment requirements and these would be linked into asset management and strategic investment planning, which were currently being undertaken. Councillor Roy then asked a number of supplementary questions and Councillor Palethorpe undertook to meet with Councillor Roy to discuss these issues further.

Councillor Wire then asked a question of Councillor Hadland as to whether he was aware that there appeared to be no mechanism for informing or advising Ward Councillors of emergency situations that occurred or developed in their wards. He asked whether it would not be of assistance to the community and to Ward

Councillors if a system was put in place to ensure that Ward Councillors were kept in the picture on such important issues. Councillor Hadland referred to his earlier answer to Councillor Roy in terms of emergency planning and stated that Councillor Wire had raised a good point and that he would request that procedures were amended to ensure that Ward Councillors did receive this kind of briefing on major incidents in a timely and appropriate way.

At this juncture the Council adjourned for a ten minute break.

The meeting resumed.

7. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY - ANNUAL REPORT

Councillor Glynane as Chair presented the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2005/06. He stated that the report was essentially the work that had been carried out over the last year by Overview & Scrutiny and the work that it proposed to do. As part of this, various Task & Finish Groups had been set up and he particularly thanked Councillors Roy and Malpas for their work and efforts in this. The Task & Finish Groups provided the opportunity for members and members of the public to be co-opted onto the Groups and involved in the Overview & Scrutiny process. The methods used by Overview & Scrutiny to involve the public included an e-bulletin newsletter, which was available on the Borough Council's website, and there was also a website dedicated to Overview & Scrutiny. He then spoke further on the work of some of the Task & Finish Groups and, in particular, paid tribute to the work of Tracy Tiff in helping drive the process forward as well as Margaret Martin for the training. He stated that there was still some work ongoing in terms of protocols. He then commended the report to the Council. Councillor Hadland stated that report had been submitted to Cabinet and had been pleased to note the quality and amount of work that had been carried out.

RESOLVED: That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee Annual Report be accepted.

8. CONSTITUTION - REPORT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL WORKING PARTY

Councillor Palethorpe presented the report of the Constitutional Working Party on various changes to the Constitution, which was seconded by Councillor Woods. It was noted that it was anticipated that the Constitution would be completed and the document submitted to the next Council meeting for approval. It was also noted that the Business Management Group should be up and running for the next Council meeting.

RESOLVED: That the report be received and the setting up of a Business Management Group (BMG) be agreed. That the changes to the Constitution as outlined in the Report be agreed.

9. LOCAL JOINT COMMITTEE - REPORT OF SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL

Councillor Palethorpe presented a report, which was seconded by Councillor Barron, seeking changes to the Constitution in terms of the Local Joint Committee. He added that all three parties wanted some representation on the Consultation Group and suggested that an additional recommendation be added in terms of seeking approval for three members from each of the political parties to sit on the Consultation Group.

- RESOLVED:**
- (1) That the report be received and that Council agrees to dis-establish the Local Joint Committee.
 - (2) That Council agrees to the route for the adoption and consultation on Human Resources Policy as outlined in the report and agrees to changes to the Constitution.
 - (3) That Council agrees to changes to the Officers' Scheme of Delegations as outlined in the report.
 - (4) That approval be sought from the various relevant bodies for three members from each of the political parties to sit on the Consultation Group.

10. NOMINATIONS TO OUTSIDE BODIES - NORTHAMPTON THEATRES TRUST - REPORT OF SOLICITOR TO THE COUNCIL

Councillor Hadland presented this report, which sought approval to change the Borough's representation on the Northampton Theatres Trust and seeking to appoint one Councillor from each of the three political groups as the Council's representatives on the Northampton Theatres Trust in place of the present five representatives. Members express the view that they would like further discussion and also to consult the Council representatives currently sitting on the Board.

- RESOLVED:** That approval be given in principle to appointing one Councillor from each of the political groups as the Council's representatives on the Northampton Theatres Trust in place of the present five representatives.

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 9:55 pm.