

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON TUESDAY THE THIRTEENTH DAY OF FEBRUARY 2007 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

COUNCILLORS: Acock, Barron, Beardsworth, Boss, Caswell, Church, Conroy, Crake, Duncan, Edwards, Eldred, Evans, Flavell, Glynane, Hill, B. Hoare, Hollis, Hope, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, B. Markham, I. Markham, Marriott, Mason, Massey, McCutcheon, Miah, Palethorpe, Patterson, Pritchard, Roy, Tavener, Taylor, Wire, Woods and Yates

1. MINUTES .

The minutes of the proceedings of the meeting of the Council held on 22 January 2007 were signed by the Mayor.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Allen, M Hoare, J Lill, B Markham, Matthews and Simpson.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor apologised for the delay in the start of this meeting and announced that as cross-party agreement could not be reached in terms of setting a balanced budget that the Budget item would be deferred and discussed at a reconvened meeting the following week. This meeting would take place on Wednesday, 21 February at 6:30 pm.

He stated that the addresses from those members of the public who had indicated that they wished to speak at this meeting would be heard. This would follow the Leader of the Council delivering his Budget Statement on behalf of the Cabinet and Councillors Woods and Barron responding to that Budget Statement. Any subsequent debate and amendments on the Budget would be deferred until the meeting on 21 February.

The Mayor then advised of a change of date for the Council Tax setting meeting, which had been scheduled for Monday, 26 February. He advised that this had been moved to Thursday, 1 March at 6:30 pm in the Council Chamber. This had been necessary as the Police Authority were not meeting until 27 February.

4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES.

The Mayor advised that as this was a special meeting of the Council for the purpose of setting the budget, he had on this occasion agreed to suspend Procedural Rules (Procedural Rule 22) so as to allow members of the public to address the Council on Items 5 and 6, namely the Budget and the Housing Revenue Account Budget. It was noted that requests to speak had been received from the following: Donna Munday – from the Royal and Derngate Theatres Trust, Anne Gilbert – on behalf of Northampton Volunteering Centre, Christopher Grethe, Ruby Bliss, Mr Adams (to address on both items), Dr Ronald Mendel, Harry Tuttle, Tina Harvey, Mike Littlewood, Anne True and Mr Swinn (on Item 6.)

5. BUDGET 2007/08 - 2009/10 (REPORT HEREWITH)

Councillor Hadland as Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder delivered his Budget Statement. He apologised for the delay in starting the meeting and explained the reasons why it had now been decided to defer consideration of the Budget until 21st February. He briefly outlined the procedure in terms of this year's Budget process and also to this year's consultation exercise, which had resulted in responses in far greater numbers than previously. He stated that last year it had been possible to set a consensus budget with all three parties but this year there had been budget pressures, which had impacted upon the Council's expenditure. Further informal discussions with the other two parties needed to take place to try to achieve a balanced Budget.

Councillor Woods, on behalf of the Opposition, and Councillor Barron, on behalf of the Labour Group, then made their comments upon the Budget Statement accordingly.

Donna Munday, on behalf of the Royal and Derngate Theatres Trust then addressed the Council stating that the Theatre was grateful for the support shown in the past and for the public who had supported the campaign against the cuts in funding. As a result they could now look forward to continuing to provide a service for the Town. She added that this had never been a political issue for the theatre the only purpose was to save the Theatre and she thanked all those who had made this now possible.

Anne Gilbert, from the Northampton Volunteering Centre, then addressed the Council stating that she was grateful to see that the Voluntary Sector Grants had been preserved, apart from a £50,000 cut, and she hoped that the status quo would remain. However, she was concerned about some of the cuts to community centres and urged the Council to rethink this aspect, which had not had a very high profile and was the reason why she was speaking on this point this evening.

Chris Grethe then addressed the Council referring to the various cuts and commenting that, in his opinion, it was an unfair Budget.

Ruby Bliss addressed the Council stating that there was a need to press for Central Government funding to be increased. She thanked the Council for its support in helping keep the theatres open. She stated that there was the need for more community initiatives to offset the cuts and advised of a proposed community

festival in June, which she would facilitate, and she asked if the Council would be prepared to support in any non financial way.

Mr Adams addressed the Council, commenting on the County Council funding cuts to the disabled. He asked why the Borough Council was wasting money on training when it did not keep the staff and why consultants were being employed. He referred to the Housing and Money Advice merger with the one stop shop and expressed the view that the Town needed this service. He asked that some alternative budgets be presented for consideration.

Dr R Mendel, President of Northampton Trades Council, then addressed the Council. He stated that he was going to present a petition, signed by one thousand five hundred people, opposing the cuts in the proposed budget but that he would now present this at the reconvened Council meeting the following week. He mentioned funding to consultants and issues with senior management and to the impact these issues would have on the Budget. He added that there was the need for an alternative method for financing local services.

Harry Tuttle addressed the Council on behalf of Abington and Kingsley Pensioners Voice and as a campaigner against the cuts. He briefly elaborated upon the campaign, which had been started as soon as he had heard about the proposed closure of Lings Forum. and was glad to hear that Lings Forum now had a reprieve.

Tina Harvey addressed the Council posing three questions, namely: "Do you love Northampton?", "Do you want Northampton to become a ghost town?", "What would be the effects of your proposals on vulnerable people?" She then stated that all groups within the community should be able to enjoy Northampton and hoped that the proposals being put forward in the Budget would not ruin the Town.

Mike Littlewood then addressed the Council asking if Council could give assurance that savings would be achieved without compulsory redundancies.

Anne True asked if Council would agree that any person seeking voluntary redundancy would be entitled to the same package as had been offered to senior managers previously.

Following the addresses the debate on the Budget stood adjourned to the meeting on 21 February.

6. HOUSING REVENUE ACCOUNT BUDGET 2007/2008

Mr Adams addressed the Council commenting that the rents were set by the Government standard but one matter he took issue with was the consultancy bill for the Housing Strategy.

Mr Swinn then addressed the Council commenting that he was of the view that tenants and leaseholders had not been consulted on this and he was also of the view that there were some errors and omissions in the appendices to the report on which he elaborated. He asked that Councillor Miah, as the Portfolio Holder and the

Section 151 Officer, attend the next NTAC meeting to explain the situation.

Councillor Miah then presented the Housing Revenue Account Budget 2007/08 report, which was seconded by Councillor Flavell. He accepted Mr Adams invitation to attend the next NTAC meeting.

Members then discussed the report in the course of which Councillor Roy posed a number of questions to Councillor Miah, including a request for reassurance that moving the Housing and Money Advice Service in to the One Stop Shop would not be detrimental to that service. Councillor Miah undertook to provide her with answers to her questions.

RESOLVED: That the report be received and the recommendations contained therein be agreed as set out below:

- (1) That an average rent increase of a 4.76% per dwelling per week (on a forty eight week basis) in line with the Government's Rent Restructuring Regime to take effect from 1 April 2007 be approved.
- (2) That warden and Call Care charges (excluding Eleanor House) are increased in line with the Sheltered Housing Review (as shown in Appendix 5).
- (3) That heating and Eleanor House service charges are increased by 3.6% (as shown in Appendix 5).
- (4) That garage charges are increased by 5% (as shown in Appendix 5).
- (5) That the budgets for 2007/08 set out in Appendices 1 and 2 of the report be approved, subject to the results of the HRA rebasing exercise being brought back to a future meeting of Cabinet.
- (6) That the potential reprioritisation of services (detailed at Appendices 3 and 4 of the report) be noted.

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

The Mayor agreed that the following be taken as a matter of urgency.

FORMATION OF AN EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Councillor Hadland presented a report, copies of which were circulated, seeking the establishment of an Employment Committee as outlined in the report.

- RESOLVED:** (1) That a committee of the Council be established to be called the Employment Committee with the following terms of reference:
- (A) To determine the terms and conditions of service on which staff hold office.
 - (B) In respect of all employees to take any decisions, which are required, and which are not appropriate to be taken by an officer within Delegated Powers in relation to superannuation benefits and contributions, extensions of service, gratuities, settlements, applications to serve beyond retirement age, or any other personnel matter which falls outside the functions of the Council's Executive.
 - (C) To be the Committee referred to in Rules 3 and 4 of the Council's Employment Procedure Rules (Appointment of Head of Paid Service and appointment of Chief Officers and certain other Officers).
- (2) That the Committee consist of three members (one from each of the political groups).
- (3) That the Committee structure and operation is reviewed in May 2007 as apart of a wider review of committees. Such a review to be considered by the Constitutional Review Working Group.
- (4) That the nomination of three Councillors to the Committee be delegated to the Group Leaders, but that it be noted that the Conservative Group nomination is Councillor Tavener.

The meeting then stood adjourned at 9:20 pm to be reconvened on Wednesday, 21 February at 6:30 pm in the Council Chamber.