

## MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON MONDAY THE NINETEENTH DAY OF NOVEMBER 2007 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

**PRESENT:** HER WORSHIP THE MAYOR Councillor Mason (in the Chair).

**COUNCILLORS:** Beardsworth, Capstick, I. Choudary, Church, Clarke, Collins, J. Conroy, R. Conroy, Crake, Davies, Duncan, Edwards, Glynane, Hadland, Hawkins, B. Hoare, Hollis, Larratt, Malpas, B. Markham, I. Markham, Matthews, Meredith, Mildren, Palethorpe, Perkins, Reeve, Simpson, Tavener, Taylor, P. Varnsvery, P. D. Varnsvery, Wilson, Woods and Yates

### 1. MINUTES.

The minutes of the proceedings of a meeting of Northampton Borough Council held on 27<sup>th</sup> September 2007 were signed by the Mayor.

### 2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Caswell, De Cruz, Flavell, Garlick, M Hoare, C Lill, J Lill, Lane and Scott.

### 3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor welcomed David Kennedy, the new Chief Executive to his first full Council meeting.

The Mayor then referred to the DVD "X Marks the Spot" which had been shown prior to the commencement of this meeting. The film was a 15 minute documentary that had been made by local teenagers with the help of Northampton Museums and was about the history of Spring Boroughs and Northampton. The film had been shortlisted from 250 entrants at a National Film Festival and the Mayor congratulated all those involved with the film for its success.

She then advised that Jim Inch, Senior Solicitor had retired from the Council after 36 years service and on behalf of the Council placed on record thanks to Jim for all his work and efforts over the years.

She then announced with regret the death of Mrs Audrey Linsdell, wife of former Borough Councillor and past Mayor Ron Linsdell. She was Mayoress from 1985 to 1986 during Ron's term of office as Mayor. The Mayor also announced with regret that former Borough Councillor Jean Lineker's husband had died. The Mayor on behalf of the Council expressed her sincere condolences to both Ron and Jean in their sad losses.

The Mayor then advised that she had raised £1,000 as a result of her taking part in a Go-Karting event and a run. She also advised that she had now completed 180 mayoral events.

#### **4. DEPUTATIONS/PUBLIC ADDRESSES**

**RESOLVED:** That Mr Chris Grethe be granted leave to address the Council in respect of the Notice of Motion under item 8A on the agenda regarding an amendment to the Constitution.

#### **5. QUESTION TIME**

The Mayor advised that five questions had been received from members and that the questions and answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution. She advised that she would take the questions in the order in which they had been received.

Councillor Reeve then asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth as the relevant Portfolio Holder. He stated that it had been brought to his attention by residents in Delapre that there had been an increase in the use of bailiffs by Northampton Borough Council during the recovery of rent arrears from tenants in Council property and asked whether the Portfolio Holder could supply figures that showed Northampton Borough Council's use of bailiffs month by month over the last year and associated costs to the authority. Councillor Reeve noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question as to whether these arrangements also applied to the collection of the rates.

Councillor Beardsworth advised that she would get the answer to that and respond in writing. She then elaborated further upon debt collection.

Councillor Reeve then asked a question of Councillor Mildren as the relevant Portfolio Holder stating that in support of a commitment to the valuable work undertaken by the Friends of Delapre Abbey when would the Borough Council be in a position to proceed with Friends of Delapre Abbey's application for the lease of the stable blocks at the Abbey.

Councillor Mildren advised that MENCAP had not yet vacated the premises and that the Council was currently undertaking an options appraisal regarding the future of Delapre Abbey. Therefore it was not possible to commit at this time to any leases for the stable block until that appraisal was completed in May.

Councillor Reeve then asked a supplementary question as to whether the administration tended to leave the buildings empty.

Councillor Mildren reiterated that it depended upon the outcome of the appraisal and what the best use for the Abbey was in the future but he doubted that the buildings would be left empty.

Councillor Reeve as a founder member of Friends of Delapre Abbey declared a personal but non-prejudicial interest in the above.

Councillor Palethorpe then asked a question of Councillor Glynane as the relevant Portfolio Holder. He stated that given the concern felt by the public over violent crime and that in the first six months of this year 2800 violent crimes were reported could the Portfolio Holder provide information on an estimated age profile on both victims and perpetrators of violent crimes in the town, a list of how many of these crimes were committed in the town centre and an indication as to how many of these offences resulted from alcohol consumption.

Councillor Palethorpe noted the response tabled and asked a supplementary question as to whether those organisations dealing with domestic abuse would be supported in the budget in the next financial year.

Councillor Glynane stated that the work such organisations did was very much appreciated and would be taken into account when setting next year's budget.

Councillor Palethorpe then asked a further question of Councillor Glynane as the relevant Portfolio Holder. He stated that at the last full Council meeting the Portfolio Holder's report indicated that Council controlled leisure centres had been maintained at approximately the same level as last year. As the public clearly supported the existence of the centres he asked if the Portfolio Holder would give a firm assurance that none of the leisure facilities at Lings Leisure Centre, Danes Camp or The Mounts would be transferred from Council ownership in the foreseeable future. He noted the response as tabled.

Councillor Larratt then asked a question of Councillor Mildren as the relevant Portfolio Holder. He stated that he was pleased that the administration had met with the Northampton Sea Cadets and was now actively pursuing a new ten year lease to this worthy and successful organisation in respect of its premises in Becketts Park/Nunn Mills Road. However he remained concerned that the administration had not seen fit to grant this organisation a lease for 25 years in respect of these premises. The organisation would welcome and still sought such a lease in order to provide it with more security with regard to its premises. He asked if the Portfolio Holder could advise why the administration had so far failed to grant a 25 year lease and also if the administration would keep the option of a 25 year lease under consideration and if so what would be the determining factors in deciding the grant of such a lease in the near future. Councillor Larratt also requested a written answer to his question.

Councillor Mildren responded verbally at the meeting but agreed to send a written answer to Councillor Larratt. He stated that the current lease was due to expire at the end of July 2008 and it was always the intention to roll the lease over for a further ten years. The administration was clear in its support of the Sea Cadets and had met with them and was supporting them in their attempts to obtain external funding. The Cabinet had given its assurance that if funding was conditional upon a lease of more than ten years then that would be given due consideration. Councillor Mildren added that at the meetings with the Sea Cadets there had been no specific request for a 25 year lease.

## 6. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

At this point each of the Cabinet members made a presentation on their respective portfolios which had been circulated with the agenda. In presenting his portfolio update Councillor Woods clarified that the timetable on the back of his report was not part of the report. He thanked John Edwards for all his work and efforts over the last eight months commenting that John would not be leaving immediately as he would be assisting the Council in its preparation for the next Audit Commission Progress Assessment. He then referred to the fact that the WNDP had invited the administration to appoint an observer to the WNDP Board and that he would be taking up this role. Councillor Woods then referred to the leaflet that had been circulated urging everyone to support the Connect 2 scheme which was a project to develop new routes for walkers and cyclists in Northampton and which had reached the final shortlist with the national charity Sustrans. Members then asked questions regarding the Portfolio presentation. Councillor Hadland referred to a virement to one of the voluntary organisations that had been made by Cabinet at its last meeting and the question asked how other voluntary organisations would be dealt with in future. Councillor Woods advised that they would be dealt with as in the past through CEFAP. In this particular instance there had been a request for emergency funding for a variety of reasons and as Leader he had taken a delegated decision to help. He added that given the nature of the organisation he had not wanted to give the issue too much publicity.

Councillor Crane, Portfolio Holder for Environment then presented her Portfolio Update which covered the Carbon Management Programme, Recycling, Refuse Collections, Ecton Lane Travellers Site, Smoke Free Legislation, Health and Safety Awareness for Warehousing and Logistics Industry, Integrated Housing IT Systems, Street Scene, Community Cleanups, the End of Life Vehicle Impound Scheme and Sheep Street Toilets. Questions were asked regarding Refuse Collection and Recycling and the Ecton Lane Travellers Site. It was noted that a pilot regarding glass collection was being carried in January next year and if this was successful it was hoped to extend the scheme to the rest of the town.

In response to a question regarding the Ecton Lane Travellers Site, Councillor Crane advised that a report was due to be considered in private by Cabinet at its meeting on 3 December.

Councillor Beardsworth, Portfolio Holder for Housing then presented her Portfolio which covered issues such as Housing Department Performance, Partnership Working, Housing Inspection, NTAFT, Choice Based Lettings, Housing Visioning Day and Estate Regeneration. She responded to questions regarding rent arrears and stated that in terms of rent arrears they had set up a three point attack and were now actively seeking people for money and that this in effect was making the figures look worse as debt previously unknown was being recovered as a result of this proactive approach.

In response to further questions she stated that the Housing Visioning Day would be held in November and that NTAFT was meeting on a two weekly basis and she and Housing Officers were helping NTAFT with their plans.

Councillor Glynane, Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Safety then presented his Portfolio Update which referred to the Community Safety in Partnership, the Balloon Festival and the Museum service in Spring Boroughs.

Questions were asked regarding the Balloon Festival and its future. Councillor Glynane stated that a report was due to be presented on the Balloon Festival to the 3 December Cabinet and invited Councillors and the public to come to that meeting to make their views known. In response to a question regarding crime and rising burglary in the town it was noted that in the run up to Christmas the Police would be setting up action teams and had plans in place and were working hard to reduce the number of burglaries. He also agreed to liaise with the Portfolio Holder for Housing to pass on advice to Council tenants regarding reducing crime and burglaries.

Councillor Mildren, Portfolio Holder for Finance then presented his Portfolio Update which covered issues such as the financial accounts position, use of resources assessment and the Northampton Door to Door Service.

A question was asked with regard to the Balloon Festival Outturn Figures and Councillor Mildren clarified that the deficit in the budget would be between £336,000 and £367,000. A further question was asked regarding the Northampton Door to Door Service and whether any talks were being held with Northamptonshire County Council with a view to them restoring matched funding to this organisation. Councillor Mildren stated he was continuing to try to set up a meeting with the County Council to discuss this issue.

Councillor Hoare, Portfolio Holder for Performance then presented his Portfolio Update which covered the Corporate Plan, Performance, ICT Services, Meeting Services, Licensing, Legal Services, Pay and Grading Review, Attendance Management and Appraisal Systems. He stated that the Pay and Grading Review was proceeding well. Reference was made to the recent multi-agency checks that had been carried out by the Licensing Department and the question was asked whether the Chair of Licensing Committee would name and shame the owners of those unroadworthy vehicles that had been discovered as a result of the checks.

At this juncture the thirty minute time limit for this item expired and the guillotine came into operation. As such the remaining Portfolio presentation was duly received and the Mayor advised that any further questions on this Portfolio should be submitted to the Portfolio Holder in writing and a written response would be received to those questions.

## **7. CONSTITUTION UPDATED FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

Councillor Perkins presented the report seeking authority to update the Constitution in relation to the financial regulations which were appended. Councillor Mildren duly seconded the report.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be received and that Council authorise the Solicitor to the Council to amend the Constitution by replacing the Financial Regulations currently in the Constitution with the Regulations attached to Appendix 1 of the report.

## 8. NOTICES OF MOTION

(A) Mr C Grethe addressed the Council stating that he would have preferred to speak on the amendment to the motion rather than the motion as set out in the agenda but understood that he could not as this was not in accordance with the Constitution. He stated that the current Constitution restricted members of the public from speaking on items on the agenda and that this was not in the spirit of open government.

Councillor Hadland then moved and Councillor Palethorpe seconded the motion as printed under 8(A) on the agenda:-

“In the interest of local democracy this Council will amend its Constitution to allow Councillors more time to question Portfolio Holders in full Council following the preparation of their reports. Therefore the allotted time for this is extended from 30 minutes to one hour and the guillotine moved from 9.30pm to 10pm with immediate effect”.

Councillor Paul Varnsberry then moved and Councillor Perkins seconded an amendment to the motion as follows:-

“To retain the words In the interests of local democracy this Council.....Then to delete all the text thereafter and replace with

“ request Cabinet to reconvene the Constitutional Working Party with party representation in the proportion of 2:2:1 to review the Council’s Constitution giving particular consideration to:-

1. Permitting the public to speak at Full Council on any item listed on the agenda.
2. Allowing Councillors more time to question Portfolio Holders in Full Council.
3. Extending the guillotine to provide adequate time for business.
4. Reducing the deadline for submission of written questions from 5 clear working days.
5. Reducing the deadline for submission of motions from 12 clear working days.
6. Other possible constitutional amendments that the Monitoring Officer, Overview and Scrutiny or the Constitutional Working Party consider worthy of consideration.

This Council requests that the Constitutional Working Party reports its recommendations back to Full Council on or before 17 March 2008”.

The amendment was then duly debated, voted upon and carried to become

substantive motion.

The full text of the motion as amended is set out below

“In the interest of local democracy this Council requests Cabinet to reconvene the Constitutional Working Party with party representation in the proportions 2-2-1 to review the Council’s Constitution, giving particular consideration to:

1. Permitting the public to speak at full Council on any item listed on the agenda
2. Allowing Councillors more time to question portfolio holders in full Council
3. Extending the quillotine to provide adequate time for business
4. Reducing the deadline for submission of written questions from five clear working days
5. Reducing the deadline for submission of motions from twelve clear working days
6. Other possible constitutional amendments that the Monitoring Officer, Overview and Scrutiny or the Constitutional Working Party consider worthy of consideration

This Council requests that the Constitutional Working Party reports its recommendations back to full Council on or before 17<sup>th</sup> March 2008.”

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

- (B) At this juncture Councillor Hill as mover of the motion under item 8(B) on the agenda withdrew the motion.

Councillor Davies duly withdrew his amendment to the motion

Councillor Church then proposed the motion as set out under 8(B) and in so doing accepted Councillor Simpson’s amendment to the motion. Councillor Clarke seconded the motion.

The amendment was as follows:-

To insert at the start of the text “This Council condemns the closure of 3,500 post offices under the last Conservative government and 4,000 so far under the current Labour government.

This Council notes that 13 post offices have closed in Northampton since 1999 and that the Labour government announced in December 2006 the consultation on its plans for the remaining post office network.

The sentence starting “This Council also.....to network” to be deleted and replaced with “This Council is dismayed that neither the Conservatives nor Labour Party have come forward with any proposals to safeguard the post office network from further closure.

This Council resolves to:-

1. Support National Liberal Democrat proposals to halt post office closures by:-

- (a) investing £2 billion in the post office network.
  - (b) opening new branches where needed.
  - (c) ensuring government services are continuing to be available at the post office.
  - (d) freeing the post office from Royal Mail restrictions to let it develop new business.
  - (e) providing a new legal requirement for the government to maintain the local post office network.
2. Objects to any future measures imposed by the government that will cause further damage to the post office network.
  3. Support the campaign to keep open the post offices in Northampton that have been threatened with closure under Post Office Limited's latest plan.
  4. Write to the town's MPs asking them to support this motion.
  5. Write to Post Office Limited and the relevant Government Minister responsible for the post office closure programme expressing this Council's support for Northampton's sub-post office network and objecting to those earmarked for closure.

The amendment was duly debated, voted upon and carried to become the substantive motion.

The full text of the amendment is as follows:

"This Council condemns the closure of 3,500 Post Offices under the last Conservative Government and 4,000 so far under the current Labour Government.

This Council notes that 13 Post Offices have closed on Northampton since 1999 and that the Labour Government announced in December 2006 a consultation on its plans for the remaining Post Office network. It called for major cuts in the number of Post Offices. On 17<sup>th</sup> May 2007 Labour Ministers announced the result of their consultation and confirmed that they would move ahead with cuts resulting in the closure of 2,500 Post Offices. The overwhelming majority of the remaining Post Offices are sub post offices run by private businessmen and women.

This Council believes that Post Offices provide a unique and essential service to many communities within the Borough and support their efforts to remain open.

This Council is dismayed that neither the Conservatives nor Labour Party have come forward with any proposals to safeguard the Post Office network from further closure.

This Council resolves to:

1. Support national Liberal Democrat proposals to halt post office closures by:
  - a. Investing £2 billion in the post office network



- b. Opening new branches where needed
  - c. Ensuring Government services are continuing to be available at the Post Office
  - d. Freeing the Post Office from Royal Mail restrictions to let it develop new business
  - e. Providing a new legal requirement for the Government to maintain the local Post Office network.
2. Objects to any future measures imposed by the Government that will cause further damage to the Post Office network.
  3. Support the campaign to keep open the Post Offices in Northampton that have been threatened with closure under Post Office Ltd's latest plan.
  4. Write to the town's MP's asking them to support this motion.
  5. Write to Post Office Ltd. and the relevant Government Minister responsible for the Post Office Closure Programme expressing this Council's support for Northampton sub Post Office network and objecting to those earmarked for closure.

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

**9. 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 8.40pm.