

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON MONDAY 8 DECEMBER 2008 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

PRESENT: HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR Councillor B. Markham (in the Chair).

COUNCILLORS: Beardsworth, Capstick, Caswell, Choudary, Church, Clarke, Collins, J. Conroy, R. Conroy, Crake, Davies, Glynane, Hadland, Hawkins, Hill, Hoare, Hollis, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, I. Markham, Mason, Matthews, Meredith, Mildren, Palethorpe, Perkins, Reeve, Scott, Simpson, Taylor, P. D.Varnsvery, P.M. Varnsvery, Wilson, Woods and Yates

The Mayor announced the death of Councillor Liz Tavener on 21 November 2008. The Council stood in silence for two minutes as a mark of respect. Councillor Hadland commented that Liz Tavener had been a Duston Parish Councillor since 1985 and had been Chairman of that Council and had also been Chair and President of Northampton South Conservative Association. She had joined the Borough Council in 2003 and the County Council in 2005 and had developed a respected expertise in Community Safety and Public Protection matters.

Councillors paid tribute to Councillor Liz Tavener.

On behalf of the Council, the Mayor expressed his condolences to Liz Tavener's widower and family.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Lane declared a personal interest in item 10 (Investment Strategy Update) insofar as the report referred to the Nationwide Building Society.

2. MINUTES.

Councillor Clarke proposed and Councillor Palethorpe seconded "That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 27 October 2008 be not moved and accepted."

Upon a vote the motion was carried.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors S Chaudhury, De Cruz, Duncan, Edwards, Flavell, Garlick, M Hoare, C Lill and J Lill.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor commented that on 27 November 2008 the Youth Forum had been finalists in the Prince of Wales Mosaic Awards in the Inter Faith Category. He also noted that the Forum had been working to bring an updated Anne Frank exhibition to the Guildhall in 2009. He offered the Council's congratulations to the Forum.

The Mayor noted that 8 December 2008 marked the Muslim festival of Eid al Adha and he expressed his best wishes to anyone celebrating this festival.

The Mayor thanked members of the Council for their attendance of his gala dinner and he noted that £1,700 had been raised for his Mayoral Charities. He also noted that the staff Christmas party at the Black Bottom Club had raised a further £600.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Peart handed a petition from Residents of Birds Hill Walk to the Mayor. Mr Beswick commented upon an area of green space near South Priors Court which was frequently used by travellers as an illegal encampment. He referred to the problems that residents had experienced and the fact that the authority appeared powerless to act. Mr Beswick urged the Council to erect barriers to prevent incursions onto this site.

The Mayor indicated that the petition would be passed to the Chief Executive who had already initiated action on what could be done and that a report would be submitted to Cabinet in due course.

Mr Jwanczuk together with Sadie, a ten year old schoolgirl, handed a petition in respect of the condition of Friars Avenue to the Mayor. Sadie commented on the poor condition of this road and Mr Jwanczuk commented that the petition with 50 signatures which Sadie had arranged herself, had been presented both to the Council and the County Council. The Residents Association who had been campaigning for improvements to Friars Avenue since 2005 were supporting Sadie in her efforts to bring the issues to the attention of both Councils. The Mayor accepted the petition and congratulated Sadie on her initiative.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that six questions had been received from members of the public and Councillors and that these and the answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution. The Mayor advised that he would take the questions in the order in which they had been received.

Mr Oldham asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, in respect of the Sheltered Housing Review carried out by Supporting People. Mr Oldham noted the response as tabled and Councillor Beardsworth in answer to a supplementary question commented that up until the Forum meeting that both she and Mr Oldham had attended she had not been aware of sheltered housing tenants' concerns in respect of the rotating warden system.

Councillor Malpas asked a question of Councillor Crake, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, in respect of the numbers and powers of Neighbourhood Wardens employed by the Council and the numbers of tickets that they had issued by type of offence. Councillor Malpas noted the response that had been tabled.

Mr N Adams asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth, as the relevant Portfolio Holder, in respect of asbestos survey being carried out in the Council's housing. Mr Adams noted the response as tabled and in answer to a supplementary question Councillor Beardsworth commented that there was no risk unless asbestos was disturbed and surveys were being carried out as works to properties were undertaken.

In the absence of Mr Green, the Mayor referred to the question directed to Councillor Church as the relevant Portfolio Holder and the answer tabled in respect of Borough Councillors voting at the WNDP Planning Committee and the costs of hiring sports pitches at upper schools since the introduction of the PFI scheme. The Mayor noted that the response would be sent to Mr Green.

Councillor Davies asked a question of Councillor Woods as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of whether the Council had conducted a soil test on Delapre Park Bund. Councillor Davies noted the response as tabled. Councillor Woods in answer to a supplementary question commented that the responsibility for testing the bund material lay with the Environment Agency who had so far conducted water tests which had proved negative. The Administration's objective was to see the removal of the London Road bund at nil or minimal cost to the Council but the Environment Agency would only use the material when they were ready for it.

Councillor Malpas asked a question of Councillor Mildren in respect of the Council's current financial position. Councillor Mildren commented that the Council had balanced its books as at 31 March 2008 and had increased its balances. In the current financial year there was a forecast overspend as at 31 March 2009 of £47,000. During these turbulent financial times the Council was working to minimise the impact of this. He commented there were pressures on next year's budget which up until September were forecast at a £3m shortfall but since then had been the impact of the credit crunch. A draft budget would be presented to the Council's Cabinet on 22 December. Councillor Malpas noted the response.

7. 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.

Councillor Woods as Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement submitted his portfolio update and noted that the appointments to the Council's Senior Management Structure had now been completed and that work on the second stage to transform the delivery of the Council's services had already started. In answer to questions from Councillors Palethorpe, Larratt and Clarke, Councillor Woods noted that in respect of the increase in Councillors allowances the Administration would need to balance priorities; that in respect of the St Peters Way/Marefair traffic scheme he had written to County Councillor Seery in respect of the problems experienced by taxi drivers, cyclists and the poor quality of finishes but had yet to receive a reply and agreed that a review of this scheme was needed; and noted that he was pleased to accept Councillor Clarke's support in respect of the Council's financial settlement from the Government and noted that the Minister

would only meet local Councils if they had the support of their MPs which he was trying to obtain.

(Councillors Beardsworth, Church, Hill, B Hoare, Hollis, Lane, Glynane, Malpas declared a personal interest in the discussions as members of the County Council insofar as it related to the St Peter's Way/ Marefair traffic improvements.)

Councillor Glynane, Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Safety presented his portfolio update and in answer to a question from Councillor Palethorpe confirmed that there were no plans to cut funding to the Royal and Dergate. In answer to a question from Councillor Clarke in respect of evidence to support a point of view that this year's Christmas decorations had proved more attractive, Councillor Glynane referred to a letter published in the Chronicle and Echo in 1997, when the then Labour Administration cut funding of Christmas decorations. Councillor Clarke pressed Councillor Glynane to answer his question. The Mayor asked Councillor Clarke to allow Councillor Glynane to answer the question.

Councillor P D Varnserry moved and Councillor Hollis seconded under paragraph 10.1 of the Constitution "That Councillor Clarke be required to cease his misconduct immediately".

Upon a request for a recorded vote:-

There voted for the motion: Councillors Beardsworth, Church, Collins, J Conroy, R Conroy, Crake, Glynane, Hawkins, B Hoare, Hollis, I Markham, Matthews, Meredith, Mildren, Perkins, Taylor, P M Varnserry, P D Varnserry, Wilson, Woods and Yates.

There voted against the motion:- Councillors Capstick, Caswell, I Choudury, Clarke, Davies, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, Mason, Palethorpe, Reeve and Scott.

Abstentions: The Mayor and Councillor Hill.

The motion was carried.

Councillor Beardsworth, the Portfolio Holder for Housing presented her portfolio update and welcomed Lesley Wearing, the Director of Housing, to her first meeting of the Council. In answer to a question from Councillor Clarke, Councillor Beardsworth apologised for the delay in writing to him and residents of the Cooper Street flats but indicated that a letter had been drafted and the works had now been completed on time and that consultations with residents on the second stage of the works would be commenced after Christmas. In answer to a question from Councillor Meredith, Councillor Beardsworth accepted his comments in respect of sheltered housing tenants concerns on the rotating warden system and noted that

this was being reviewed with the Sheltered Housing Forum and the situation would be discussed with tenants.

Councillor Crake as the Portfolio Holder for Environment presented her update and in answer to questions from Councillor Larratt noted that it was not possible to accurately indicate whether the Council would meet its budget for recyclable material but given its good quality it was hoped that the budget would be met and that in respect of kerbside glass collections that these would commence after Christmas and information would be advised to residents.

Councillor Church as the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration presented his portfolio update and in answer to a question from Councillor Clarke commented that although there were issues about the proposed works in Gold Street there was also a great deal of support for them and that the works in Marefair had changed the quality of public realm for the better. Wider pavements were needed in Gold Street.

Councillor B Hoare as the Portfolio Holder for Performance presented his portfolio update and noted that the Legal Services Department had received a very positive assessment as part of Lexcel accreditation process the final results of which were awaited. The assessment was a credit to the Legal Team.

Councillor Mildren as the Portfolio Holder for Finance presented his portfolio update and in answer to a question from Councillor Clarke commented that he had asked for information on how the use of lie detectors would work and would write to Councillor Clarke accordingly.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Davies noted that Housing was the most important service that the Council provided. He commented that whilst the PFI expression of interest was to be welcomed would the administration confirm that they would not be able to meet their manifesto promise of delivering the Decent Homes standard by 2010. He acknowledged some of the good work that had been done and welcomed the appointment of Lesley Wearing as Director of Housing. However, he was concerned that there was no information on how long people had to wait for a Disabled Facilities Grant once they had been accepted. He also made reference to the Audit Commission report on the Housing service and referred to the fact that 25% of tenants experienced appointments for repairs not kept and that although the Council's target for satisfaction of repairs work was 97% only 91% satisfaction was being achieved. He also noted that the average time to relet properties was 30 days whilst the target was 23 days and that this represented a loss of rent income. He also noted that whilst the number of Stage 1 and 2 complaints had reduced the number of Stage 3 complaints had increased by 75%. He also referred to the number of tenants with more than 7 weeks of rent arrears as a percentage of the total number of tenants stood at 9.27% whilst the target was 7.5% and that bad debt provision for 2007/08 had risen by £873,000 and benefit overpayment had risen by £1.7m. Councillor Davies also referred to the need for a truly representative tenants group which needed to be democratic and accountable; what action was being taken to achieve this? He asked when the Council was anticipating to receive a two

star Housing service rating and urged the Administration to deal with these issues.

Councillor Woods commented that following the elections in 2007 the Administration had found that the Council's HRA position was not as strong as had been previously thought. A lot of action had been taken in respect of the Housing Options Appraisal, PFI funding and a programme to bring homes up to the Decent Homes Standard although there was a residual number of around 2,000 which the funding for was still being sought. He also noted that the debt collection service needed to be firm but fair and he agreed that a democratic and accountable tenant participation process was needed and this was being examined.

Councillor Davies commented that he had serious concerns about public consultation if some sums of money had been already earmarked for some areas and that funding was needed across all of Housing stock that needed updating not just particular areas.

Councillor Clarke raised a Point of Order in respect of the validity of the motion moved against him by Councillor P. D. Varnsvery under item 7. The Mayor commented that he believed that the motion had been disposed of properly.

9. PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS FOR CAPITAL FINANCE 2008/09 TO 2010/11

Councillor Mildren submitted a report that required the Council to set a range of prudential indicators for 2008/09 and the two succeeding years under the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. Councillor Perkins seconded adoption of the report.

RESOLVED: That approval be given to the revisions to the Council's prudential indicators for 2008/09 as set out below:-

(a) Estimate of capital expenditure

	2008-09
Estimates of Capital Expenditure	Estimate as at 31 August 2008
	£000
General Fund (Non HRA)	10,214
Housing Revenue Account (HRA)	17,455
Total	27,699

(b) Estimate of capital financing requirement (CFR)

Capital Financing Requirement (Closing CFR)				
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11
	31 March 2008 Actual £000	31 March 2009 Actual £000	31 March 2010 Actual £000	31 March 2011 Actual £000

Non-HRA	21,150	25,695	25,075	24,480
HRA	(7,675)	(6,675)	(4,676)	(2,150)
Total	13,475	19,020	20,399	22,330

10. INVESTMENT STRATEGY UPDATE

Councillor Mildren submitted a report to approve the amended Treasury Strategy for 2008-09 to 2010-11. Cabinet had made an amendment to paragraph 3.2.12 of Annex C so that it read £12 million rather than £10 million. Councillor Perkins seconded approval of the report.

RESOLVED: That the amended Treasury Strategy for 2008-09 to 2010-11, and as further amended by Cabinet, be approved incorporating (a) the Capital Financing and Borrowing Strategy for 2008-09 to 2010-11 and (b) the Investment Strategy for 2008-09 to 2010-11.

11. CITIZENS AWARDS SCHEME

Councillor Glynane submitted a report which sought the authorisation of the creation of a Citizens Award Scheme. Councillor Yates seconded the recommendation.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That authorisation be given to the creation of a Citizens Award scheme to be known as the "Northampton Borough Council's Citizens Awards".
- (2) That a Citizens Award Panel be composed of the Mayor (as Chair), Deputy Mayor, the Mayor of the preceeding year, the Leader of the Council (or his nominee), one member from any political group not represented in the foregoing list and the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement.
- (3) That the Citizens Award Panel agree the details of the scheme.

12. NOTICES OF MOTION

(a) Councillor Malpas moved and Councillor Larratt seconded the Notice of Motion printed under 12 of the agenda

"Under the Fixed Penalty Offences Order 1999 (in combination with the provisions of the Road Traffic Act 1988), the wilful riding of a bicycle on a public footpath is an offence that can result in a fine of £30.

As well as the obvious dangers, studies have shown that pavement cycling is intimidating to pedestrians, and that fear of injury can in certain circumstances discourage them from freely using our public spaces.

This Council recognises the efforts of Northamptonshire Police to tackle this problem, and praises the success of Operation Push.

This Council resolves to do everything in its power to help Northamptonshire Police stamp out this illegal and anti-social behaviour and instructs Cabinet to investigate

initiatives that will help educate cyclists and the public, and improve appropriate signage.”

The motion was duly debated and upon a request for a recorded vote:-

There voted for the motion:- Councillors Beardsworth, Capstick, Caswell, I Chaudhury, Church, Clarke, Collins, J Conroy, R Conroy, Crake, Davies, Glynane, Hawkins, Hill, B Hoare, Hollis, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, I Markham, Mason, Matthews, Meredith, Mildren, Palethorpe, Perkins, Reeve, Scott, Simpson, Taylor, P M Varnsberry, Wilson, Woods and Yates.

There voted against the motion: None.

Abstentions: The Mayor.

The motion was carried.

(b) Councillor Palethorpe moved and Councillor Larratt seconded the motion under item 12 of the agenda

“This Council notes the recent announcement of £1.5m loss in parking income, and news that 86 businesses have left the town centre since 2007. This confirms fears that town centre trade is in decline.

In the current financial climate local business ratepayers have every right to expect assistance from the Borough council, and this authority has a responsibility to do everything within its power to help local companies, especially local retailers, by proactively attracting shoppers to the town.

It is inevitable that the current town centre parking price structure is discouraging shoppers from visiting Northampton and has also served to encourage motorists to park in side streets, causing congestion and inconveniencing residents.

This Council calls upon the Cabinet to:-

- (1) Take urgent action to provide advantageous parking charges for shoppers in the run up to Christmas; and
- (2) Initiate a complete review of car parking charges throughout the Borough, with a view to attracting visitors to the town, especially shoppers, and stimulating town centre trade.”

The motion was duly debated, voted upon and lost.

(Councillors Malpas and Larratt declared a personal interest in the motion as concessionary bus pass holders insofar as the discussion touched upon this

matter.)

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

None.

The meeting concluded at 21.40 hours