

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON MONDAY 19 JANUARY 2009 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

COUNCILLORS: Beardsworth, Capstick, Church, Clarke, Collins, J. Conroy, R. Conroy, Crake, De Cruz, Davies, Duncan, Edwards, Flavell, Garlick, Glynane, Hadland, Hawkins, Hill, B. Hoare, Hollis, C. Lill, J. Lill, 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 recent deaths of Mary Finch who had been Mayor in 1980/81 and Reg Harris who had been Mayor in 1982/83. The Council stood in a minutes silence as a mark of respect.

Councillors paid tribute to Mary Finch and Reg Harris.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. MINUTES.

(i) 27 OCTOBER 2008.

Subject to the addition on page 4 to the third paragraph by the inclusion of Councillor Clarke's question in respect of statements made by lorry drivers delivering the bund infill to Delapre and Councillor Woods response, the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 27 October 2008 were signed by the Mayor.

(ii) 8 DECEMBER 2008.

The Mayor noted that the final paragraph of item 8 referred to a point of order raised by Councillor Clarke in relation to the motion moved by Councillor P D Varnsvery during item 7 and there stated that he ruled at the time that the motion had been disposed of correctly. After further consideration he was clear that the motion did not comply with paragraph 10.1 of the Council's Rules of Procedure in that as Mayor he had not notified or named Councillor Clarke prior to the motion being moved.

The Mayor wished to clarify that he did not consider that Councillor Clarke behaved irregularly improperly or offensively and his ruling recorded in the minutes should not be taken as an indication that he had done so.

Councillor Malpas queried why the minutes of the meeting of 8 December did not record a reason as to the deferral of the minutes from 27 October 2008 meeting. He further commented that an answer given to a question from Mr Adams was recorded but not the question. He also noted that a comment he made about the Guildhall car park had not been recorded. Councillor Malpas also stated that the record of

the debate on motion 12A had not been recorded and proposed that due to these omissions that considering the minutes of this meeting should be deferred pending appropriate amendment.

The Mayor withdrew the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 8 December 2008 from consideration.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors Caswell, S Chaudhury, I Choudary, De Cruz, M Hoare, Lane and Larratt,

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor reported that he had attended the funeral of Corporal Mark Birch formerly a Royal Marine on 23 December 2008 and had been impressed by the dignity and pride of Corporal Birch's widow and family. He had on behalf of the Council passed on condolences to the family. He also thanked all those employees from the Parks, Street Cleansing and Cemeteries departments who had assisted with the funeral and to the Guildhall staff for flying the Union flag at half mast.

The Mayor noted that earlier in the evening he had presented the Lexcel award from the Law Society to members of the Legal Services Team and noted that the Council was only the second local authority in the sub-region to achieve this status.

The Mayor stated that he had recently attended a 105th birthday party at St Crispins House and had met a former Mayor Mr Don Wilson who was 97 years old. Mr Wilson had been Mayor in 1965/66.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Beverley Mennell stated that her comments were addressed to the Administration. She commented that when the Council was proposing to spend public money it needed to undertake proper consultation and to keep a proper account of that expenditure. She did not feel that the public were getting that. She commented that at present there was no tenants' voice and that this was causing a problem across the town. In respect of the interest in PFI she commented that it was important for proper consultation to take place.

Mr De Rosier stated that the credit crunch did not appear to have affected the Liberal Democrats with £33,000 spent on the fake Christmas trees and another £30,000 proposed for a Sports Officer. He commented that the Council apparently couldn't find funding to support Sixfields. He stated that there had been no consultation on expenditure but he was pleased to see that the Leader of the Council's car had been removed from the Guildhall car park.

Mr Adams referred to page 6 of the Portfolio Holder for Housing's report and the problems caused by the power cut on New Year's Day to Melbourne House, Abbey House and Devonshire House. He noted that whilst staff were dealing with these problems some other sheltered housing tenants elsewhere in the town were not

visited. He suggested that cuts to the sheltered housing warden service had gone too far so that emergencies such as the one on New Year's Day would not allow the service to be maintained and suggested that the sheltered housing service needed to be got back on the tracks.

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 Adams asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to how many sheltered housing units were occupied and in terms of floating support how many were in each category. Mr Adams noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question as to what protocol existed between the Borough and County Councils to ensure a full package for emergency and non-emergency care is available. Councillor Beardsworth referred to her report under item 7 and also referred to the Sheltered Housing Forum which was the main consultative mechanism for sheltered housing tenants. She stated that the Council worked with the County Council's Supporting People Department and systems for dealing with emergencies were in place. She apologised if any sheltered housing tenants had not received their normal service on New Year's Day due to the emergency.

Councillor Capstick asked a question of Councillor Glynane as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of the options appraisal on the future of Brookside Community Centre. Councillor Capstick noted the response as tabled and Councillor Glynane in answer to a supplementary question noted that Brookside Community Centre had been in a poor state for many years and should be considered as part of the regeneration of the wider area. There was the possibility of a PFI scheme.

Councillor Capstick asked a question of Councillor Glynane as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of the administration's commitment to allocate more resources to Overview and Scrutiny. Councillor Capstick noted the response as tabled. Councillor Capstick noted that the report to Cabinet had identified Overview and Scrutiny as an area of strength and queried whether Councillor Glynane agreed that this would be a risk if support to Overview and Scrutiny was not increased. Councillor Glynane commented that he agreed with the report that Cabinet had considered and noted that the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees had not approached him seeking further support.

Councillor Scott asked a question of Councillor Crake as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of all areas of the town to have at least one dedicated Neighbourhood Warden and the current budget consultation which proposed the reorganisation of them. Councillor Scott noted the response as tabled and in answer to a supplementary question Councillor Crake commented that there were no current plans to make any of the Neighbourhood Wardens compulsorily redundant.

Councillor Malpas asked a question of Councillor Church as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of the adequacy of scrutiny of planning applications. He noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question particularly referring to the scrutiny of Section 106 Agreements. Councillor Church commented that Councillors if they had concerns concerning planning applications or Section 106 Agreements could discuss these with the relevant Planning Officer when an application was due for determination. Councillors could call-in an application into the Planning Committee. He suggested that if Councillor Malpas had ideas that might improve the process he should raise them with the Head of Planning or have them raised with the Constitution Working Party if issues of delegation were concerned.

Councillor Malpas asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of the late notification to residents of the public meeting in Bellinge and what would be done to prevent a similar situation from occurring in the future. Councillor Malpas noted the response as tabled and in answer to a supplementary question Councillor Beardsworth noted that leaflets had been posted to residents on 6 January. Additionally posters had been placed around the estate. Attendance at the meeting on 12 January had been broadly similar to that of the meeting held in November 2008. She noted that 100% survey of residents would be undertaken to ascertain their preferred method of communication. A variety of public events would be held throughout February and March. Regular communication would take place to encourage public involvement.

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 an Audit Commission Inspector had visited the Council on 15 & 16 January 2009 and the resulting Direction of Travel statement was due in March or April. Councillor Woods also stated that the Government Monitoring Board had met on 15 January and the Lead Official had indicated that he hoped that that would be its last meeting although a final decision on this was for the Minister to make. Councillor Woods reported that a meeting had been arranged with the Minister about the Council's Formula Grant allocation which would take place on 27 January 2009 which the town's MPs would attend. In answer to a question from Councillor Hadland, Councillor Woods stated that the public meeting arranged for 29 January 2009 was for Nick Clegg MP to discuss with local people issues of national and international significance. He further stated that a public budget meeting had not been arranged this year as previous experience had shown that e-mail and other written responses to the budget consultation had proved more successful. He further commented in these difficult economic times it was difficult to draw a line in the sand in terms of a stable position. He stated that ideas from any source to help with the Council's financial situation would be welcomed. Councillor Clarke queried how democratic the meeting with the Minister would be in terms of those people who had not voted for candidates from the main political parties. He also queried the representation of Northampton's position by Councillor S Barnes of South Northants District Council

on the Leader's Board for East Midlands. Councillor Woods noted that Councillor Clarke could only claim to represent those people who voted for him in Castle Ward but between himself and the town's MPs all three major parties would be represented at the Minister's meeting. In respect of the Leader's Board for the East Midlands the arrangements were such that without Councillor Barnes nomination the Council would have no representation at all. The arrangements that had been agreed were for one District Council representative per County area. Councillor Woods stated that he would ensure that Northampton's voice would be heard.

In answer to a question from Councillor J Lill, Councillor Woods noted that Councillor Meredith was the Council's representative on the Northampton Town Supporters Trust and had attended matches when he could and had visited other grounds as well.

Councillor Church as the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration submitted his Portfolio update and in response to a comment made by a member of the public earlier in the meeting noted that the Council had never received a request for funding of the Sixfields Stadium but the issues raised with the Council all related to planning. In answer to a question from Councillor Hadland, Councillor Church commented that in respect of the works to the Market Square the approach would be to cause minimum disruption to the Market traders. Comments made by the traders in respect of the wide aisle and demountable stalls had been accepted. The scheme was designed to allow the Market Square to be as flexible a space as possible and the intention was that the scheme would ultimately boost trade and help the Market to thrive. In answer to a question from Councillor Clarke, Councillor Church noted that the traders had approached the Council with a scheme that was similar to that of the Council's but he had never claimed that the traders agreed fully with the Council's version. He had had no recent contact with Mr Wilson from the Traders Association except for the Liaison Committee Meeting the previous week. In answer to a query raised by Councillor Palethorpe, Councillor Church stated that the amendment to the minutes considered by the Cabinet on 22 December 2008 had not been put forward by himself.

Councillor Mildren as the Portfolio Holder for Finance submitted his Portfolio update and in answer to a question from Councillor Clarke noted that the budget consultation document was widely available and that it would not be practical to send it to every resident in full. The consultation document dealt with major items of expenditure but the public could ask for the more detailed document if they so wished.

Councillor Hadland questioned the use of the tick box approach to the consultation document and that it only contained two figures in it. Councillor Mildren indicated that he did not feel that this approach to the consultation exercise was unusual. In answer to a further question from Councillor Hadland, Councillor Mildren indicated that he would write to him with the County District Councils' comparisons of business rates. In response to a question raised by Councillor Palethorpe, Councillor Mildren noted that a series of public meetings on a number of issues were scheduled to be arranged but that this would not include the budget. In response to a question from Councillor Hadland, Councillor Mildren indicated that if

lessons could be learnt from the County Council's approach to their budget consultation exercise then they would be.

Councillor Glynane as the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Safety submitted his Portfolio update and in response to a question from Councillor J Lill noted that car parks' charges for all day on Sundays was 80p and that off street parking charges had not been increased since 1997. The County Council had increased on-street parking. He also noted that there were two free car parks on Sundays along the Wellingborough Road and Bedford Road. These charges had been agreed to support the market and town centre traders.

Councillor Clarke queried whether Councillor Glynane would now answer the question he had posed at the Council meeting on 8 December in terms of providing the evidence to support his statements that the Christmas lights had proved more successful than those of recent years. Councillor Glynane commented that in 2007 there had been no budget provision for Christmas lights and the existing lights were old and not safe. The Council had provided five Christmas trees. However, this year fifteen trees had been provided and in his opinion the public had been impressed by them; positive comments had been received from the Youth Forum. He noted that some members of the public had had their photographs taken by the trees as backdrops. He noted that it was common practice to use existing trees and cover them with lights. He also stated that the public would not want the Council to spend large sums of money on Christmas lights in the current economic climate. In a question from Councillor Reeve, Councillor Glynane commented that the Council would support Northampton Town FC and that sponsors were being looked for to support the Shoe Festival. Councillor Glynane was pleased to accept the thanks expressed by Councillor Hill as trustee of Workbridge in respect of the help offered by staff at Danes Camp Leisure Centre to the workers from Workbridge and stated that he would pass those comments on. Councillor Hadland asked Councillor Glynane to provide the evidence that the previous Administration had cancelled the Christmas lights. He also enquired what contribution the Portfolio Holder had made to the improvements he had alluded to in Leisure Services. Councillor Glynane repeated that for Christmas 2007 there had been no budget line for Christmas lights and that he had already spoken to the appropriate Manager and asked for congratulations to be passed on the staff at the Leisure Centres.

(NB Councillor Clarke declared a personal interest in Councillor Glynane's Portfolio Holder report in so far as the discussion referred to Northampton Town Football Club of which he was an employee).

Councillor Clarke moved and Councillor Woods seconded "That the Council's Procedural Rules be suspended to allow full questioning of Portfolio Holders".

Upon a vote the motion was carried.

Councillor Beardsworth as the Portfolio Holder for Housing submitted her report and congratulated the Private Sector Housing Solutions Team for the conference they had arranged with other agencies in order to discuss disability grant work. She also commented upon the success of the Temporary Housing Team in reducing the

numbers of people requiring their services and referred to the reduction in Council house rent to £1.46m by using a firm but fair approach. In answer to a question from Councillor Palethorpe, Councillor Beardsworth agreed that expectations needed to be managed in respect of the PFI interest and that a long consultation period would be involved. Councillor Clarke referred to the sheltered housing wardens service and expressed his thanks to the staff for their dealing with the New Year's Day incident. He further commented that the incident had shown up the weaknesses in the service and he noted that elderly neighbours had had to assist each other and that there had been 20-30 minute response times from Call Care. He also noted that wardens wasted a great deal of time travelling between schemes. He requested that there should be a review and rethink of the service to vulnerable people. Councillor Beardsworth stated that a review was underway and that anyone who had experienced a fall should contact the ambulance service direct, wardens, even if present, were not able to help in those circumstances. If sheltered housing tenants had issues then they should contribute them to the review.

Councillor Crake as the Portfolio Holder for Environment submitted her Portfolio update. Councillor Malpas displayed some photographs showing uncollected trade waste in the Wellingborough Road and querying what action was being undertaken to deal with it. He also referred to the horse chestnut trees in Abington Park that were suffering from bleeding canker and asked which trees would be removed and what species would replace them. Councillor Crake commented that if the uncollected trade waste represented a health and safety issue then this should be referred to the Health and Safety Team. If nothing subsequently happened she would be happy to take the issue on. Generally speaking Street Cleansing were working with the public to reduce side waste issues and in appropriate cases people would be prosecuted. Proof was needed to prove dumping of rubbish. In respect of Abington Park, Councillor Crake commented that notices had been placed on those trees that would be removed. Councillor Malpas then queried what action was being taken against businesses who might be leaving out side waste. Councillor Beardsworth commented that Councillors should refer these matters to the Councillor Contact Centre and that the Street Cleansing Team worked hard to keep Northampton clean; it was the public that caused the problem. Councillor Flavell asked Councillor Crake if she would attend a site visit along the Wellingborough and Kettering Road to examine the issues that had been raised by Councillor Malpas. Councillor Crake agreed to this.

Councillor B Hoare as the Portfolio Holder for Performance submitted his Portfolio Holder report and welcomed the Lexcel award achieved by the Legal Services Team. Councillor Clarke commented that he generally approached Council officers directly for answers to queries and noted the 60% increase in Freedom of Information requests; Councillor B Hoare commented that the figures were what they were and that the Contact Centre was available for a purpose i.e. to handle comments, thanks and complaints and the intelligence gained from that would help to improve the Council's services. Councillor Hadland queried whether the increase in the use of Freedom of Information mechanism actually represented a vote of no confidence in the other ways information could be supplied. Councillor B Hoare noted that use of Freedom of Information was probably a tactic. Councillor Simpson

queried how much each Freedom of Information request cost and noted that only 7% of responses were challenged and that no references had been made to the Information Commissioner. Councillor B Hoare commented that he was not aware of the cost per Freedom of Information request but that such requests were handled within the spirit of the Act. Councillor Palethorpe queried whether or not Councillor B Hoare was now saying in respect of use of the contact centre was in fact contrary to a previous report he had made. Councillor B Hoare was pleased to accept Councillor Woods congratulations on the good service provided by the Councillor Contact Centre.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Hadland stated that he was concerned that the Council was ignoring or appearing to ignore various facets of the Northampton community whilst they tried to deal with probably the greatest challenge in living memory. He noted that the Credit Crunch affected everyone but that some people were more insulated from it than others. Local Government would not go bankrupt. The Council should acknowledge this position and work to help vulnerable individuals and groups. The Council should be lobbying Government to be sympathetic towards Local Government and the role it could play and that the Council should be looking to reduce the cost of the organisation. It was clear that Local Government would not receive more funding from Government and that people would not be able to pay above inflation increases in Council Tax and the Council needed to be a smaller organisation; the country as a whole needed to be able to afford Local Government.

Councillor Perkins commented that the current situation had been brought about by greed and that Thatcherite capitalism was now dead. The situation had been exacerbated by the Government continuing its predecessor's policies. The Council's £7m funding gap was a direct result of Government policy. The Administration would help the people of Northampton and the Council would be better organised and would focus on its statutory services. Service delivery would be examined and regeneration encouraged. Increased resources would be given, benefits and help would be given to businesses and the public.

Councillor Hadland commented that the Council was where it was and had to slim down and deal with real debts and real problems. The Council needed to demonstrate that it understood the problem and could deal with it. He was not convinced that there was evidence of this. He noted that in the Portfolio Holder report considered earlier in the meeting one line was devoted to the budget and nothing else related to the economic situation. He commented that the Council should be lobbying Government to reverse the empty business property rate charges and also reduce the amount of regulation that encumbered Local Government.

9. COUNCIL TAX BASE 2009 - 2010

Councillor Mildren submitted a report that set out the calculation of the Council's Tax Base for 2009/10. Councillor Perkins seconded the adoption of the report.

RESOLVED: (1) That the recommendation set out below as agreed by Cabinet on 22 December 2008 be agreed.

(2) That approval be given to the recommended change to the

level of reduction of discount to be applied on Class C Long Term Empty Homes.

- (3) That the tax base for 2009/10 at £66,166 Band D equivalent properties and associated parish tax bases within this be approved.

Parish	2009/10	2008/09
Billing	£2,568.00	£2,583.00
Collingtree	£514.00	£515.00
Duston	£5,172.00	£5,176.00
Great Houghton	£286.00	£285.00
Hardingstone	£743.00	£752.00
Upton	£1,302.00	£1,035.00
Wootton and East Hunsbury	£6,331.00	£6,340.00
Northampton Unparished	£49,250.00	£48,757.00
Total Tax Base	£66,166.00	£65,443.00

10. NOTICE OF MOTION

Councillor Hadland proposed and Councillor Palethorpe seconded that;
 “This Council congratulates Northamptonian Matt Smith on being chosen to be the next Doctor Who and applauds the effect that such an achievement has in serving as a positive example to Northampton’s young people”.

The Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote the motion was carried.

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

None.

The meeting concluded at 20.50 hours