

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON MONDAY 2 MARCH 2009 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

COUNCILLORS: Beardsworth, Capstick, Caswell, S. Chaudhury, I. Choudary, Church, Clarke, Collins, J. Conroy, R. Conroy, Crake, De Cruz, Davies, Edwards, Flavell, Glynane, Golby, Hadland, Hawkins, Hill, B. Hoare, M. Hoare, Hollis, Lane, Larratt, C. Lill, J. Lill, I. Markham, Mason, Matthews, Meredith, Mildren, Palethorpe, Perkins, Reeve, Scott, Simpson, Taylor, P.D. Varnsberry, P.M. Varnsberry, Wilson, Woods and Yates.

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors Duncan, Garlick and Malpas.

3. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor reported that Councillor Duncan had recently returned home following a hospital operation and on behalf of the Council expressed his best wishes for her recovery.

The Mayor on behalf of the Council expressed his congratulations to Councillor S Chaudhury on the recent birth of his son, Adam.

The Mayor introduced Petty Officer Catherine Goldfinch to the Council who had taken over the role of Mayor's Cadet.

4. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Hazelgrove handed a petition to the Mayor that had been signed by over 800 people and which stated, "All people signing this petition believe that Northampton Balloon Festival should continue. It is a treasured event on the Northampton calendar and it should remain. Started in 1990, thousands of people have experienced this exciting event. Great for families and friends. We do not want it to go". Mr Hazelgrove commented that the public were disappointed in the Council's decision to end the Balloon Festival, which had attracted people from all over the country. He commented that a well run event should have no cost to the tax payer and that the festival put Northampton on the map for the right reasons. He also commented that in the current economic conditions an event such as the Balloon

Festival was very important. The petition stood referred to Cabinet.

Mr Adams with reference to the Portfolio Holder for Housing's presentation queried the level of staffing within the Council's sheltered housing service and in reference to the report on the evaluation of Overview & Scrutiny expressed disappointment that voting in the recent call-in had appeared to be on party political lines rather than based on the facts presented.

5. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that ten 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 in respect of the Local Government Association's call for a root and branch review of care for the elderly in response to Help the Aged's report "Nobody is Listening". Mr Adams noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question as to an apparent postcode lottery of support provided by local authorities. Councillor Beardsworth replied indicating that she expected all wardens to share the same level of dedication whatever the terms of the provision and that the Council was listening to the public and agencies. Support was intended to be as flexible as possible and a meeting of the Forum held earlier in the day had discussed these issues and that a pilot scheme was underway.

Mr Adams asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to the staffing level for the sheltered housing schemes and what allowance had been made for annual leave and sickness. Mr Adams noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question in respect of sickness amongst the Housing Wardens. Councillor Beardsworth indicated that she had no further information available other than that which had been tabled.

Councillor Clarke asked a question of Councillor Woods as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of an update on the current timescale for the removal of both bunds at Delapre Abbey. Councillor Clarke noted the response as tabled and expressed disappointment that it was a repeat of the responses given to Councillors Davies and Reeve in December and May 2008 respectively. He asked a supplementary question as to what action the Council was taking to ensure that those responsible removed the material. Councillor Woods commented that responsibility for this lay with the Environment Agency and the conclusion of their investigation was awaited.

Councillor Clarke asked a question of Councillor Glynane as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to the views of the Balloon Festival Working Party on the losses in 2008 and the decision to cancel the Balloon Festival this year. Councillor Clarke noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question as to whether Councillor Glynane would apologise in the same way that colleagues in Eastbourne had done after introducing an admission charge for their Air Festival, which had

subsequently had to be rescinded. Councillor Glynane stated that he had nothing to apologise for.

Councillor Clarke asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to the details and timetable for the proposed review of the Sheltered Housing Warden Scheme. Councillor Clarke noted the response as tabled and asked for further details of the timetable. Councillor Beardsworth indicated that the PCT and Social Services would be involved.

Councillor Clarke asked a question of Councillor Beardsworth as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to when work towards the Decent Homes Standard would be implemented within Castle Ward. Councillor Clarke noted the response as tabled and asked a supplementary question in respect of a firm timetable for implementation of the Decent Homes Standard. Councillor Beardsworth commented that the programme of work to make the Decent Homes Standard across the Borough was being carried out on the basis of need.

Councillor Clarke asked a question of Councillor Church as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to the initial findings from the Council's consultation on the future of the Market Square. Councillor Clarke noted the response as tabled and queried whether the petition gathered by the Market Traders over 10,000 signatures would be given suitable weight. Councillor Church commented that it would be inappropriate to give a partial response to the consultation and noted that the petitioners and the Council wanted the same thing which was to save the Market.

Councillor Clarke asked a question of Councillor Church as the relevant Portfolio Holder as to an update of negotiations with Legal and General and noted the response as tabled. Councillor Clarke asked a supplementary question as to when negotiations with Legal and General were likely to be concluded and would an agreement be open to inspection by all Councillors. Councillor Church commented that a report would go to Cabinet and would include the details of any agreement reached and that Councillor Clarke could attend that meeting and address it.

Councillor Palethorpe asked a question of Councillor B Hoare as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of projected staff savings resulting from the Administration's budget proposals and noted the response as tabled.

Councillor Palethorpe asked Councillor Glynane a question as the relevant Portfolio Holder in respect of CEFAP and noted the response as tabled.

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.

Councillor Woods as Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Partnerships and Improvement submitted his portfolio update. In answer to a question from Councillor Hadland, Councillor Woods noted that the intent to accelerate the transformation programme through seeking support from the DCLG for strategic

business reviews of services was so that the Council could get the benefit from the results as soon as possible which would also help the Council to get through the current economic situation. In answer to a question from Councillor Clarke, Councillor Woods noted that the three Group Leaders had given their support to the work of the Standards Committee to the independent Chair of that Committee.

Councillor Church as the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration submitted his portfolio update and in answer to a question from Councillor P D Varnsverry indicated that he would draft a letter to the appropriate Ministers for signature by the three Group Leaders in respect of the Government under funding of the concessionary bus fare scheme and that such a letter would be copied to the town's MPs for them to raise the issue as appropriate in the House of Commons. In response to a comment from Councillor Clarke, Councillor Church noted that transport hubs like Northampton tended to lose out to rural districts in the way funding for the concessionary bus fare scheme was applied.

Councillor Glynane as the Portfolio Holder of Community Engagement and Safety submitted his portfolio update and made reference to the recent Anne Frank exhibition noting that some 3,700 people had attended and also made reference to the Anne Frank themed football match at Sixfields that had been supported by over 4,000 people. Councillor Glynane congratulated all those who had been involved with the Anne Frank exhibition. Councillor Glynane in response to a comment made by Councillor Collins welcomed the Government's swimming initiative and expressed disappointment that South Northants and East Northants District Councils had decided not to participate in the scheme. In response to a question from Councillor J Lill in respect of the location of 21 CCTV cameras in Brackmills, Councillor Glynane commented that he was not aware of the proposed locations for them.

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

Councillor Beardsworth as the Portfolio Holder for Housing submitted her report and in answer to a question from Councillor Hadland confirmed that she expected Ward Councillors to be consulted about the Housing PFI Initiative. She noted a further comment from Councillor Hadland that the Ward Councillors for Bellinge had not been informed of a meeting which clashed with this Council meeting. In response to a question from Councillor P D Varnsverry, Councillor Beardsworth commented that tenants would be consulted about the proposed tenants' panel. Councillor Clarke queried Councillor Beardsworth's comments in respect of the tenants' panel appeared to be an extension of call-in and queried the appropriateness of this being discussed at a meeting of Council. Councillor Beardsworth commented that although the call-in had not been upheld, lessons could still be learnt from it.

Councillor Crake as the Portfolio Holder for Environment submitted her report. Councillor Flavell queried the issue of FPNs for flytipping insofar as the incident needed to be witnessed. Councillor Crake noted that at present the Neighbourhood Wardens were not issuing FPNs but they would do so in the future with appropriate

evidence. In answer to a question from Councillor Hadland, Councillor Crake clarified that the proposed division of regulatory services would be the Central Area as described in her report and then the remaining Council Wards split into three areas. Councillor Clarke in referring to the statement about gritting Abington Street and major bus stops on consecutive days during the recent cold snap commented that there had been occasions when gritting had not taken place and there had been reported incidents of people suffering injuries. Councillor Crake noted that gritting had been done on a particular Thursday and Friday but not on the Saturday when supplies of grit had run out. In answer to a question from Councillor J Lill, Councillor Crake commented that a report to Cabinet on glass recycling would now be made in April rather than the reported 18 March with the intention that the scheme would be implemented in the summer.

Councillor B Hoare as the Portfolio Holder for Performance submitted his report and in answer to a question from Councillor Wilson noted that Payzones were available in around 70 shops and an additional number of post offices and that footfall to these premises would increase. In answer to a question from Councillor Mason, Councillor B Hoare noted that currently at the district offices and One Stop Shop floorwalkers were advising the public of the changes to the payment methods to the Council and that in future correspondence would include bar codes to aid payments.

Councillor Mildren as the Portfolio Holder for Finance submitted his report and in answer to a question from Councillor Davies noted that Council Tax were working with the CAB and other agencies to help people solve their debt problems. He noted that just under 98% of Council Tax due had been collected for the current financial year. In answer to a question from Councillor P D Varnsberry, Councillor Mildren commented that no funds had been received from the Friends of Delapre Abbey as a result of events that they had held. He noted that some works to the greenhouses had been undertaken by the Friends and that any events that they wanted to hold were subject to agreement with the Council, some of which had been modified in discussion. In response to a comment made by Councillor J Lill it was noted that the local show had been helped by the provision of tenting. In response to a question raised by Councillor Larratt, Councillor Mildren commented that he was not aware in detail of the charges made by the Council to the Friends of Delapre Abbey but he was aware that charges were made to cover the Council's costs in processing requests to hold events. Councillor Clarke queried whether this represented another policy shift insofar as expecting payments from a charity. Councillor Mildren indicated that this did not imply a change in policy but that any organisation approaching the Council to use its facilities were charged to cover some of the costs of the Council processing those requests.

7. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Clarke commented that sometimes the Council received a bad press, often in respect of events outside of its control, on other occasions the Council could be justly blamed, for example, over the Balloon Festival and sometimes it scored "own goals". However, this didn't explain the sense of disengagement of the public from political processes. For example, the fact that the Council had been offered £1m to improve the Market Square should have been a cause for celebration.

However, the Council had secretly engaged consultants who came up with a plan that was decided upon by Cabinet and then consulted upon. It was not surprising that people reacted adversely to it. A similar situation applied to the Robinson House issue. Councillor Clarke commented that he believed the Administration was as much a victim as a sinner and that the Local Government Act 2000 had failed the public and set Councillor against Councillor in some circumstances. He believed that governance should be from the bottom up and that the legislation and the way it had been implemented had got this the wrong way round.

Councillor Collins responded by indicating that Councillor Clarke as an MP at the time had voted for the Local Government Act 2000 and had voted against a Lords amendment that warned against the legislation being centralising and forcing structures that might not suit local needs and could encourage secretivity. He commented that the former Committee system was remembered with a rose tinted view however, it had not led to clear decision making processes and that Scrutiny performed better than the old committees. There had been no call-in facility or ability to change decisions.

Councillor Clarke commented that with hindsight his original view had been mistaken as he had originally believed that the legislation could work but that it depended on how it was implemented. He believed that the original intent had been corrupted and that it had become secretive and turned the general public off. He commented that the system set Councillors against each other and that a review of it was needed so that decisions were not imposed on either Councillors or the public.

8. EVALUATION OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The Mayor proposed that Council procedural rules be waived so that the mover of the report could have ten minutes to speak and other speakers five minutes. Upon a vote this was agreed.

Councillor Simpson submitted a report that set out the findings from the self-evaluation framework which was intended to be the basis for developing an Overview & Scrutiny Improvement Plan. He noted that the evaluation had been carried out by using the Centre for Public Scrutiny Guidance and criteria by issuing questionnaires to all Councillors, the undertaking of two peer group reviews plus a desktop study involving three other Councils. Seventeen achievements had been noted and there sixteen challenges which needed to be addressed. Councillor Simpson reported that there would be a workshop on 7 May to which all Councillors were invited that would address these challenges. Councillor J Conroy seconded adoption of the report.

The report was debated, the principal points being:-

- Ensuring that Overview & Scrutiny recommendations were implemented by the organisation
- That there should be pre-decision Scrutiny based on the Forward Plan

- Greater public involvement
- Holding Cabinet to account
- The adequacy of resources
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RESOLVED: That the report be received and noted.

9. BOROUGHWIDE DESIGNATED PUBLIC PLACES ORDER - CONSUMPTION OF ALCOHOL

Councillor Glynane submitted a report that sought the adoption of a Designated Public Place Order for the Borough of Northampton and elaborated thereon. Councillor Taylor seconded adoption of the report.

RESOLVED: That a Designated Public Place Order (DPPO) for the Borough of Northampton be adopted and that the Council exercise its powers under Section 13 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001.

NB Councillor Clarke declared a personal interest insofar as the Appendix referred to Sixfields Stadium and Northampton Town Football Club of which he was an employee.

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

None.

The meeting concluded at 20.57 hours