

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 14 May 2018 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

PRESENT: HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR Councillor G Eales (in the Chair).

COUNCILLORS: Malpas, Ansell, Ashraf, Aziz, Beardsworth, Birch, Choudary, Chunga, Culbard, Davenport, Duffy, G Eales, T Eales, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Graystone, Hadland, Hallam, Haque, Hibbert, J Hill, Joyce, Kilbride, King, Lane, Larratt, B Markham, M Markham, Marriott, McCutcheon, Meredith, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel, Russell, Sargeant, Kilby-Shaw, Smith, Stone and Walker

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sargeant declared a personal non pecuniary interest in Item 4 – as a Freeman of Northampton.

2. APOLOGIES.

Apologies were received from Councillors Bottwood, Cali and Caswell.

3. TO GIVE DIRECTIONS ON PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS RELATING ONLY TO THE MOTION ON THE AGENDA

Mr Steve Miller spoke as resident of Kingsthorpe and a member of the Green Party and commented that it was ludicrous that whilst the Borough Council were responsible for Air Quality, the County Council were liable for Highways which he considered should be delivered under one umbrella. He commented that the consultation would be the last opportunity for Northampton to stand up for itself and proposed the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system be piloted to enhance the democratic process.

Mr Scott Mabbutt spoke as a resident of St Crispin's and a member of the Green Party and commented that he broadly supported the motion and noted the disparity between the urban population of Northampton and those in more rural areas and stated that a one size fits all approach was not viable. He emphasised the need for robust public engagement and argued that STV would provide a more proportional voting system.

Father Oliver Coss (All Saints Church, Northampton) explained that he had some sympathy with the notion of having 2 unitary Councils, proposed by Government, and urged engagement with neighbouring authorities to ensure a joined up Northamptonshire.

Mr Martin Sawyer stated that he considered the motion to be one of the most important decisions that the Council would have to make as it would ultimately decide

the shape and future of the Town and surrounding areas. He commented that it should have cross party support and any progress or options considered should have the full support of the residents. He urged the Council to fight for a stronger Northampton to ensure that it would be fair to all.

Alderman John Dickie questioned why the Administration had originally supported and signed the motion and then conducted a political U-turn and were proposing to vote against it. He asked whether this was due to pressures from Government and urged any proposal to government be supported by residents and urged more emphasis on localism.

Mr Brian Hoare commented that the criteria set by the Government was not credible and ignored what it was intended to achieve. He stated that the Council needed to listen to the views and concerns of the residents and not the requests of the Government; this would be a decision that would affect the residents of the Town and it was necessary to do what was right by them.

Mr Arthur Newbury commented that he considered it to be necessary for the Borough Boundaries to be extended and stated that the Town was a strong place and that there was no desire for the Town to be ruled from a village 30 miles away. He reported that Northamptonians needed to vote on this and that there was a need for engagement with the public as he believed Northampton needed to be independent from the two other areas.

Ms Morcea Walker commented that she did not envy the Council with having to make a decision on the motion as it would have a significant impact on the future of Northampton. She reported that the Government proposal would provide an opportunity for change and requested that whatever decision was reached, it be fully supported and commented that the future of Northamptonshire was currently in the hands of the Borough.

Mr Thomas Appleyard referred to the criteria outlined in the Government proposal and questioned how the population boundary figure of 300,000 was arbitrary and noted that having fewer Councillors, who would potentially be further removed from their local areas would have a detrimental impact of the residents they represented. He urged the Council to give the public satisfactory information prior to any consultation and that the consultation should not be carried out exclusively online as this would restrict a number of residents from participating in the exercise.

Ms Sally Keeble commented that she had represented Northampton as an MP for 13 years and stated that the County Council had been severely impacted on by a lack of Government funds and very poor financial management and stated that the people of Northampton had a right to self-determination. She stated the Government should drop the County Council debt, so that it would not have to be incorporated into Unitary budgets and commented that the public consultation should be for the residents of Northampton, and not a decision of Town Hall, County Hall or Whitehall.

Mr Daniel Soan stated that the Council should not right-off a proposed West Northamptonshire Unitary authority; the potential to have the combined incomes of

the 3 current authorities would be of benefit to residents and potentially provide enhanced value for money. He explained that the structure of local government would not detract from the heritage or history of Northampton and a West Northamptonshire unitary authority could ensure the excellent provision of a public services.

4. MOTION FOR EXAMINATION

Councillor Stone proposed the motion as set out on the agenda and reported that the Government wanted to abolish the County and Borough Council and introduce 2 unitary authorities; one option proposed being the West Northamptonshire Council which would incorporate Northampton. She questioned whether it would be a sustainable Council and suggested it would not succeed and there were few cultural or shared values and commented that the people of Northampton were lacking in clear information and there had been no mandate from the Administration. She reported that the Government was starving the County of funds and this would impact on the most vulnerable residents.

Councillor Beardsworth seconded the motion and noted that there was a need to listen and represent people and emphasised the need for consultation on the proposals. She commented that the Government should not be urging Civil Servants to decide the future of Northampton but the people of the Town. She noted the lack of local MPs present at the meeting and commented that the people of Northampton deserve to have a choice and a voice as to the future of their Council.

It was agreed that there be a suspension of standing orders under Rule 25 of the Constitution that limited the length of each speaker. Members were given a maximum of five minutes each to address Council.

Councillor Birch commented that if Northampton joined South Northants and Daventry, Northampton would comprise of 60% of the population and currently had the biggest income and expenditure and stated that the needs of the aforementioned Councils in rural areas would differ greatly from those in an urban area, such as Northampton.

Councillor Goby commented that there was a need to shape and share a vision for the future of Northampton. He reported that Adult Social Care and Social Services would be massive issues for the new unitary Councils and noted the need to protect and preserve the heritage and history of Northampton. He stated that there was a need for joined up working with other authorities and commented that the proposals should be perceived as an opportunity for change and the necessity to look outwards.

Councillor Haque commented that the general consensus in the chamber was pride and value of the Town and stated by voting against the motion, the Administration would be letting people down.

Councillor B Markham stated that he was disappointed with the motion but that there was a real need to make a case for Northampton based on evidence. He questioned what the roles of the Parish Councils would be and whether there would eventually be a Northampton Town Council.

Councillor Hill reported that Unitary Councils was an emotive issue with cross boundary implications and noted that any proposal submitted would have to have county support but emphasised the need to retain a proportionate number of Councillors to represent the majority of residents and therefore be the most dominant of Councils.

Councillor T Eales questioned why there had been a sudden U-turn by the Administration and asked if they had been privy to information that had not been shared.

Councillor Hadland reported that everyone supported the concept of a unitary authority but that there continued to be disputes about the size and proportional representation of them.

Councillor McCutcheon stated that there was a need for boundaries to be re-drawn and for there to be more control over the boundary periphery and argued that people of Northampton would want a council, with sovereignty for its people.

Councillor Eldred urged Members to consider the financial implications of the various proposals and explained that 40% of adult and social care costs were in Northampton. He reported that he would theoretically support a Unitary Northampton but the increase in Council Tax to cover the costs would equate to each household paying an extra £750 per annum.

Councillor Duffy stated that the people of Northampton were disappointed with the shoddy service that had been provided by the Administration over the past few years and commented that whilst there were many heritage assets, the biggest asset of Northampton were its residents.

Councillor Hibbert noted that he was pro-unitary and there was a need for a sustainable future of the Council and should be fiscally responsible.

Councillor Joyce urged members to consider the socio- economic affects that had impacted on the Council with an increase in population of over a third since 1992 and noted the need for further investment in affordable housing.

Councillor Sargeant spoke as a Freeman of the Council and commented that the consensus of the Freeman was to support the motion. As a Councillor, he did not agree with their notion and therefore, as this juncture of the meeting, Councillor Sargeant withdrew from the meeting.

Councillor Russell stated that the MPs representing Northampton had failed in their duties to listen to the residents and they had failed to protect the people of Northampton. She reported that Labour would canvas and show residents that their views and opinions mattered and that they were being listened to.

Councillor Meredith explained that he had no confidence on the Conservative Administration and did not believe that they were doing what was best for the Town

and spoke of the problems experienced at the County Council with many of the schools funded through PFIs and believed that Daventry would be the dominant Council.

Councillor Smith noted that as a member of the Planning Committee, all the political parties could see the implications of decision making on residents. She commented that the Northampton Conservative Councillors and the MPs were not prepared to fight to the best outcome for the residents of the Town.

Councillor Oldham commented that the Council were faced with the guidelines and that there was a need for the Council to engage to ensure that the needs and wishes of the residents were heard; to go against the Government proposals would potentially close the door to the Council and considered it better to be looking in, than out.

Councillor Larratt explained that his heart wanted to support a Northampton Unitary Council but that the reality was very different. He reported that they had made requests four times to extend the boundaries and they had all been turned down and therefore there was a need for the Council to participate and agree with other neighbouring authorities to a submission and to ensure that Northampton was at the forefront of discussions and concurred that there was a need for Northampton to be a majority on any future Council to ensure fair representation of residents.

Councillor Nunn explained that it was a very fast and fluid topic hence the reason for them no longer agreeing to the motion and emphasised the need for Northampton to retain its local sovereignty. He proposed a cross party group with Councillors who would feed into the process through briefing sessions and update and involve all political groups to ensure inclusion and representation.

Councillor Marriott questioned whether the Conservatives felt betrayed and let down by their own Government who he believed were dictating the terms and further questioned whether there had been meetings with the MPs and Senior Cabinet Members as they appeared to have changed their voting position.

Councillor Stone summarised her right of reply and noted that she believed that the Government had starved the County Council of funding and taken no responsibility for the subsequent debt. She noted her concerns that there was a potential for asset-stripping and explained the Borough Council were still unable to sign off their budget, were still trying to recover debt from the loan to the football club and had sold off Sekhemka. She stated that the Administration had joined the Government in the betrayal of local residents.

The Mayor stated that a requisition for an Extraordinary Council meeting had been made in accordance with the Local Government Act and he had called this meeting in good faith. He explained that it was somewhat irregular for Councillors to call a meeting, sign up to a motion in support and then vote against it. This could be regarded as waste of tax payers' time and money.

He also reported that he considered there to be a process and constitutional issue.

The Mayor commented that the motion was a re-affirmation of the existing motion passed in January 2017 and to vote against it would not in itself create a new or change in council policy. Meaning that between now and 4th June 2018 there could be no mandate for this council to work outside the motion unanimously passed in January 2017 and policy position to seek a Unitary Northampton Council.

Upon a requisition for a recorded vote, there voted for the motion:

Councillors G Eales, Ashraf, Beardsworth, Birch, Choudary, Chunga, Culbard, Davenport, Duffy, T Eales, Haque, Joyce, Marriott, McCutcheon, Meredith, Russell, Smith and Stone.

There voted against the motion:

Councillors Ansell, Aziz, Eldred, Flavell, Golby, Graystone, Hadland, Hallam, Hibbert, Hill, Kilbride, Kilby-Shaw, King, Lane, Larratt, Malpas, M Markham, Nunn, Oldham, Parekh, Patel and Walker.

The motion was lost.

The meeting concluded at 8.32pm