

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 24 April 2017 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Caswell declared a personal non pecuniary interest in Motion i) by virtue of being the Chair of Duston Parish Council.

2. MINUTES.

The minutes of the Council meetings held on the 13th March and the 3rd April 2017 were agreed and signed by the Mayor.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Flavell and Marriott.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Mayor announced that as the General Election had been announced for the 8th June, it would be proposed at the Annual Council meeting that the Council meeting scheduled for the 8th June would be postponed until the 19th June 2017.

The Mayor thanked Councillors who had attended Charity Curry Night at the Saffron on the 10th April 2017 and noted that raised almost £900 almost £900 had been raised for Guide Dogs.

The Mayor announced that he and the Mayoress had supported a number of events for St David's Week of Action which commenced on the 1st April. Amongst the activities were opportunities for budding young detectives to help Northamptonshire Police solve a case as part of a crime mystery workshop and the RSPCA were also present, offering reduced-price dog microchipping.

The Mayor congratulated his chaplain, Mr Haydon Spenceley Assistant Curate, Northampton Emmanuel, as he has was to be appointed Team Rector and would be licensed by Bishop John on 8th May 2017.

Finally the Mayor thanked all of those who have supported him over his year in

Mayoralty. He informed the Council that he would be attending his 500th engagement as Mayor and had so far raised £21,000 for Guide Dogs Northampton.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Robert Jones addressed Council and commented that he had a number of concerns about the current levels of pollution that he believed had increased since the erection of the Northgate Bus Station.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Mayor advised that 6 questions had been received from Councillors and that the answers had been tabled in accordance with the Constitution.

Questions and answers were given as tabled (included in an update agenda on the Council's website) unless where stated, supplementary questions were asked as detailed below.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 5, Councillor Hadland stated that he did not have figures about the length businesses had lasted or job turnover but noted that there were 13 new businesses with 300 new jobs having been created.

In response to a supplementary question asked relating to question 6, Councillor Hadland stated that the food outlets in the town centre would allow the Council to clawback some capital as opposed to empty units.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

Councillor Nunn, the Leader of the Council, submitted a report and elaborated thereon. He noted that the contract for the work in commissioning the assessment for a possible future Unitary Council model for Northamptonshire, had been awarded to Deloitte. He further reported that the administration of relieving traffic flow in the Town Centre, specifically the Drapery had led to a number of improvements being made with the County Council. The Leader informed Council that a Governance and Risk Manager had been employed on an interim basis as part of the Governance improvements. He further reported that he had recently visited the Nightshelter and spoke of the inspirational place it had become and encouraged other Members to visit.

In response to questions asked, the Leader confirmed that a briefing session would be organised for cross party updates on Unitary discussions. He further explained that with regards to new contracts, there was limited consideration that could be given to the potential impact of Unitary status as there were no definitive timescales. Responding to further questions, Councillor Nunn explained that he had attended a breakfast meeting with BID members, including shop owners on the Drapery, and that the administration continued to work with the County Council to resolve traffic issues and that Councillors should await the outcome of the Scrutiny Panel in their examination of the Emission Strategy. In response to a further question, Councillor Nunn explained that work with Network Rail was still ongoing and that progress of the St James Mill Link would be reported when significant advancement had been made.

Councillor Larratt submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. He thanked Councillor Duffy for her work with Thorplands Club 81. He noted that the next Markets Advisory Group meeting would be held in June 2017. In response to questions asked, Councillor Larratt explained that the majority of the light bulbs in the Town were owned by the County Council and he was not aware of any substandard Borough owned lights but any that were reported he would look into. Responding to a further question, Councillor Larratt stated that although a meeting would be set up with several agencies to discuss Match Day Parking, a specific date had yet to be set.

Councillor Eldred submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated further, noting that the Revenue and Benefits Service at Northampton were in the process of procuring new technology which would speed up the processing of new claims. In response to questions asked, Councillor Eldred explained that it was anticipated that the final accounts would be signed off as all recommendations that had been made, had been considered and that they have achieved value for money.

Councillor Hadland submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. In response to questions asked, he explained that the Queen Eleanor's Cross was a County Council responsibility but that some repairs and works had been undertaken by the Borough Council. Responding to further questions, he informed Council the Delapre Abbey had received many reviews on 'Trip Advisor' and had included extremely positive feedback which he considered an endorsement of the hard work that had gone into the project.

Councillor Hibbert submitted his Cabinet Member report and elaborated thereon. He explained that in the first two months of the opening of the Nightshelter, 61 referrals had been made and emergency shelter had been provided for 50 homeless men and that assistance had been given to 22 people, moving into suitable accommodation. He further reported that a Private Sector Housing Civil Penalties Policy would be submitted to Cabinet for consideration at a meeting to be held in July 2017. In response to questions asked, Councillor Hibbert informed Council that there had been 2 successful prosecutions of rogue landlords and another 5 that were proceeding. It was also noted that the delay to the opening of the Social Lettings Agency had been attributed to a systems error, but that the issues were being resolved with expediency. In response to a further question asked, Councillor Hibbert commented that with regards to the 100 new Council homes, some had already been built and completed and that planning permission had been sought for further homes. It was further explained that NPH had conducted a garage review which had identified a number of garages that were no longer in use and therefore not needed and a number of repairs that needed to be undertaken in order for them to be put back into use.

Councillor King submitted her Cabinet Member report and noted that funding had been allocated and would support 32 projects (not 33 as written in the report) and elaborated on the numerous events that had been held, including a tea dance, forum events and IDAHO conference that was to take place on the 17th May 2017. In response to questions asked, Councillor King explained that there had been increased crime figures and that she was aware of shoplifting 'gangs' that had resulted in a shop closure. She further noted that she would liaise with the Police,

having received a suggestion from a Councillor that mental health workers assist with some Policing matters.

At this juncture of the meeting, the Mayor informed Council that the allocated time had been met and no further Cabinet Member reports would be heard.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor McCutcheon stated that the amount of job losses in the retail industry within the town centre could potentially have a domino effect. He commented that everyone was aware of the stores and chains that were present in the Town Centre but suggested that there had been a growth in the number of retail jobs that were unseen and out of sight, primarily in warehouses. He stated that much of the warehouse work undertaken came with zero hour contracts and a number of workers were being paid less than the national minimum wage. He further asked why there was such disparity between the reported increased footfall in the Town Centre and the decrease in the numbers of shops. He suggested that executive powers were needed to address the issue and commented that he considered a Local Economy All Purpose Working Group an option in addressing those concerns.

Councillor Hadland, in response commented that the retail industry was a reactive not dictating industry and noted that there had been many changes to the retail sector due to changing demands and shopping habits. He stated that Town Centres were becoming more leisure focused due to a change in internet shopping as well as other contributing factors. He further explained that by increasing the number of leisure based activities, residents were still being encouraged into the Town Centre.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION

Mr Brian Hoare addressed Council on Motion i) and stated that he wanted fairness, transparency and legality in the increased levy on Parished areas of Northampton. He commented that the increase in Parish precepts had resulted in year on year increases in tax paid by residents and questioned the fairness of it since it affected a third of residents. He further questioned what consultation had been undertaken as he could find little evidence of any having been completed.

i) Councillor Beardsworth proposed and Councillor B Markham seconded:

“This Council calls on the Administration to review the 2017/18 Council Tax increase levied on the Parished areas of Northampton”.

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

Mr Martin Sawyer addressed Council on motion ii) and questioned why the Council had stopped monitoring Air Quality around the Bus Station in 2016 and stated that this was a legal responsibility under the Food and Environment Protection Act 1985. He further questioned why Air Quality monitoring had commenced again in 2017

despite half of the population living in an area that was damaging to health.

ii) Councillor B Markham proposed and Councillor Meredith seconded:

“Given the clear public interest and concern expressed at the last council meeting regarding the inadequacy of the Northgate Bus Station and the congestion caused in the Drapery the Council is concerned that no Air Quality monitoring was undertaken in the vicinity of the Bus station during 2016.

To reassure the public that this Council is taking the traffic congestion and resultant air quality problems seriously we call on the Administration to bring a report to this Council twice a year detailing the trend in air quality readings and details of actions that are being taken to protect the public”.

Councillor Nunn proposed and Councillor Hallam seconded and amendment:

Amended motion read:

“Given the clear public interest expressed at the last council meeting regarding the Northgate Bus Station and the congestion caused in the Drapery this Council resolves to implement any recommendations from the current Scrutiny Review concerning Air Quality in this area of the Town Centre and receive any monitoring reports that Scrutiny considers should be reported.

To reassure the public that this Council is taking the traffic congestion seriously this Council notes that the Administration is working with partners to address the abuse by motorists of the Traffic Regulation Orders applying to The Drapery, and are pursuing other measures to enable improved vehicle flows.”

Council debated the amendment.

Upon a vote, the amendment was carried and became the substantive motion.

Council debated the substantive motion

Upon a vote he motion was carried.

iii) Councillor Beardsworth proposed and Councillor B Markham seconded:

“This Council notes that the Administration has included in the 2017 / 18 financial plan capital expenditure of £7 million to redevelop the Central Museum. This money will increase the council's borrowing at a time when interest rates are predicted to rise.

Council is extremely concerned that the administration has once again embarked on

a major investment project without first having considered the business or financial case for such a large investment.

The Council therefore calls on the administration to bring a halt to this project until Scrutiny and all councillors have had an opportunity to consider a business plan”.

Council debated the motion

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

Ms Morcea Walker addressed Council on motion iv) and commented that she had been in education for over 40 years and that she supported the motion. She stated that there was a need to raise the standards of education and that if Councils were given the opportunity to intervene in failing schools by means of sponsoring academies.

Mr Alan Hackett addressed Council on motion iv) and explained that he was currently employed as a teacher and that the school academy structures were not always well understood and considered that multi-academy trust to be unaccountable to their communities. He further noted his concerns with regards to the ‘academisation’ of Universities and the impact that this could have on the terms and conditions affecting teaching professionals and emphasised the need for control of academies be taken back.

iv) Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Birch seconded:

“That this council notes and supports the House of Commons Education Select Committee Report's conclusion that local councils should be allowed to sponsor academies.

This goes even further than the Local Government Association's recent call for councils to be permitted once again "to play a direct role in raising education standards and improving life chances" by setting up and running academy schools and, where necessary, taking on the running of failing academies.

Consequently, this council should:

- Press the Secretary of State for Education to amend the legal ruling which currently prevents local authorities sponsoring academy chains and setting up free schools
- Use its influence to remove unnecessary red tape that currently prevents high performing maintained schools from becoming academy sponsors
- Once this has been done, build this Borough Council’s capacity to take on these responsibilities”

Council debated the motion

Upon a vote, the motion was lost.

v) Councillor Smith as the proposer of Motion v) accepted the amended motion.

Councillor McCutcheon seconded the acceptance of the amendment:

Amended motion read:

“This Council believes it needs to be as open and as transparent to the public as much as possible.

“This Council notes that Northamptonshire County Council does successful webcasting of its official meetings, including full Council and Cabinet. This Council resolves to introduce the webcasting of official Borough Council meetings, including Council, Cabinet, Committee and Scrutiny meetings that are open to the public, at the earliest opportunity”.

Council debated the motion amended motion which had become the substantive motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

10. 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 9.21PM