

MINUTES

OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING OF NORTHAMPTON BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE GUILDHALL, NORTHAMPTON, ON Monday, 14 January 2019 AT SIX THIRTY O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING

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

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

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest by members.

2. MINUTES

Councillor Russell noted an omission from the previous meeting's minutes wherein she thanked the Democratic Services Manager and the Civic and Mayoral Officer for their hard work.

The minutes were then agreed.

3. APOLOGIES.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Flavell, Lane, Malpas and Kilby-Shaw.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced the sad passing of Alderman Tony Stimpson and led Members in a minute's silence in his honour.

Councillor Beardsworth commented that she remembered Alderman Stimpson fondly and passed her condolences to his wife and family.

Councillor Stone stated that whilst she did not know Alderman Stimpson, she was always glad to honour people who played an important role in the town and commented that she was glad Alderman Stimpson's passing was being marked and asked that the Labour group's condolences be passed to his family.

Councillor Larratt commented that he had been saddened to learn of Alderman Stimpson's passing and noted that he had been a key architect to the extension of the Guildhall, stating that the town was still living with his legacy and would continue to do so for many years to come.

The Mayor announced that the Big Sleep Out would be taking place on 1st February and that approximately 400 fundraisers were expected to take part. He further announced additional upcoming events, including:

- 28th February - "You Must Remember This" fundraising event; tickets priced at £30, food and drink included and entertainment provided;
- 30th March – Northampton Male Voice Choir performing at All Saints Church to raise money for the Mayoral Fund, starting at 7:30pm; tickets priced at £10, refreshments available, and;
- 3rd April – Thanksgiving Mass at Barrack Road Cathedral.

The Mayor announced that since the last meeting he and the Mayoress had attended a number of events, including:

- an art exhibition on Guildhall Road to commemorate the 10 year anniversary of the death of Corporal Marc Birch;
- visiting numerous residential care homes over the Christmas period;
- 18th December - Attended "Tree of Love" event at Northampton Cathedral, also attended by Lord and Lady Spencer;
- 25th December – met Stan Robertson, a local volunteer, who had a food stall on the Market Square, and helped feed the homeless. Later, the Mayor and Mayoress visited several wards at Northampton General Hospital. In the evening they attended a dinner at the Hope Centre along with 150 of its clients.
- Several visits to Berrywood Hospital over the Christmas period;
- Lunch at Miller & Carter where the Rotary Club presented the Mayor with a cheque for £2125 for his Mayoral Charity, and;
- A New Year's party, hosted by the Mayor, at Simon De Senlis House.

5. PUBLIC COMMENTS AND PETITIONS

Mr Brian Hoare referred to the Cabinet Member Report for Finance and suggested that the Council had not been honest when consulting the public. He did not believe that the consultation was written in plain English and stated that the questionnaire was not visible on the Council's website until 8th January, leaving residents with less than 4 weeks to respond. He stated that the questionnaire did not give respondents enough information to form an educated response.

Mr Daniel Soan commented on the Queen Eleanor Cross and noted that a current petition on the Council's website had garnered more than 1,500 signatures. He welcomed the news that the Council had gone to tender for works to be carried out in April, however asked the Council to erect a temporary cover around the structure to prevent further eroding of the stone in the meantime. He further commented that a regular programme of inspections and maintenance would be crucial in insuring the future of the Cross and suggested that ownership be transferred to the community, possibly a Parish Council, to quickly and easily deal with any maintenance issues that may arise.

Mr Ronald Fitzhugh referred to the Queen Eleanor Cross and stated that the Council needed to do more to inspire confidence in residents that the Cross was being given

due consideration.

Mr David Huffadine-Smith referred to the Cabinet Member Report for Housing and Wellbeing and expressed his pleasure at the Nightshelter's success but questioned why it was "only half full" when several social media groups had indicated that some rough sleepers had been turned away. He suggested that the Council meet with some of the town's voluntary organisations to better assist those in need.

6. MEMBER AND PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

No questions were submitted before the deadline.

7. CABINET MEMBER PRESENTATIONS

Councillor Nunn, as Leader of the Council, submitted his report and elaborated thereon. He explained that he had met with the NCC Children's Commissioner to discuss children's services and was encouraged by the observations made. He reminded Councillors of an upcoming unitary briefing session on 30th January. He further stated that a Northampton West Steering Group had been set up. The next step would be to implement a Joint Committee before moving to an implementation board, which would comprise of 16 members.

The Leader commented that the trial Park & Ride service in the lead up to Christmas had been a success despite it not being widely advertised and stated that its continuation was important for the town's long-needed culture change. Regarding the Queen Eleanor Cross, the Leader advised that Historic England had strongly recommended that the Cross remain uncovered, since condensation could cause further damage and a temporary cover could be seen as a "climbing frame" to some.

In response to questions asked, the Leader agreed that there was significant demand for family housing. The Leader confirmed a meeting between residents' associations and heritage officers would be arranged for those interested in discussing the Queen Eleanor Cross; moving forward, he advised that briefings, possibly monthly, would be arranged to keep councillors updated with progress made. He confirmed that he would be happy to meet with the Councillor G Eales, as the Ward Councillor for Spencer, regarding the St James Mill Link Road and commented that regarding unitary business, there was no benefit in further lobbying Central Government. He stated that the current proposal was the best thing for the town.

Councillor Larratt, as Deputy Leader to the Council, presented his report to the Council and elaborated on the salient points. He noted that a report updating Members on carried motions was unfortunately not ready for the meeting but hoped that it would go to the next. He also clarified that there had been some changes to upcoming Councillor Development groups, new dates being as follows:

- 18th February
- 9th May
- 8th July
- 16th September
- 4th December

Responding to questions, the Deputy Leader explained that a meeting room capable of webcasting would make it a more lettable facility in order to generate income. He confirmed that consultants had been appointed for the consultation element of the Community Governance Review would be ready to start the consultation process from the end of January. With regard to sports clubs, the Deputy Leader stated that work to secure the Fernie Fields club was ongoing, confirming that the Head of Economy, Regeneration and Assets was currently working on a lease.

Councillor Hibbert elaborated upon his report highlighting the importance of the Strategy and its aim to change lives. He informed the Council of a homeless person who had used the Night Shelter, had found it very beneficial and useful. He had moved to Oasis House and had been very happy there but had since passed away. He stated that a review would be undertaken into the death of a homeless woman who had died on New Year's Day. Councillor Hibbert emphasised the importance of rough sleepers engaging with Outreach Workers.

In answer to a question regarding assistance provided to rough sleepers with drug or alcohol addiction, Councillor Hibbert informed that individuals could be referred to the relevant Agencies but they must want the assistance in order to be helped.

At this juncture of the meeting, the Mayor announced that the time limited for Cabinet Member reports had been reached and no further Cabinet Members would elaborate on their reports.

8. OPPOSITION GROUP BUSINESS

Councillor Joyce highlighted the importance of appreciating employees and stated that Northampton Borough Council had done a lot of work recently to improve the working lives of employees, such as the reduction of the working week from 40 to 37 hours, changes to sick pay and signing of the "Dying to Work" charter. He commented that as a trade union representative, he was pleased that the Council had established good working relationships with unions and that they were seen as having an important contribution to make in maintaining a happy and committed workforce. He stated that work needed to be done to ensure that poor management practices were dealt with and training given to improve interpersonal skills throughout the organisation. Councillor Joyce further highlighted the importance of showing that bullying and harassment was not tolerated, and seen to be dealt with.

The Leader commented that a lot of work had been undertaken in recent years to change the culture of the organisation and highlighted the return of the HR Department back in-house as part of that change. He stated that HR policies were regularly updated. The Leader further confirmed that a staff group would be moving forward with the "Red Box" project.

9. NOTICES OF MOTION

- i) Councillor Roberts proposed and Councillor Haque seconded:

"Northampton Borough council is committed to being the best employer we can be

and to set the standard for other local employers.

We therefore to commit to refreshing our employment procedures to include an updated policy on family friendly working.

It can be hard to balance the needs of family with those of employer but it's in everyone's interests to get the balance right.

There are several family-friendly working options to consider, including parental leave and flexible working arrangements. Flexible working can include working part-time, job sharing, shift working, working school hours, staggering time and working from home.

As an employer we are keen to help staff find the right work/life balance because we want them to be productive and focused on work, getting the best possible outcome for our service users.

Parental leave and flexible working arrangements are two ways to make work more family-friendly.”

Councillor Nunn proposed and Councillor Eldred seconded an amendment.

Amended motion to read:

“Northampton Borough council is committed to being the best employer we can be and to set the standard for other local employers.

It can be hard to balance the demands of modern life and needs of family with those of an employer but it's in everyone's interests to get the balance right, and Northampton residents deserve to be served by council staff that feel valued and engaged with their work, and therefore provide the best service they can.

We therefore continually refresh our employment procedures, and these include the existing policies that the council has on Parental Leave and Paternity Leave, and our Career Break Policy that is currently supporting staff including one employee who's long-term serious illness would otherwise have meant them having reduced pay, but who is still receiving full pay consistent with our commitment to the TUC 'Dying to Work' charter.

The council also operates family-friendly working, which (whilst never losing sight of the service to be provided to residents) not only allows parental leave and flexible working arrangements, but flexible working, part-time, job sharing, working school hours, and staggering time.

Working from home is part of modern work patterns, and this is allowed, with a review currently under way to ensure that this, and flexible working, is clearly defined.”

As an employer we are keen to help staff find the right work/life balance because we want them to be productive and focused on work, getting the best possible outcome for our service users, and council reaffirms its commitment to this.”

Council debated the amendment.

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

Council debated the substantive motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

The Mayor noted that within accordance to Part 4 (4.2) of the Constitution, motion ii) had been withdrawn.

- iii) Councillor Beardsworth accepted an alteration to the original motion as published on the agenda. The altered motion was seconded by Councillor Meredith.

Council agreed to the altered motion debated below:

“This Council recognises the importance of retaining good members of staff over the next 15 months to ensure that skilled staff are available to transfer to a new Unitary authority to continue to provide good local government services to the residents of Northampton.

The Council has HR policies and procedures in place, which of course need to be understood and adhered to, in order to achieve the goal of retaining good members of staff.

The Council recognises that there will always be staff who choose to move on, but during the past 18 months, in order to make NBC an attractive place for good staff to work, has:

- Reduced the standard work hours from 40 to 37, to be competitive with other employers, with part-time staff reducing their by the same percentage if they chose to.
- Removed the no pay for the first day of sickness
- Improved various HR policies
- Used the discretions policy on sick pay to honour commitments under the TUC ‘Dying to work’ charter
- Anticipates a likely 2% pay award for 2019/20
- Enhanced staff discounts and benefits arrangements
- Maximised the use of apprenticeships and the apprenticeship levy
- Transferred a significant proportion of the interim contract staff to more permanent types of fixed contract arrangements
- Recruited a Learning and Development Manager to support personal development
- Brought the HR service back in-house to be closer to the employees that it supports

Council thanks its hard working staff for their dedication to supporting the town and serving its residents, and reaffirms its commitment to ensure that NBC is an attractive place for good staff to work.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

iv) Councillor Stone proposed and Councillor Nunn seconded:

“Northampton has a strong and proud history of manufacturing, including its boot and shoe trade and heavy to medium engineering.

Despite the demise of such important companies such as British Timken, Express lifts, Northampton Machinery Co, RHP Bearings and Plessy, we do still have centres of excellence with Cosworth, AMG Powertrain, Churches shoes, Trickers and many others.

This Council is already very pleased to buy products and services from many local companies, and as part of continually seeking to get best value for the local taxpayer, is keen to work with more local companies and employers.

There are now two national campaigns to promote manufacturing, the GMB Union “Making it” and “The Made in Britain” which is run for manufacturers.

This Council therefore recognises both of these campaigns, and agrees to promote their membership to local companies, along with continuing to encourage potential manufacturers to site within the town. The Council will, wherever possible and cost effective, use local suppliers to support the local economy.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

Mr David Huffadine-Smith addressed Council and explained that parish councils could provide many services that a large authority could not, and hoped that the Council would seek to create parish councils wherever possible.

v) Councillor B Markham accepted an alteration to the original motion as published on the agenda. The altered motion was seconded by Councillor Beardsworth.

Council agreed to the altered motion debated below:

“The Council is undertaking a Community Governance Review with the intention of establishing two tiers of local government across Northampton when the new unitary arrangements come into force.

This will constitute a major change to the way that services are delivered to local

communities and the level of council tax that households are expected to pay in the currently unparished areas of the Borough.

This Council therefore expects that in any literature provided to the public, setting out proposed new Parish / Town Council arrangements, will detail the options for service delivery by the new councils and give an indication as to the initial precept / council tax that will be levied, while recognising that going forward this will be a matter for the elected members of the new councils.”

Council debated the motion.

Upon a vote, the motion was carried.

vi) Councillor King proposed and Councillor Larratt seconded:

“The Disability Confident scheme, run by the national government, promotes a disability-inclusive culture among employers across the UK.

The scheme helps employers:

- draw from the widest possible pool of talent
- secure high quality staff who are skilled, loyal and hard working
- improve employee morale and commitment by demonstrating that all employees are treated fairly

Disability Confident employers are changing behaviour and cultures within their organisations, networks and communities. Northampton Borough Council is serious about equal opportunities and proud of its proven track record of being an Equal Opportunity employer and, as such, it already carries out numerous actions to make a difference for disabled people. Nevertheless, we are aware this is only a part of a much broader journey.

Therefore, this motion calls on the Council to commit to signing up as Disability Confident Committed and taking the necessary steps to become a Disability Confident Employer, playing an active role in changing attitudes for the better.

Under the Disability Confident scheme, this Council will further commit to carry on learning and strengthening the networks it will need to continue to improve its offer to existing and future disabled employees.”

Council debated the 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 was none.