



Walsall Metropolitan Borough

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 25th April, 2005, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

PRESENT

COUNCILLOR M.A. BIRD (MAYOR) IN THE CHAIR

Councillor J.R. Cook (Deputy Mayor)

“ A.J.A. Andrew
“ T.G. Ansell
“ M. Arif
“ A. Aslam
“ C.M. Ault
“ J.M. Barton
“ L.A. Beeley
“ A.G. Bentley
“ Mrs. J. Beilby
“ P. Bott
“ M.R. Burley
“ B. Cassidy
“ K. Chambers
“ A.G. Clarke
“ R.J.H. Collins
“ S.P. Coughlan
“ A.E. Griffiths
“ A.D. Harris
“ L.A. Harrison
“ E.F. Hughes
“ A.D. Johnson
“ H. Khan
“ M. Longhi
“ S.W. Madeley
“ Ms. R.A. Martin
“ Mrs. B.V. McCracken

Councillor Mrs. C. Micklewright

“ M. Munir
“ J.G. O'Hare
“ T.S. Oliver
“ A.J. Paul
“ K. Phillips
“ D.J. Pitt
“ Mrs. E.E. Pitt
“ M.G. Pitt
“ I.C. Robertson
“ R.S. Robinson
“ J. Rochelle
“ C.E.M. Rose
“ B. Sanders
“ H.S. Sarohi
“ K. Sears
“ Mrs. D.A. Shires
“ I. Shires
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ D.J. Turner
“ W.T. Tweddle
“ A. Underhill
“ R.A. Walker
“ V.G. Woodruff
“ M. Yasin
“ P.A. Young
“ Zahid Ali

94. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Anson, Douglas-Maul, Perry and Withnall.

95. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th March, 2005, copies having been sent to each member of the council be approved as a correct record and signed.

96. **Declarations of interest**

The following members declared their interest in the items indicated:-

Councillor Sears	Acorn Home Care (personal)
Councillor Twedde	New Deal

97. **Mayor's announcements**

- (1) The Mayor informed the Council that Councillor Withnall was in hospital.
- (2) The Mayor informed the meeting that Councillor Phillips would be undertaking a sponsored silence during the meeting this evening and asked for support from members present.
- (3) The Mayor reminded those present that he would be hosting drinks in the Mayor's Parlour as this was the last meeting in this municipal year.

98. **Petition**

The following petition was submitted:-

Councillor Sarohi – residents of Bassett Street, Walsall – anti-social behaviour

99. **Recommendation of Cabinet**

Corporate Plan 2005 – 2006

The report to Cabinet was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Ansell and duly seconded:-

That the Corporate Plan 2005 – 2006 be adopted as part of the policy framework.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried – the voting at the request of several members of the Council being recorded as follows:-

**For the motion -
41 Members**

Cllr. Ansell
“ I. Shires
“ Andrew
“ Arif
“ Aslam
“ Ault
“ Beeley
“ Beilby
“ Bentley
“ Bird
“ Bott
“ Clarke
“ Collins
“ Cook
“ Griffiths
“ Harris
“ Harrison
“ Hughes
“ Khan
“ Longhi
“ Martin
“ McCracken
“ Micklewright
“ Munir
“ O’Hare
“ Paul
“ D.J. Pitt
“ E.E. Pitt
“ M.G. Pitt
“ Rochelle
“ Rose
“ Sanders
“ Sears
“ D.A. Shires
“ Towe
“ Turner
“ Twedde
“ Walker
“ Woodruff
“ Yasin
“ Zahid

**Against the amendment -
14 Members**

Cllr. Barton
“ Burley
“ Cassidy
“ Chambers
“ Coughlan
“ Johnson
“ Madeley
“ Oliver
“ Phillips
“ Robertson
“ Robinson
“ Sarohi
“ Underhill
“ Young

and it was:-

Resolved

That the Corporate Plan 2005 – 2006 be adopted as part of the policy framework.

100. **Recommendation of Development Control**

Residential development standards – interim supplementary planning document

The report to Cabinet was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Longhi, duly seconded and:-

Resolved

That the Residential development standards – interim supplementary planning document be approved.

101. **Review of the municipal year**

Councillor Ansell addressed the Council as follows:

We have in Walsall political groups with of course their differences but I want to start by acknowledging that in this year we have worked together across all the Council services, Committees and Scrutiny as a Council team. I particularly want to acknowledge Ian and Harold who have continued to work with me on the Interim Board. This year has seen the Conservative Group take overall control of the Council and I am immensely proud of what the group has achieved but in this Annual Report I am sticking to the achievements of the Council.

Part of our Vision for the future is that our schools will be great preparing our young people for their future and the OFSTED Inspection of the Local Authority Education Service was a boost for us all. We were recognised as the most improved education Authority in the country and this is a credit to our staff, the Head teachers, teachers, governing bodies and our partners Education Walsall. We still have much to do particularly in raising educational achievements. We also need to redress the serious underinvestment in schools and our disappointment at not being included in the next round of the Government's programme for this – something I and the other group leaders are determined we address with our local MPs.

This year has seen the implementation of the Council's new initiative to lead the community engagement agenda by launching our Local Neighbourhood Partnerships. These Partnerships are already leading to greater ownership of the issues that are important locally to our residents, and increasing pride in this borough and all that it has to offer.

We put an emphasis on Listening and valuing what people tell us. There have been a number of key events this year with our partners listening to their views and planning for the future. We have held events with our partner organisations on the future of the voluntary Sector and are now firmly on the way to agreeing our first Community Plan. We are also communicating with residents more effectively through our new civic newspaper.

And we are making a difference locally. Let us look at one area Brownhills. After years and years of the public not knowing and more importantly not believing that the new Medical Centre and Library would ever happen today the people can see the workmen on the site and know that they now have a Council that is focusing on getting results and making a difference. The new Canoe Centre is again the result of good partnership work and the demolition by Walsall Housing Group of old unsuitable housing is bringing new enthusiasm to that area.

Walsall is now the safest place to live in the West Midlands. Now everyone on the Council knows that crime and anti social behaviour is a key issue in all the communities but we are making progress and the Crime and Disorder Partnership have this year set challenging Targets to bring crime figures down even further and tackle that area so hard to impact on – the fear of crime. Our partnership with the faith communities of Walsall is one that we can be proud of. In January the Art Gallery featured the art work of young people who through the STAR programme were presenting their views on the Holocaust and how that impacts our approach to racism today.

This Council is now graded a Fair Council and we should all stop for a moment and just remember where we have come from. Those memories are still sharp with me and no one in this Council should ever underestimate the impact that the initial inspection had. That position has been transformed. But more important than the Audit Commission are the views of our residents. Wherever I go I hear people saying things are getting better, our roads are cleaner and many more positive comments. Carers have written to me saying how pleased they are that the Council has listened to their needs for respite care, parents have written saying that they can see improvements in their schools, residents who have waited for years and years for road repairs are now seeing action. And we are now recycling more than ever.

There has been a turnaround in Development Control and the standards of meeting government targets are now being met and everyone who serves on that Committee deserved to be thanked for the dedicated way they have worked as a team. This year our Housing Service received a one star rating, another turnaround story and we are pleased that the Walsall Housing Group also moved out of special measures.

We have achieved this because our staff are working with us. They are recognised as having high morale and good strong leadership and that chemistry now has the Council on a sound financial basis. We have a world class financial team that has set this Council's finances in order and our approach to budget setting and policy based budgets is second to none.

We are putting the citizen first. You can see this in the major improvements we have made in the First Stop Shop. Over coming months we will be establishing our major partnership with Fujitsu to transform the way the organisation works and the way people can access Council services. The last year has seen a great amount of work in preparing for this and we are all looking forward to the improvements in customer services and regeneration.

An Annual Report must include the challenges we face. Our critical Youth Service Report means that we must make changes. We will need to listen to young people and act on their views. This means that organisations that work with young people must change and we know that is presenting us with challenges but ones that we must face.

Walsall exists in a world global economy and the recent events at Rover and the impact on the supply chain mean that we have to play our part with our partners in encouraging new industry, jobs and employment to our borough.

The Council has continued to develop its progressive relationships with key partners to regenerate the Borough. Major progress has been achieved with the Black Country Consortium in progressing the Black Country Study which will set out a long term strategy to transform the Black Country into a leading region.

Within the Borough, the Walsall Regeneration Company is leading work with the Council to set out an exciting, yet deliverable plan to revitalise Walsall Town Centre so it is able to fulfil its role in driving the borough's regeneration. Similarly groundbreaking work with Walsall Housing Group will conclude with the development of sustainable plans for each of our district centres.

We can already see evidence of real improvements in our communities, centres and at our key gateways. Significantly a range of projects that will help transform our borough including Walsall Waterfront, a new Business and Learning Campus and Darlaston Strategic Development Area are now becoming a reality. Walsall is changing and the development world is definitely taking notice.

Finally I want to finish this Annual Report by thanking the executive management team and my colleagues on the Cabinet for their hard work, enthusiasm and the personal support they have given to me over the year. It has been an exciting year and one that has certainly energised me for the year ahead. This year has seen us bring Walsall closer to our Vision for 2008 and I thank everyone in this chamber for their contribution.

The following Members replied to the report of the Leader:

Councillor Oliver
Councillor E.E. Pitt
Councillor Harris
Councillor Madeley

Resolved

That the report of the Leader of the Council be noted.

102. Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) - Constitution

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Hughes, duly seconded and:-

Resolved

That the Constitution of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE) be amended to increase the membership of Christian and other religious denominations from 20 to 21 in order that the Orthodox Church can be represented.

103. Fair trade policy

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Zahid, duly seconded and:-

Resolved

(1) That Council confirms its support for Fairtrade and directs that the council;

- Agree to the use of fairtrade products by the Catering PSE and Residential Homes.
- Agree to negotiate the inclusion of fairtrade products for sale in the vending machines currently provided in council premises.

The above recommendations to be implemented by 1 September 2005.

(2) That Council support and promotes Fairtrade activities within the community to raise public awareness.

104. Members Allowances

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor O'Hare, duly seconded and:-

Resolved

- (1) That a Members' Allowances Scheme be made under The Local Authority (Members Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003 for the municipal year 2005/2006, the scheme to be in the same terms as the scheme approved by Council on 1st March 2004 for the municipal year 2004/2005.
- (2) That the Council note the position with regard to the possible future payment of special responsibility allowances to Licensing and Safety Committee members dependent on the recommendations of an independent review panel.

105. Change of group membership

Resolved

- (a) That it be noted that Councillor Carole Rose has left the Labour Group and with the agreement of Councillor Ansell, Leader of the Council has joined the Conservative Group.
- (b) That it be noted that Councillor Rose no longer a member Licensing and Safety Committee.

106. Notice of motion – Walsall – Wolverhampton rail link

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given was **moved** by Councillor Chambers and seconded by Councillor Madeley:

That this Council is totally opposed to the proposal of the Strategic Rail Authority to seek the closure of the Walsall – Wolverhampton rail link which the Council regards as vital to the ongoing regeneration of the Borough and expresses the view that the creation of new stations on the route at James Bridge and Willenhall would be a further regeneration tool as well as making the service more accessible to potential users and that a joint short life scrutiny committee be established with Wolverhampton City Council comprising three members from each authority to review the proposal of the Strategic Rail Authority and to report their conclusions and any recommendations to their respective authorities.

Amendment moved by Councillor Longhi and seconded by Councillor Andrew:-

That all the words after “Walsall – Wolverhampton rail link” be deleted and the following be inserted:-

and therefore in the context of the Strategic Rail Authority’s consultation document entitled “The West Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy”, this Council considers that making rail services more accessible to potential users is vital in supporting regeneration of the Borough and.

- (1) welcomes the intention to improve frequencies to Rugeley and the extension of train services from Walsall to Birmingham International;
- (2) does not support the proposed withdrawal of services from Walsall to Wolverhampton, and would wish to see investment such as re-opening a station at Willenhall and consideration of the development of new stations elsewhere on this route;
- (3) expresses concern at any intention to relocate Walsall to Birmingham New Street services to Birmingham Snow Hill;
- (4) in recognising the importance of these proposals agrees that a report be presented to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity and that the Regeneration, Environment, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel be invited to comment on the proposals beforehand;
- (5) that the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority be consulted as part of this process.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried and the substantive motion was put to the vote and declared carried and it was:-

Resolved

That this Council is totally opposed to the proposal of the Strategic Rail Authority to seek the closure of the Walsall – Wolverhampton rail link and therefore in the context of the Strategic Rail Authority’s consultation document entitled “The West Midlands Route Utilisation Strategy”, this Council considers that making rail services more accessible to potential users is vital in supporting regeneration of the Borough and.

- (1) welcomes the intention to improve frequencies to Rugeley and the extension of train services from Walsall to Birmingham International;

- (2) does not support the proposed withdrawal of services from Walsall to Wolverhampton, and would wish to see investment such as re-opening a station at Willenhall and consideration of the development of new stations elsewhere on this route;
- (3) expresses concern at any intention to relocate Walsall to Birmingham New Street services to Birmingham Snow Hill;
- (4) in recognising the importance of these proposals agrees that a report be presented to Cabinet at the earliest opportunity and that the Regeneration, Environment, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel be invited to comment on the proposals beforehand;
- (5) that the West Midlands Passenger Transport Authority be consulted as part of this process.

The meeting terminated at 8.10 p.m.