



# Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 16th January, 2006, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

## Present

### Councillor J.R. Cook (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor B.V. McCracken (Dep Mayor)

“ A.J.A. Andrew  
“ T.G. Ansell  
“ D.A. Anson  
“ A. Aslam  
“ C.M. Ault  
“ J.M. Barton  
“ L.A. Beeley  
“ A.G. Bentley  
“ Mrs. J. Beilby  
“ M.A. Bird  
“ P. Bott  
“ M.R. Burley  
“ K. Chambers  
“ A.G. Clarke  
“ R.J.H. Collins  
“ S.P. Coughlan  
“ C.U. Creaney  
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul  
“ A.E. Griffiths  
“ A.D. Harris  
“ L.A. Harrison  
“ E.F. Hughes  
“ H. Khan  
“ M. Longhi  
“ S.W. Madeley  
“ R.A. Martin  
“ Mrs. C. Micklewright

Councillor M. Munir

“ J.G. O'Hare  
“ T.S. Oliver  
“ A.J. Paul  
“ G. Perry  
“ K. Phillips  
“ D.J. 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  
“ G. Wilkes  
“ V.G. Woodruff  
“ M. Yasin  
“ P.A. Young  
“ Zahid Ali

63. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Arif, Cassidy, Johnson, Mrs. Pitt and Woodruff.

64. **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 7th November 2005, copies having been sent to each Member of the Council, be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to an amendment to the declaration of interest given by Councillor Burley to read "Walsall Hospital and NHS Trust".

65. **Declarations of interest**

The following members declared an interest in the items indicated:

Councillor Perry	Walsall Hospitals NHS Trust (employee) (personal)
Councillor Sears	Acorn Home Care (personal)
Councillor Robertson	Item 11 - Notice of motion – member of Friends of the Earth (personal)
Annie Shepperd	Item 6(b) – Question 2 (personal)
Jamie Morris	Item 6(b) – Question 2 (personal)
Carole Evans	Item 6(b) – Question 2 (personal)
Bhupinder Gill	Item 6(b) – Question 2 (personal)

66. **Mayor's announcements**

**(a) Mr. R. Arkell**

The Mayor referred to the recent death of Mr. R. Arkell.

The Mayor and Councillor Ansell paid tribute to Mr. Arkell's services to the Borough over a period of many years, following which it was **moved**, duly seconded and:-

## **Resolved**

That this Council have heard with deep regret of the death of Mr. R. Arkell, a member of former Aldridge-Brownhills Urban District Council of which Council he was Chairman in 1971/72 and a member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from 1974 to 1980 and 1984 to 1988, and place on record their appreciation of his services to the Town over a period of many years and extend to his family their sincere sympathy in their bereavement.

Members and officers stood in silence as a mark of respect.

### **(b) Statement by Councillor Ansell on achieving three stars CPA category**

The Mayor called upon Councillor Ansell to make a statement with regard to the achievement of the three star CPA category.

Councillor Ansell said that he wished to congratulate all those people involved and to put on record his thanks to members and staff in achieving this three star status. He went on to say that the Council was now on track to achieve four stars by 2008 and this Council has proved to everyone that it can move into the mainstream which will open doors for inward investment.

Councillor Oliver added his congratulations to those of Councillor Ansell and **moved** a point of order which was seconded by Councillor Coughlan:-

That the Mayor be requested to use his discretion in order to suspend Council Procedure Rules to enable a statement to be made by the Leader on Putting the Citizen First project which he understood was not now being proceeded with.

The Mayor in reply said that the letter regarding this matter had only been received that afternoon and that no decision on this matter had yet been reached.

Councillor Ansell said that a report would be submitted to Cabinet on Wednesday and reminded the Council that he had always promised that a debate on this issue would take place and that it was his intention to call a special meeting of the Council in due course, however, professional advice at the moment was that it would be inadvisable to discuss this issue before the Cabinet meeting on Wednesday and he assured the Council that he would call a special meeting as soon as possible after that date.

The time being 6.15 p.m. the Mayor adjourned the meeting for 10 minutes.

The meeting recommenced at 6.25 p.m.

The Mayor asked Councillor Oliver if he wished to withdraw his motion in the light of Councillor Ansell's assurances that a special meeting of the Council would be called to discuss this issue.

Councillor Oliver said that he wished to proceed to a vote.

As several members had queried whether Councillor Oliver had requested suspension of the appropriate Council Procedure Rule, the Monitoring Officer advised the Council that a vote still needed to be taken in order to ascertain the Council's wishes on the suspension of a Council Procedure Rule. Whether the correct Council Procedure Rule had been quoted was not the issue at the moment until the Council had decided what course of action it wished to follow. Once the vote had been taken he would then given his advice on procedure.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost – 15 members voting in favour and more voting against.

## **67. Petitions**

The following petitions were submitted:-

- (a) Councillor Underhill – reinstatement of 575 bus route along Noose Crescent and Aston Road, Willenhall;
- (b) Councillor Phillips - new traffic light system at junctions of Mossley Lane, Sneyd Lane and Upper Sneyd Lane;
- (c) Councillor Rochelle – raising of speed limited on Erdington Road, Aldridge, between island at the junction with Little Hardwick Road, Barr Common and Knights Hill.

## **68. Questions by members of the Council**

### **(a) Staff illness figures**

Councillor Robertson asked the following question of Councillor Ansell:-

What are the illness figures for our staff on a monthly or quarterly basis which ever is available, over the period of the last 9 months. I would request that these figures are split into the various categories ... stress, back pain, etc.

Councillor Ansell replied that like all responsible employers we carefully monitor the number of days lost due to sickness absence and we have in place a variety of approaches to ensure health and wellbeing of our workforce.

He said that one of our performance indicators is the average number of working days/shifts lost due to sickness absence. Sickness patterns are very seasonal and monthly or quarterly comparisons are not very useful. A more meaningful comparison is year on year and the absence figures for the last 3 years are as follows:

2003/4	11.7 days per employee
2004/5	11.02 days per employee
2005/6 (so far)	9.5 days per employee

Councillor Ansell said that we have continued year on year to reduce sickness absence and thereby improve the productivity of our workforce. Like all employers we have a range of causes of sickness absence. For example of our total absences currently some 17% are musculo/skeletal, 15% are stress related, 10% are back problems, 9% are stomach problems and 8% are infections. This pattern is common across local authorities.

Councillor Ansell concluded that management actions to bring down sickness levels included:-

- Providing a physiotherapy service to help employees with musculo/skeletal and back related absences.
- Introducing a new sickness policy in 2004 setting out how employees would be treated and what were managers' responsibilities.
- Making sickness absence data available to all managers to enable them to address the problems for their service and the needs of the individual employee.
- Providing a counselling service to all staff to help with the many causes of stress whether work related or not. Stress management training is also available for staff and managers.

Councillor Roberston asked the following supplementary question:-

What support is provided for employees with stress related illnesses?

Councillor Ansell replied that we are a caring employer and we do not employ malingerers and referred to the last point in his previous answer.

At this point in the meeting the Chief Executive and all Executive Directors present, together with the Monitoring Officer left the meeting.

Councillor Robinson rose on a point of order and asked why no legal advice was available at the meeting.

The Mayor replied that if legal advice was required members would be written to and he went on to say that the officer who had left was concerned personally with the question about to be asked and had declared an interest previously in the meeting.

(b) **Senior management team - Salary costs**

Councillor Robinson to ask the following question of Councillor Ansell:-

Can the Cabinet member responsible tell us the total salary costs in a full year of the Senior Management Team including the Chief Executive, all Directors and Assistant Directors, how many there are and who does what? Can you give a comparison of costs between now and when the current Chief Executive was appointed?

Councillor Ansell, in answering the question, said that he was disappointed and disturbed to receive this question as the information was available to Councillors and the public through the freedom of information legislation. This was the type of question which would have been asked before corporate governance issues in 2000.

He went on to say that he sees this type of thing as intimidation of officers who have turned this Council around and that we have a responsibility to our staff and we should protect them whoever they are.

When we were under special measures with an interim management team we were told that one of the conditions that we had to fulfil was to prove to the ODPM that this Council was a responsible Council which would not return to its old ways of using the senior management team as a political football. The three leaders at that time signed up to this and this question is appalling. All the good work carried out when Harold Withnall was leader of the Labour Group is being ignored. The annual accounts of this Council are published every year and any member or citizen can access these accounts under the Freedom of Information Act.

Councillor Robinson asked the following supplementary question:-

I find it sad that Councillor Ansell thinks that this question is going back to the pre-2000 situation. We have been very supportive of this Council whilst going through special measures.

The audited accounts go £5,000 either way, however, can you confirm that the answer to the question is that the total cost of the management team is £1.723 million.

Councillor Ansell replied that he had no details at the present time and referred Councillor Robinson to the annual accounts

69. **Mayoralty 2006/2007**

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

## **Resolved**

That Councillor Mrs. B.V. McCracken be nominated as Mayor and Councillor M.G. Pitt be nominated as Deputy Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the Municipal Year 2006/2007.

### **70. Membership of School Organisation Committee**

The report was submitted.

## **Resolved**

That Mr. N. Baddeley, Mrs. J. Cocken, Mr. A. Ditta and Mrs. D. Silvester be appointed as members of the Schools Group on the School Organisation Committee for Walsall for a three year term of office, subject to their continued eligibility and annual review of the proportional representation requirements.

### **71. Notice of motion – provision of brown bins**

The following motion, notice of which has been duly given was moved by Councillor Robinson and duly seconded:-

This Council currently understands that meeting our 2005/06 environmental targets for recycling may be doubtful. In view of this and the possible impact of increased landfill tax on the level of Council tax and the countless petitions that come before Council, we believe that the pre budget costs announced to the Regeneration, Environment, Housing and Community Safety Scrutiny and Performance Panel to provide every resident in the borough with a brown bin would be money wisely spent.

Council therefore supports the principle that every residential property in the borough that wants a brown bin be given this.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost – 20 members voting in favour and more than 20 against.

### **72. Notice of motion – revaluation of Council tax base in England**

The following motion, notice of which has been duly given, was **moved** by Councillor I. Shires and seconded by Councillor D.A. Shires:-

This Council notes the recent announcement by David Milliband MP (Minister for Communities and Local Government) that the Government has decided to delay the long awaited revaluation of the Council tax base in England.

This Council expresses concern:

- A total of £50m has to date been wasted on the scrapped revaluation exercise. This is not an effective use of public money.
- At the delay in the revaluation of the Council tax base in England which means that the poorest residents in Walsall continue to pay a disproportionately high amount of their income in Council tax.
- That the unfairness of the Council tax is particularly felt in low wage areas and the Government are urged to take seriously the issue of fairness and to at least undertake the revaluation process as a matter of urgency.
- At the inherent unfairness of the Council tax.

This Council calls for the abolition of Council tax and its replacement with a local income tax based upon income and ability to pay.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost – 4 members voting in favour and more than 4 against.

### 73. **Notice of motion – Zero Waste Charter**

The following motion, notice of which has been duly given, was **moved** by Councillors I. Shires and seconded by Councillor D.A. Shires:-

This Council notes:

- The launch of the Zero Waste Charter at Westminster on 18th June 2002 by many environmental groups in order to tackle the long-term problem of waste, landfill and incineration.
- That many Council have since adopted a Zero Waste policy for their long term waste strategies.

This Council adopts the following based on the Zero Waste Charter:

- Setting a target of Zero Waste for all municipal waste in the UK by 2020 (60% recycling by 2010, 75% by 2015).
- Promoting the doorstep collection of dry recyclables to every home in Walsall.
- Supplementing home composting with doorstep collection of organic waste, subject to appropriate safeguards against contamination, and establishing a network of local closed vessel compost plants.
- Developing civic amenity sites into re-use and recycling centres to give a greater emphasis to recycling and composting.
- Banning as soon as possible the landfilling of organic waste that has not been treated and neutralised, thereby reducing the production of methane.
- Opening up waste planning to greater public participation and ending the commercial confidentiality of waste contracts to ensure greater openness and accountability.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried – 24 members voting in favour and 17 against and it was:-

### **Resolved**

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This Council adopts the following based on the Zero Waste Charter:

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- Developing civic amenity sites into re-use and recycling centres to give a greater emphasis to recycling and composting.
- Banning as soon as possible the landfilling of organic waste that has not been treated and neutralised, thereby reducing the production of methane.
- Opening up waste planning to greater public participation and ending the commercial confidentiality of waste contracts to ensure greater openness and accountability.

The meeting terminated at 8.10 p.m.