



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 14th April 2014 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

Present

Councillor M. Nazir (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor P.E. Smith (Deputy Mayor)

“ Z. Ali
“ A.J.A. Andrew
“ R.E. Andrew
“ D.A. Anson
“ M. Arif
“ I. Azam
“ D.J. Barker
“ O.D. Bennett
“ M.A. Bird
“ C. Bott
“ P. Bott
“ R. Burley
“ B. Cassidy
“ K. Chambers
“ A.G. Clarke
“ D. Coughlan
“ S.P. Coughlan
“ A. Ditta
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul
“ J. Fitzpatrick
“ S.F. Fitzpatrick
“ M. D. Flower
“ A.D. Harris
“ L.A. Harrison
“ E.F. Hughes

Councillor G. Illmann-Walker

“ D. James
“ L.D. Jeavons
“ T.J. Jukes
“ P. Lane
“ M. Longhi
“ Mrs. R.A. Martin
“ J. Murray
“ G. Perry
“ K. Phillips
“ L.J. Rattigan
“ J. Rochelle
“ E.B. Russell
“ H.S. Sarohi
“ K. Sears
“ Mrs. D.A. Shires
“ I. Shires
“ R.M. Thomas
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ A. Underhill
“ S. Wade
“ F.J. Westley
“ V. Whyte
“ T.S. Wilson
“ V.G. Woodruff
“ R.V. Worrall
“ A. Young

107. Apologies

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Cook, Creaney, Hussain, McCracken and Oliver.

108. Minutes

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27th February 2014 copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record and signed

109. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

110. Local Government (Access to information) Act 1985

There were no items to be considered in private session.

111. Mayor's announcements

The Mayor invited members to join him in the Parlour for drinks as this was the last meeting of the municipal year.

The Mayor went on to thank all those members not standing for re-election on 22nd May for their services to the Council and the people of Walsall. He named those members as Councillors Ali, R. Andrew, Azam, Cook, Thomas and Turner.

Councillors Azam, Ali, Arif, A. Andrew, R. Andrew, Bird, Harris, Martin and Towe also expressed their thanks to retiring members.

The Mayor made reference to the record breaking amount of money that he had raised for charity during his term of office and then went on to remind members that this was the last meeting of the municipal year and is a particularly testing time for members as we were now in the run up to the local elections. He requested members to treat each other with respect during proceedings this evening.

112. **Petitions**

The following petitions were submitted:

- (1) Councillor James – “Make dyslexia diagnosis easier for children to get”.
- (2) Councillor Young
 - Road safety measures in Chantry Avenue.
 - Preservation of Dartmouth House as a community asset.
- (3) Councillor Phillips – improved road safety in Blakenall Heath area (further signatures to petition under item 8 – Road safety in Blakenall Heath area).
- (4) Councillor Bennett – Improvement of bus services for residents in Heath End, Pelsall.
- (5) Councillor S. Fitzpatrick – Resurfacing of pavement outside properties in Guild Avenue.
- (6) Councillor Worrall – Provision of small traffic island near steps to Medical Centre on A461 Lichfield Road, Rushall.
- (7) Councillor Smith – transport services provided by Walsall Society for the Blind.
- (8) Councillor Bird – Opposing the proposed increase in Council pitch fees from season 2014/15.

113. **Road safety in Blakenall Heath area – petition**

The report was submitted.

Councillor Phillips spoke to the petition as the organiser. She welcomed the report on the petition and welcomed the figure of £10,000 reserved as part of the 2014/15 capital programme in the event that improvements are recommended at this junction following investigations by the Police.

Councillors J. Fitzpatrick, Young, A. Andrew, S. Coughlan, Bird and Smith contributed to the debate which followed.

Resolved

- (1) That the content of the petition be noted.
- (2) That the Council await the outcome of the investigation into the cause of the road traffic collision on Monday 24 February 2014 at the junction of Valley Road/Ryle Street.

- (3) That it be noted that a provisional sum of £10,000 has been made in the Council's capital budget for 2014/15 to implement additional works at the Valley Road/Ryle Street junction following the conclusion of the police investigation, should this be required.
- (4) That the Council await the outcomes from the prioritisation of the ten identified areas for consideration of a 20 mph sign only speed limit.

114. Question from member of the public

Walsall Society for the Blind transport service

Mrs. B. Brady of Fletcher Road, New Invention asked the following question of Councillor Bird:

"I am a partially sighted senior citizen of Walsall.

On behalf of the blind and partially sighted users of the Day Centres at the Hatherton Street premises of the Walsall Society for the Blind and on behalf of our friends, family, supporters and signatories of the 1000 plus petition and given that the 2013 Annual Treasurer's Report of the Society stated: "Our total reserves stand at £1,844,156, made up of the development fund of £1,200,000, restricted fund £14,202 and £629,956 unrestricted fund", I would like to ask in what ways Walsall Council can support us in persuading the Walsall Society for the Blind to reverse its decision to axe, at the end of June this year, the much needed and valued transport service for the Day Centre users, which will mean not only the loss of the mini-buses but also the loss of our two much valued, experienced and helpful part time drivers?"

Councillor Bird replied that Walsall Society for the Blind was an independent charitable organisation with its own Board of Trustees and Management Committee. The Board of Trustees proposed that the minibus transport would cease from the 30th June 2014 and had been conducting a consultation on this matter which had begun in March 2013. The consultation had been extended at the request of the people that used the service to the end of June 2014. There had been no decision to date.

Councillor Bird said that he had been informed that the minibuses cost £34k a year to run and this was totally funded by the charity. The society day centre numbers had been falling and there were now only 55 people who using the day service. The transport was provided to 26 people, the remainder making independent arrangements to travel to the day service.

Walsall Society for the Blind had offered one to one support to all those affected by the proposed transport changes to assist people to make alternative arrangements.

Councillor Bird went on to inform the meeting that it was possible that the “ring and ride” service might replace the existing service but that this would not be like for like as drivers would not just be delivering people to the centre and that ring and ride needed 2 days notice to book a journey. He went on to say that he was grateful to Councillor Longhi for calling a meeting of the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel to look at this matter and referred to the fact that the Society for the Blind had not accepted an invitation to attend.

Councillor Bird thanked Mrs. Brady for her question.

115. Question from members of the Council

(1) Walsall Society for the Blind transport service

Councillor Smith asked the following question of Councillor Bird:

“On behalf of many blind and partially sighted users of the Hatherton Street Day Centres and on behalf of their families, friends and supporters, would the Leader of the Council, as a matter of urgency, convey to the Board members of the Walsall Society for the Blind, the grave concerns surrounding its decision to axe the 2 driver posts and the bus service that takes users safely to and from the Centre to the comfort of their homes, and furthermore, would he do his utmost to urge the Walsall Society for the Blind to reconsider its decision and indeed to ensure that the bus service for the Day Centre users is retained?”

Councillor Bird replied that he would give an undertaking to speak to the Walsall Society for the Blind on this matter, however, he took a great dislike to the leaflet that had been circulated on this matter and would hope that the Council could unite to express its views to the society.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question of Councillor Bird:

Are you aware of the following points:

- No consultation had taken place with the users of this service
- The users already pay £6 per day when using the bus service
- Ring & Ride would not be a suitable alternative
- Users raised £7,000 themselves toward transport costs
- A leaflet circulated by Councillor Young saying that transport for the blind had been saved with the Ring and Ride service providing a new service.

Councillor Bird replied that at 5.00 p.m. this evening nothing had been heard from Centro, however, users have said that they do not see Ring & Ride as a satisfactory alternative to the present system. At the moment drivers help passengers into their homes and make sure that they are safe. Ring & Ride drivers have a different role. Furthermore Ring & Ride journeys are unplanned and blind passengers will have to sit on the bus for a longer period. He went on to say that this matter should be referred back to the Health Scrutiny and Performance Panel

(2) **Grace Academy**

As the questioner, Councillor Oliver, was not present at the meeting the question was not put.

116. **Impact of welfare reform in Walsall**

The report was submitted, together with the Appendix circulated at the meeting.

It was **moved** by Councillor S. Coughlan, duly seconded and:

Resolved

- (1) That the report on the "Impact of Welfare Reform in Walsall" by the Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel be noted.
- (2) That Cabinet be requested to give consideration to implementing the recommendations contained in the report.

117. **Street entertainment**

The report was submitted.

Councillor Sears informed the Council that one of the preferred locations in the report was incorrect. He said that the site at the junction of Stafford Street and Union Street, Willenhall should be substituted for the service yard off Wood Street.

Accordingly it was **moved** by Councillor Sears, duly seconded and:

Resolved

- (1) That the attached policy for performance of street entertainment be adopted.

- (2) That approval be given to the sites appended to the policy as preferred locations for street entertainment, subject to the site at the junction of Stafford Street and Union Street, Willenhall being substituted for the service yard off Wood Street.
- (3) That the Head of Community Safety and Public Protection be delegated authority to identify additional preferred locations for street entertainment after consultation with the local community and businesses from 1 May 2014.

118. Portfolio holder briefings

(a) Children's services

Councillor R. Andrew, portfolio holder for Children's services gave a presentation.

Members asked questions in relation to the presentation which were responded to by Councillor Andrew.

(b) Community engagement and voluntary sector

Councillor I. Shires, portfolio holder for Community engagement and voluntary sector gave a presentation.

Members asked questions in relation to the presentation which were responded to by Councillor Shires.

At this point in the meeting, it was **moved** by Councillor Bird, duly seconded and:

Resolved

That Council procedure rules be suspended to enable the business of the meeting to be completed.

(c) Environment

Councillor Arif, portfolio holder for Environment gave a presentation.

Members asked questions in relation to the presentation which were responded to by Councillor Arif.

119. **Notice of motion – Walsall Society for the Blind**

As Councillor Worrall had left the Council Chamber the motion was not proceeded with.

At this point in the meeting, the Council sat as charitable trustees when considering the following item, the normal Council procedure rules did not apply.

120. **Annual report of Barr Beacon Trust Management Committee**

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor A. Andrew, duly seconded and:

Resolved

- (1) That the report be noted.
- (2) That the Trust recognises the work of Council officers from the Council's Clean and Green Services, Financial and Democratic Services who supported the Trust this year and extends its thanks to those officers.

The meeting terminated at 9.10 p.m.

Mayor:

Date: