



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 12th January, 2009, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

Present

Councillor T.G. Ansell (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor K. Aftab

“ A.J.A. Andrew
“ D.A. Anson
“ M. Arif
“ C.M. Ault
“ J.M. Barton
“ L.A. Beeley
“ M.A. Bird
“ C. Bott
“ P. Bott
“ B. Cassidy
“ K. Chambers
“ A.G. Clarke
“ J. R. Cook
“ S.P. Coughlan
“ C.U. Creaney
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul
“ M. D. Flower
“ A.E. Griffiths
“ A.D. Harris
“ L.A. Harrison
“ E.F. Hughes
“ P.F. Hughes
“ A.D. Johnson
“ H. Khan
“ M. Longhi
“ S.W. Madeley
“ Ms. R.A. Martin

Councillor Mrs. B.V. McCracken

“ M. Munir
“ M. Nazir
“ M. Nazir
“ J.G. O'Hare
“ T.S. Oliver
“ A.J. Paul
“ G. Perry
“ K. Phillips
“ D.J. Pitt
“ M.G. Pitt
“ I.C. Robertson
“ J. Rochelle
“ B. Sanders
“ H.S. Sarohi
“ K. Sears
“ Mrs. D.A. Shires
“ I. Shires
“ P.E. Smith
“ 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

62. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Mushtaq, E. Pitt and Zahid Ali.

63. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd November, 2008, copies having been sent to each member of the Council be approved as a correct record and signed, subject to Councillor Martin's declaration of interest being amended to read "Item 10 – Walsall Adult and Community College".

64. **Declarations of interest**

The following members declared their interest in the items indicated:

Councillor Cook	Item 15 – Fairer charging policy (personal and prejudicial)
Councillor Oliver	Item 14(a) – Chair, Walsall Adult and Community College (personal)

65. **Mayor's announcements**

(1) New Year Honours

The Mayor, on behalf of the Council, congratulated the following persons who had received honours in the New Year list 2009:

- Ellie Simmonds - M.B.E. (youngest recipient of an MBE for her double gold winning performance at the Paralympics)
- Doug Birch – M.B.E. (Brownhills Community Worker for service to the Brownhills community dating back to the 1950s)
- Roy Hulbert- M.B.E. (Vice-Chair of Governors at Shire Oak School for services to education)

(2) Councillor Cath Micklewright

The Mayor referred to the death of Councillor Micklewright and paid tribute to her services to Walsall over a period of many years.. Councillors O'Hare, Madeley, Walker, Smith, Bird, Phillips and Sanders also paid tribute to Councillor Micklewright, following which it was **moved** by the Mayor, duly seconded and:

Resolved

That this Council have heard with deep regret of the death of Councillor Mrs. Catherine Micklewright a member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from May 1992 to May 2000 and from June 2004 to November 2008 of which Council she was Deputy Mayor in 2008/2009 and place on record their appreciation of her services to the town over a period of many years and extend to her family their sincere sympathy in their bereavement.

Members and officers stood in silence as a mark of respect

66. Petitions

Councillor Phillips submitted the following petitions:

- (a) Road safety and access to shops at Lower Farm
- (b) Improvement of toilet facilities in Bloxwich

67. Questions by members of the Council

(1) Fairtrade

Councillor Robertson asked the following question of Councillor Arif:

“What progress has been made by this Council to support Walsall meeting the five criteria to become a Fairtrade town?”

Councillor Arif replied that the Council considered and agreed a Fairtrade policy on 24th April 2005. A steering group was originally set up but had not met in this format for a while due to changes within the Council and other demands. A number of local groups had been meeting to discuss Fairtrade within their local area.

He said the Council used fairtrade products as far as possible in its meetings, although the main conference rooms had products from sustainable sources and which complied with Rainforest Alliance criteria rather than Fairtrade. The Town Hall restaurant in particular used Fairtrade products and promoted their use in civic catering as well as the restaurant. The current food contract included the provision of Fairtrade products and a number of community groups and day centres used Fairtrade.

Fairtrade products were now more readily available and nearly all major supermarkets stocked them as well as being used by a number of local café's. Some outlets, such as Costa, used their own sustainable sources, Rain Forest Alliance, which mirrored Fairtrade but would not meet its eligibility criteria and the use of the logo.

Councillor Arif said that vending machines around the Civic Centre did contain some Fairtrade chocolate and cereal bars but these had not been popular because of their higher cost, despite a major tasting event in the Council House. The premium being paid for the products was reducing as it became main stream. The premium used to be 20% but was now around 10%.

The Council were aware that Walsall Endeavours (St Paul's) were keen to champion the wider use of Fairtrade and were developing a local campaign for 2009 which would involve surveys and benchmarking take up and usage of Fairtrade products. A number of local events, including possible stalls in the markets, were being planned for Fairtrade fortnight in February 2009 and information would be included in the Town Centre newsletter. The Council would be working with them to support this campaign.

Fairtrade appeared on the Council's intranet site.

Councillor Robertson said that he hoped the Council would fully engage in Fairtrade fortnight and promote Fairtrade.

Councillor Arif said that procurement would continue to do this.

(2) Concessionary travel for the elderly and disabled

Councillor Oliver asked the following question of Councillor McCracken:

"What is the Cabinet's current policy on concessionary train and tram travel for the elderly and disabled, and do you pledge to continue to fund it in the next financial year?"

Councillor McCracken said that the Council did not provide concessionary passes, as these were administered by Centro on behalf of the West Midlands Transport Authority for all residents of the West Midlands.

She went on to say that Centro operates a free travel pass scheme, available to blind and disabled people who were residents of the West Midlands and who met the relevant criteria. The permit entitled the holder to travel on bus, rail and metro services in the West Midlands from 9.30 a.m. until the end of daytime service on Monday to Friday and anytime at weekends and on bank holidays.

For disabled people who required to travel before 9.30 a.m., Councillor McCracken said that the Council paid a top-up to allow users free travel before 9.30 a.m. This charge ranged from £301 to £442 and was dependent on the type of travel and the area covered. The top-up was only payable by application and subject to the person being registered blind. The local authority spent between £28k and £32k on this discretionary element of travel passes. The Council has been assured by the current Chairman of Centro that there are no plans to withdraw this.

Councillor Oliver welcomed this commitment.

(3) Walsall market

Councillor Coughlan asked the following question of Councillor Andrew:

“Will the Cabinet support the regeneration scrutiny panel and ensure that Walsall market stays in Council control and not be transferred to any private sector organisation?”

Councillor Andrew said that he would not advise the Cabinet to rule anything in or out, but there were no plans to transfer the market to the private sector at the present time.

Councillor Coughlan asked the following supplementary question

Walsall market is a profit making activity and it goes in some way to subsidise markets in the districts, how long will the Council subsidise Willenhall Market whilst money from this is being used to grease the hands of developers?

Councillor Andrew replied that the Cabinet was looking at not only how Walsall market was managed, but how other markets in the town were managed in order to support them and ensure they were sustainable and were improving. Only Darlaston was making a loss.

(4) Worklessness

Councillor Coughlan asked the following question of Councillor Andrew:

“What measures have the Council put in place to tackle the worklessness agenda and how will the Council ensure all opportunities are made available to residents to help them through any period of unemployment?”

Councillor Andrew said that the Council took worklessness seriously and referred to the presentation which had been circulated around the Council Chamber.

The Council was the key facilitator of activity to tackle worklessness although the delivery of activity was undertaken by a range of public/voluntary sector partners. There was a strong multi-agency approach to addressing worklessness across the borough.

The Council was currently supporting five projects through the Walsall Strategic Partnership using Working Neighbourhood Funding that assisted people back into work. These projects were identified by looking at activities needed to be undertaken to address worklessness. These projects included transport assistance, advice and guidance, training and offering the opportunity of self-employment. These activities would get over 550 residents back into work, support over 200 businesses and offer a large range of varying support to residents to improve their access to job opportunities within the next year.

The main activities that the Council would commission to assist residents were held in the Worklessness Target Action Plan (TAP) which complemented mainstream provision and services offered by partners and proposed to deliver around £4m worth of activity to support people into work. Support would also be offered to those at risk of unemployment through pre-redundancy assistance.

With regard to the Worklessness Target Action Plan 2009/11, Councillor Andrew said that the LSP Executive was to make recommendations to Cabinet in early 2009 to approve activity, some of these projects were:

- Pilot out of hours Benefit Advice (Housing /Council Tax)-offers a out-of-hours line
- Pre-Redundancy Assistance – providing information, access to training and job-matching where available.
- Flexible and confidence in childcare
- Employment practices in the public sector - increasing opportunities for local people to access employment in the public sector
- Transportation Barriers (Workwise) - offering free bus tickets to enable people to access transport to interviews and work once offered employment
- Multi Agency One Stop Shop (Darlaston JET) - offering advice, guidance, job vacancies in an area not covered by a job centre

Councillor Andrew referred to support into jobs events and said that the aim of the events was to promote employment opportunities, the skills and personal qualities required for these jobs and the range of support available locally to assist local people, particularly those who were long term unemployed.. Importantly the events were to raise the awareness and aspirations of local people to consider the range of services and support available to help them and make positive steps into taking up employment in the future. The Public, Private and Voluntary Sector Partnership Events were held on a bi-monthly basis in priority wards to publicise jobs, support and services available to residents to secure employment. These had been led by the Council and had been very successful so far from the feedback received from attendees and support agencies and businesses with vacancies.

Future dates for events were as follows:

21st January 2009 – Palfrey Sure Start, South Street, Palfrey
11th March 2009 – Beechdale Community Centre, Bloxwich
24th April 2009 – Aldridge Community Centre, Middlemore Lane, Aldridge
11th July 2009 – Willenhall Chart Centre, 19 Gomer Street, Willenhall
24th September 2009 – Walsall Town Hall, Lichfield Street, Walsall
11th November 2009 – Darlaston Town Hall, Victoria Street, Darlaston

Councillor Coughlan asked the following supplementary question:

Unemployment has soared and will Cabinet members support the Government's proposals not to return to the community-destroying times and recognise that it is the neighbourhood level and not a borough wide level?

Councillor Andrew said that he could not speak on behalf of national government, but the Council was committed to doing this at neighbourhood level and would continue to do so.

(5) Energy and cost saving measures

Councillor Robertson asked the following question of Councillor Walker:

“What measures will this Council introduce to support energy and cost saving measures, so setting an example to our residents and play our small part in combating global warming while also reducing the waste of our Council Tax revenue?”

Councillor Walker said that the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan recently signed by the Council identified a range of activities and responsibilities that the Council had/or would develop in response to the broader climate change agenda. National indicators 185 and 188 also placed a duty on the Council to consider its contribution to energy usage. She went on to refer to some of the activities and actions that the Council were undertaking as detailed below.

Automatic workstation shut down: ICT have developed a computer programme to force all computers to be turned off at the end of the day. The estimated power savings calculated from the number of computers that are left on overnight is £15,000 per year. This application has been developed in-house by ICT staff and this has avoided any external software costs.

Green Fleet Review: Climate Change Team working with Fleet Services and the Energy Saving Trust to identify the Council's current transport operations. We are currently in the early stages and in the process of gathering data for mileage, numbers of employees who use their personal vehicles for business use and type of fuel used. Before we can even look at setting reductions we need to have an idea of where we are at present. This service is provided free to the Council by the Energy Saving Trust.

Energy awareness: An energy awareness campaign is being rolled out to all our Residential Homes. This is being coordinated by one of the Registered Managers. This follows on from training to employees and school caretakers last year. A programme for 2009 for staff generally will be developed. Details of good housekeeping are already included within the e-induction package.

Other measures: We are nearing completion of surveys of our buildings over 1000m² to produce Display Energy Certificates and site specific reports with recommendations for improving their performance.

Building Schools for the Future (BSF): Capital investment in the building fabric will provide a significant opportunity to reduce emissions from new and refurbished buildings. The principle aim will be to minimise energy consumption by using high levels of insulation, heating technology and intelligent lighting schemes. The Council is increasing year on year the quantity of energy it purchases from sustainable sources.

Councillor Robertson said he was pleased and hoped that switching off PC's would save more. He asked about the position with regard to mobile phones and other equipment.

Councillor Walker said that she would take this on board

(6) Walsall Town Centre Transport package

Councillor Oliver asked the following question of Councillor Harris:

“Could the Cabinet portfolio holder for transport please give an update on the current proposed completion date for the Walsall Town Centre Transport Package (i.e. the new ring road) and also list the previous proposed completion dates which have subsequently been extended?”

Councillor Harris replied that Walsall town centre was undergoing a programme of major development by both the public and private sectors that would ensure the substantial regeneration of the area creating thousands of jobs for the local community, such as the new College, Hospital PFI, proposed Gigaport, and Waterfront developments. The Town Centre Transport Package (TCTP), Ring Road improvement, was seen as the essential catalyst to the successful delivery of these projects with the additional benefits of reducing congestion and improving traffic flow.

He confirmed that the latest published scheduled completion dates for the project are as detailed within the most recent Ring Road Leaflet dated December 2008. He said that the Pleck Road one way traffic system was successfully removed on the 28th December, earlier than stated, after completion of the Pleck Road/Rollingmill Street junction. The northern section of Pleck Road and its junction with Wolverhampton Street would take until mid April 2009 due to works to the existing Canal Bridge where beams were being replaced now that the major water main had been installed.

The objective was to ensure safe operation of the new road and so sections were only made operational when we were fully satisfied that there was minimal risk to all road users. The current contract completion date (operational) was 22nd February 2009. This was to match the approved extensions due to the delays of the works caused by the statutory undertaker diversionary works.

Construction of the project commenced in July 2006 and at that time it was envisaged that works would be operational by summer 2008. To minimise future disruption, we had ensured proper coordination with both the Hospital and College developments and incorporated extra works. A major impact on progress had been the poor performance of the statutory undertakers and issues with Network Rail which had only recently been resolved. Poor weather during the summer and in January had made the situation worse.

In October 2007 the completion date was revised to September 2008. In February 2008 all Members were briefed that this had been further delayed to October 2008 and he had advised Council of this in April 2008. After completion of most Statutory Undertakers' works he was able to advise the Stakeholder Forum in June 2008 that the works would be operational by Christmas 2008. These dates were based on the best information available at the time following detailed discussions with the contractor.

Councillor Harris said that the emphasis had always been to give information relating to when sections of road become 'operational and usable' by the motorist or general public rather than 'completed' which, of course, had a quite clear meaning when used in contractual terms.

He said that the contractor and officers of the Council were committed to delivering this essential and complex scheme. Everyone was frustrated by the ongoing delays but he reassured members that good project management was in place and, if it was not for the impact of the performance of the statutory undertakers which was outside of the Council's control, the project would have been completed by now. Subject to weather conditions and resolving concerns over a gas main in the Pleck Road area the project would meet the revised programme. Finishing works would be ongoing to suit the planting season and to allow for the correction of defects.

Councillor Harris concluded by saying it was unfortunate that this important project had been affected by these severe constraints. Not only had the contractor had to deal with huge complications in respect of the utility companies, major new investments sitting cheek by jowl with road works and some very poor weather, but had had to do this with, on average, over 21,000 vehicles travelling along this major artery every day. Under the circumstances he felt that the team had done an excellent job on behalf of the residents and businesses of the borough and had laid a very substantial foundation for regeneration in the area for many years to come.

Councillor Oliver asked the following supplementary question:

What is the final cost and where will this be paid from?

Councillor Harris said that GOWM was supporting the Council in its application for increase grant from the Department for Transport to meet eligible costs outside of the Council's control and it was hoped that a decision would be made soon.

68. **Birchills-Leamore Ward by-election result**

The Council noted the following result of the by-election for the Birchills-Leamore Ward held on 27th November 2008:

Name of candidates	Votes cast	Candidate elected
Aftab, Kamran	764	Kamran Aftab
Booker, Paul	34	
Cockayne, Christine	72	
Davies, Alan George	69	
Hazell, Elizabeth	52	
Moore, Malcolm William	90	
Worrall, Richard Vernon	661	

Percentage turnout – 19.6%

69. **Appointment of Deputy Mayor**

It was **moved** by Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Andrew and it was

Resolved:

That Councillor Arthur Gary Clarke be appointed Deputy Mayor of this Borough for the remainder of the municipal year 2008/2009.

70. **Mayoralty 2009/2010**

It was **moved** by Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Andrew and it was:

Resolved

That Councillor J.G. O'Hare be nominated as Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the municipal year 2009/2010.

It was **moved** by Councillor O'Hare, seconded by Councillor Andrew and it was:

Resolved

That Councillor A.G. Clarke be nominated as Deputy Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the municipal year 2009/2010.

71. **Recommendation of Cabinet – Housing Strategy 2008-2011**

The report to Cabinet was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor McCracken and seconded by Councillor Andrew:

That the Housing Strategy 2008-2011 be adopted.

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

Resolved

That the Housing Strategy 2008-2011 be adopted.

72. Schools Forum

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor O'Hare and seconded by Councillor Andrew:

That a Schools Forum be established under The Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2002 as amended by The Schools Forum Regulations 2005.

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

Resolved

That a Schools Forum be established under The Schools Forum (England) Regulations 2002 as amended by The Schools Forum Regulations 2005.

73. Membership of Committees

(a) Audit Committee

The Council noted that the Conservative Group had appointed the following members for the remainder of the municipal year:

Councillor Rochelle in place of Councillor Clarke
Councillor Aftab in place of the late Councillor Micklewright.

(b) Licensing and Safety Committee

The Council noted that the Conservative Group had appointed Councillor Aftab to the Committee in place of the late Councillor Micklewright for the remainder of the municipal year.

(c) Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee A

The Council noted that the Conservative Group had appointed Councillor Aftab to the Sub-Committee in place of the late Councillor Micklewright for the remainder of the municipal year.

(d) Corporate Scrutiny and Performance Panel

The Council noted that the Labour Group has appointed Councillor Chambers to the vacancy on the Panel following the resignation from the Council of former Councillor J. Phillips.

74. Nominations to outside bodies and charities

(a) Walsall Adult and Community College

Resolved

That Councillors Arif, Cassidy, McCracken and Towe be appointed member governors of the Walsall Adult and Community College for a period of 4 years.

(b) School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall

Resolved

That Councillor Douglas-Maul be appointed a Trustee of the School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall for the balance of the period expiring on 25th August 2012 in place of the late Councillor Micklewright.

(c) Blanch Woollaston Charity

Resolved

That Councillor Aftab be appointed a Trustee of the Blanch Woollaston Charity for the balance of the period expiring on 13th September 2011 in place of the late Councillor Micklewright.

75. Notice of motion – Charges for social care transport services

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

This Council calls upon the Cabinet to suspend the recently introduced flat rate fee of a £4 daily return travel charge for disabled people who attend our local day centres – in order to enable proper discussions with user and carer groups as to the implementation of this charge, and a better understanding as to how this charge relates to the Council's "fairer charging" process.

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

**For the motion -
24 members**

Cllr: Oliver
I. Shires
Anson
Barton
C. Bott
P. Bott
Cassidy
Chambers
Coughlan
Creaney
P. Hughes
Johnson
Khan
Madeley
Nazir
Phillips
Robertson
Sarohi
D.A. Shires
Smith
Underhill
Wilkes
Woodruff
Young

**Against the motion -
31 members**

Cllr: O'Hare
Aftab
Andrew
Ansell
Arif
Ault
Beeley
Bird
Clarke
Douglas-Maul
Flower
Griffiths
Harris
Harrison
E. Hughes
Longhi
Martin
McCracken
Munir
Paul
Perry
D. Pitt
M. Pitt
Rochelle
Sanders
Sears
Towe
Turner
Tweddle
Walker
Yasin

The meeting terminated at 8.18 p.m.