



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 8th January 2018 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

Present

Councillor M. Longhi (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor P. Bott (Deputy Mayor)

“ B. Allen
“ A.J.A. Andrew
“ D.J. Barker
“ O.D. Bennett
“ M.A. Bird
“ C. Bott
“ R. Burley
“ K. Chambers
“ A.G. Clarke
“ S.J. Cooper
“ D. Coughlan
“ S.P. Coughlan
“ S.R. Craddock
“ C.U. Creaney
“ S.K. Ditta
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul
“ K. Ferguson
“ M. Follows
“ J. Fitzpatrick
“ S.F. Fitzpatrick
“ N.Z. Gultasib
“ A.D. Harris
“ D.T. Hazell
“ E.A. Hazell
“ A.J. Hicken
“ K. Hussain

Councillor L.D. Jeavons

“ C. Jones
“ T.J. Jukes
“ A. Kudhail
“ Mrs. R.A. Martin
“ J. Murray
“ A.A. Nawaz
“ M. Nazir
“ A.S. Nazir
“ G. Perry
“ K. Phillips
“ L.J. Rattigan
“ I.C. Robertson
“ J. Rochelle
“ E.B. Russell
“ H.S. Sarohi
“ K. Sears
“ I. Shires
“ G.S. Sohal
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ A. Underhill
“ S. Wade
“ M. Ward
“ P. Washbrook
“ T.S. Wilson
“ R.V. Worrall
“ A. Young

57. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors Clews, A. Ditta, Harrison, Hughes and James.

58. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th November 2017 copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record and signed.

59. **Declarations of interest**

Councillors D. Coughlan, S. Coughlan and Nawaz declared an interest in item 8 – Petition relating to Palfrey Sure Start Children’s Centre and left the room during consideration of the item.

60. **Local Government (Access to Information) Act, 1985 (as amended)**

There were no items to be considered in private session.

61. **Mayor’s announcements**

Death of Mr. J.D. Winn

The Mayor referred to the recent death of former Councillor Des Winn, Mayor in 1976/77.

The Mayor and Councillors S. Coughlan, Bird and Shires paid tribute to Mr. Winn’s services to Walsall over a period of many years, following which it was **moved** by the Mayor, duly seconded and:

Resolved

That this Council expresses its regret at the death of Mr. J.D. Winn a member of Walsall County Borough Council from 1958 to 1974, a member of Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council from 1974 to 1996 and Mayor in 1976/77 and places on record their appreciation of his services to the borough over a period of many years and expresses its condolences to his family at this sad time.

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

62. **Petition**

Councillor Robertson presented a petition from residents of Broadstone Avenue and Bloxwich Road asking for the installation of gated access behind the houses to prevent anti-social behaviour.

At this point, Councillors D. Coughlan, S. Coughlan and Nawaz left the meeting having declared an interest in the item and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

63. **Petition: Palfrey Sure Start Children's Centre**

A report was submitted.

Shabir Akhtar and Sabir Mia presented the petition and emphasised the community's strong objections to the allocation of the tender to Change, Grow, Live. They highlighted that the community would have been better served should the tender have been awarded to the previous provider and raised concern that the tender included services to assist people with drug and alcohol issues.

Resolved

- (1) That the concerns of the petitioners be noted.
- (2) That Council notes that the tendering process which led to the award of the contract to Change Grow Live has been scrutinised by Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee concluded that the process was fair, open and transparent, that it had been correctly adhered to, and that none of the organisations tendering for the contract had been disadvantaged.
- (3) That the Council note that legally there is no power to interrupt the process of awarding the contract on the grounds raised by the petitioners. There was a mandatory procedure to be followed, including a requirement to notify the successful tenderer the award of the contract, it would have been unlawful for the Council to not have done so.
- (4) That the Council notes the plan of actions as part of the transition and implementation of the new contract to ensure services user continue to receive a local quality service.

Councillors D. Coughlan, S. Coughlan and Nawaz returned to the meeting.

64. **Question by member of the public**

Council tax arrears

Mr. P.E. Smith asked the following question of Councillor D. Coughlan:

“Given that in reply to a question that I asked (when a member of this Council) at the Council Meeting of 13th July 2015, that in the short space of time from April 2015 to 30 June 2015 (the first 3 months from when the Labour administration first introduced a 25% Council tax bill for those households that had previously, on the grounds of low income, been exempt from paying any Council tax), it was revealed the arrears attributable to these 19,465 households hence subject to Council tax was £343,000 affecting 6,600 (34%) of the 19,465 households, and given further that the current Labour administration is preparing the next budget that presently has within it an implicit 4.99% increase in Council tax, well above the inflation rate, can the appropriate Portfolio holder now update us by informing me, the Council and the public about the present level of Council tax arrears and in particular:

- (a) What the total of Council tax arrears (in £s) amounts to, at the present time?
- (b) How many households, eligible for Council tax, are presently in arrears?
- (c) How much of present outstanding arrears can be attributed to those households (19,465 in 2015) that are now obliged to pay Council tax due to the changes brought in from April 2015?”

In response to the relevant parts of the question Councillor D. Coughlan replied as follows:

- (a) *What the total of Council tax arrears (in £s) amounts to, at the present time?*

“£12m of the £347m billed in last 3 years is in arrears equating to 3.4% 96.6% paid in full.

This will continue to fall. Arrangements are in place to collect £9m. 99% will be paid in full. Work continues to collect the remainder.

- (b) *How many households, eligible for Council tax, are presently in arrears?*

“I can confirm 11,150 households are presently in arrears. It is anticipated that this will reduce to 2,885* by the end of March 2018.”

(*115,427 households x 97.5% collection rate)

- (c) *How much of present outstanding arrears can be attributed to those households (19,465 in 2015) that are now obliged to pay Council tax due to the changes brought in from April 2015?"*

"£3.6m – this will reduce to £0.9m under current arrangements. The service continues to work with affected households and ensures that the hardship policy is used to help individuals where appropriate."

Mr. Smith asked the following supplementary question:

"With over 11,000 in arrears, why is the Council still intent on chopping services to the bone whilst increasing Council tax by 4.99%? Will this not just aggravate the arrears situation?"

Councillor D. Coughlan replied stating that the Council had to set a legal budget. She extended an invitation to Mr. Smith to attend the Cabinet meeting in February, 2018, at which the budget would be discussed.

65. Mayoralty 2018/19

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

Resolved

That Councillor P. Bott be nominated as Mayor and Councillor M.R. Burley be nominated as Deputy Mayor of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council for the municipal year 2018/2019.

66. Recommendation of Audit Committee – Annual review of Treasury Management policies and mid-year position statement 2017/18

The report to Audit Committee was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Robertson, seconded by Councillor Craddock and:

Resolved

That Council approve the Treasury Management Policies, as set out at Appendix A to the report and notes the mid-year position statement for treasury management activities 2017/18 including prudential and local indicators, as set out at Appendix B to the report.

67. **Change in political group membership**

A report was submitted.

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

Resolved

That Council agree the revised proportionality calculations as set out in paragraph 3.6 within the report.

68. **Community, leisure and culture portfolio holder report**

A report was submitted.

Councillor Shires, portfolio holder for community, leisure and culture gave a presentation.

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

The meeting terminated at 7.15 p.m.