



# Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 21st September 2015 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

## Present

### Councillor A. Underhill (Mayor) in the Chair

#### Councillor K. Phillips (Deputy Mayor)

“ A.J.A. Andrew  
“ D.A. Anson  
“ M. Arif  
“ O.D. Bennett  
“ M.A. Bird  
“ C. Bott  
“ P. Bott  
“ R. Burley  
“ K. Chambers  
“ A.G. Clarke  
“ C.E. Clews  
“ S.J. Cooper  
“ D. Coughlan  
“ S.P. Coughlan  
“ S.R. Craddock  
“ C.U. Creaney  
“ A. Ditta  
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul  
“ K. Ferguson  
“ M. Follows  
“ J. Fitzpatrick  
“ S.F. Fitzpatrick  
“ A.D. Harris  
“ L.A. Harrison  
“ D.T. Hazell  
“ E.A. Hazell  
“ A. Hicken  
“ E.F. Hughes

#### Councillor K. Hussain

“ D. James  
“ L.D. Jeavons  
“ C. Jones  
“ T.J. Jukes  
“ A. Kudhail  
“ M. Longhi  
“ J. Murray  
“ A.A. Nawaz  
“ M. Nazir  
“ G. Perry  
“ L.J. Rattigan  
“ I.C. Robertson  
“ J. Rochelle  
“ E.B. Russell  
“ H.S. Sarohi  
“ K. Sears  
“ Mrs. D.A. Shires  
“ I. Shires  
“ P.E. Smith  
“ G.S. Sohal  
“ C.D.D. Towe  
“ S. Wade  
“ P. Washbrook  
“ F.J. Westley  
“ V. Whyte  
“ T.S. Wilson  
“ R.V. Worrall  
“ A. Young

38. **Apology**

An apology for non-attendance was submitted on behalf of Councillor Martin.

39. **Minutes**

**Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13th July 2015 copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record and signed.

40. **Declarations of interest**

The following members declared an interest in the items indicated:

Councillor Burley                      Item 16 – Notice of motion with regard to Right to Buy – member of Caldmore/Accord Board.

Councillor Ditta                        Item 18 – Notice of motion with regard to wheelchairs in taxis.

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

There were no items to be considered in private session.

42. **Mayor's announcements**

(a) **Civic Service**

The Mayor informed members that a Civic Service would be held at St. Lawrence's Church in Darlaston on Sunday 11th October 2015 at 3.00 p.m.

(b) **Extra-ordinary Council – 19 October 2015**

The Chief Executive explained the reason for the date of the extraordinary meeting to deal with the establishment of the Combined Authority. He said that the government had set the timetable to approve or not by the 20th October and it was most advantageous to the Council to make the decision as close to the date as possible. Members would be aware of what was happening in the West Midlands and know what was involved and so would be fully informed to make a decision. Therefore the meeting had been called as late as possible.

43. **Petitions**

The following petitions were submitted:

- (1) Councillor Jeavons – Against proposals for the former Metal Casements site.
- (2) Councillor Robertson – Goscote Lodge Crescent – proposed travellers site.
- (3) Councillor Worrall – Site of former Daw End Special School, Floyds Lane, Rushall being used by travellers.
- (4) Councillor J. Fitzpatrick – Commissioned youth funding.
- (5) Councillor Wilson – Wellfield Road – resurfacing of pavement.

#### 44. **Questions from members of the Council**

##### (1) **Obesity**

Councillor D. Coughlan asked the following question:

“Can you explain to this Council how you are tackling obesity in the borough, what initiatives there are, especially to combat childhood obesity, and the cost to this Council?”

Councillor Bird replied that obesity remained a challenge in Walsall, in line with national trends, Walsall’s population continued to become increasingly overweight and obese. Walsall Council Public Health worked with a range of key partners, commissioned a variety of initiatives and had allocated £343,549 transformation funding to develop existing Council services including clean and green services, environmental health, planning and engineering and transportation that contributed to reducing obesity in adults and children.

He said that Public Health’s Healthy Weight budget was £1,233,151 with £917,842 spent on childhood obesity plus £343,549 through transformational funding.

Councillor Bird said that in relation to increasing healthy weight prevalence in children there were a range of initiatives in place.

Councillor Coughlan asked the following supplementary question:

“Why have we allowed a burger van onto the play area in the Arboretum?”

Councillor Bird replied that because of a dwindling budget the provision of food in the Arboretum had gone out to tender and a rent was paid for the pitch. There was a choice for people to make.

##### (2) **Lichfield and Hatherton canals**

Councillor Worrall asked the following question of Councillor Andrew:

“Given the exceptionally welcome news that the Trust have just completed the purchase and clearance of 1 km of decades long overgrown canal bed between The Boat Inn on the A461 at Summerhill near Muckley Corner, and the aqueduct over the M6 Toll, and expect to have built a disabled friendly canal trail from Summerhill over the aqueduct through to Catshill junction at Brownhills by year’s end, would the cabinet member advise what steps the Council have taken since the notice of motion in September 2009 and Cabinet’s decision in January 2010, to support the Trust in its admirable endeavours, and what new positive steps might be taken in light of the most recent developments which bring the prospect of full restoration between Lichfield and Walsall suddenly much closer?”

The Council noted that in submitting his question Councillor Worrall had included the following background information:

“At its meeting of 14 September 2009, Council unanimously approved a notice of motion, moved by Councillor Wilkes, resolving that:

“This Council welcomes the news that the Lichfield and Hatherton Canals Restoration Trust now has a phased, costed programme which will lead to the restoration of the Borough's waterway links to the northern canal network by relinking the canal at Brownhills Ogle Junction with Huddlesford Junction at Lichfield.

It notes in particular:

- (a) the significant regeneration benefits this will bring to Brownhills as a gateway to the Borough, and to the whole of Walsall Borough and
- (b) the recent launch of a Phase One funding appeal headed up by the Trust's high profile President, David Suchet.

The Council expresses its full support for the project to restore the eight miles of canal in question, and asks that officers enter into discussion with the officers of the LHCRT with a view to reporting to Cabinet at an early date setting out ways in which the Council can provide meaningful support to the efforts of the Trust in bringing this major project to fruition."

At Cabinet on 13 January 2010, it was agreed, inter alia, to authorise officers to pursue the formation of an officer steering group with relevant organisations, including neighbouring local authorities (Lichfield, Cannock Chase and South Staffordshire District Councils), Staffordshire County Council, British Waterways and LHCRT, and further that the role of the steering group would be to advise the LHCRT on specific planning and strategic issues relating to the restoration of the Lichfield and Hatherton Canal links."

Councillor Andrew replied that there was not much that this Council could do as it was on the periphery of the area, but the Council would support the Canal Trust as much as possible and would be happy to have discussions with the Trust.

Councillor Andrew said that he would provide Councillor Worrall with a copy of his reply.

(3) **Public health grant**

Councillor Robertson asked the following question:

“Will the Cabinet member join in condemning the announcement by Central Government of a cut to Walsall in the Public Health grant of a yet unconfirmed amount of 6.2%. Do you agree that this grant, when taking into consideration the amount received by our immediate neighbouring authorities which is already showing a comparative shortfall of around £1m with Walsall currently receiving the least public health funding allocation per head of the population within its group of statistical neighbours at £58 per head as compared to an average of £73.6 per head and that if this 6.2% cut is implemented will leave us £1.8M short of a fair allocation? In addition will you also join us in condemning the £1.6M shortfall in comparison with our neighbouring authorities of the future allocation of funding to cover the commissioning of health visitors who come into the responsibility of Public Health in October 2015.”

Councillor Bird said that he did not support the Government on this.

Councillor Bird continued that he wholehearted condemned the announcement by Central Government to cut the Public Health grant and of their preferred option to apply this across the board resulting in a 6.2% cut. He also agreed that the cut to this grant, when taking into consideration the amount received by immediate neighbouring authorities (using local authorities with similar levels of deprivation as comparators, the shortfall was £4.26 million) was especially relevant when taking into account the additional £1.6 million shortfall in comparison with our neighbouring authorities of the future allocation of funding to cover the commissioning of health visitors who had come into the responsibility of Public Health in October 2015. A paper was presented at Health and Wellbeing Board informing partners of the proposals and received overwhelming support against applying the cut in such a way as to further impact on the already decreased allocation to Walsall.

Walsall Public Health had strongly contested the proposal in a letter to Public Health England that outlined the implications on services if the preferred option went ahead. The Council also continued to decry the allocation for the Health Visiting service and the impact this would undoubtedly have on the delivery of this service.

Councillor Robertson asked the following supplementary question:

“Do you agree that residents are being short changed, will cost lives and can we join in a deputation to the Minister and lobby the borough’s 3 Members of Parliament?”

Councillor Bird said that he supported lobbying.

(4) **Living wage**

Councillor Young asked the following question of Councillor Arif:

“Would the Cabinet holder agree that the recent published evidence shows that the over consumption of sugar and salt is a major factor affecting the current and future health of our population and that over 70% of our residents here in Walsall do not have a healthy weight or life style with many of our young people showing early signs of type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. Do you join with me in also recognising the need for support to those of our residents on more limited income to encourage them to adopt a healthier lifestyle despite serious economic pressures.

Will you also agree that this Council must adopt measures to ensure that every avenue under our direct influence is used to encourage and support our residents young and old, to adopt a healthier life style and that we must be an exemplar employer throughout the council ensuring good practice in the workplace including improved access to healthy food and drink. We you also join us in supporting initiatives and raising of awareness in other outlets to ensure that they follow the same principles of improving access to healthy food and drink.”

Councillor Arif replied that from 1st April 2015 the Council paid its own employees at least the living wage, thus joining many other local authorities, other public bodies and private companies in doing so.

He said that unlike the national minimum wage (which was a statutory requirement set by Central Government each year upon the advice of the Low Pay Commission and was enforced by HM Revenue and Customs), the “living wage” was voluntary.

Recent case law had confirmed that the Council must be very cautious about attempting to impose a living wage requirement on any of its contractors. The Council must balance this desire against (i) Article 56 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which prohibited restrictions upon the freedom to provide services within the EU and (ii) the likelihood of conflicting with Best Value principles, if in doing so, contractors’ additional costs of supply were passed on to the Council in their prices.

Councillor Arif said that this was in addition to restrictions placed upon the Council by section 17 of the Local government Act 1988 to discount “non-commercial” issues when procuring goods and services.

Councillor Arif informed members that in all contracting arrangements suppliers were obliged to comply with the UK employment legislation (which included the national wage) and sign a legally binding agreement to that effect. The Council currently had around 15,000 suppliers the logistics of which made it impossible for routine monitoring. The mechanism for monitoring and control was through an exception basis for example a complaint or an alert from an employee or a supplier. This would trigger a meeting with the contractor to view their records and validate with staff their pay. To date there had been no exceptions reported

to the Council. In addition, when evaluating tenders, any abnormally low prices submitted might instigate the Council seeking further clarification on the wage structure of the contractor.

Councillor Young asked the following supplementary question

“Can you explain why a contractor in the Arboretum is offering “cash in hand”

Councillor Arif asked Councillor Young to pass on the details to him.

(5) **Healthier lifestyles**

Councillor Robertson asked the following question:

“Would the Cabinet holder agree that the recent published evidence shows that the over consumption of sugar and salt is a major factor affecting the current and future health of our population and that over 70% of our residents here in Walsall do not have a healthy weight or life style with many of our young people showing early signs of type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. Do you join with me in also recognising the need for support to those of our residents on more limited income to encourage them to adopt a healthier lifestyle despite serious economic pressures.

Will you also agree that this Council must adopt measures to ensure that every avenue under our direct influence is used to encourage and support our residents young and old, to adopt a healthier life style and that we must be an exemplar employer throughout the council ensuring good practice in the workplace including improved access to healthy food and drink. We you also join us in supporting initiatives and raising of awareness in other outlets to ensure that they follow the same principles of improving access to healthy food and drink.”

Councillor Bird replied that it was recognised that poor diet could lead to poor health outcomes and cause increased prevalence of obesity, disease and premature death. It was also known that poor diet was linked to social deprivation and therefore Public health’s commissioned lifestyle services would continue to support and target those residents that lived within the deprived areas of the borough and were on low incomes. As budgets became increasingly tighter budgets needed to be realigned to commission additional early year’s interventions and to focus on improving upstream universal approaches for a wider, longer impact.

He said that public health had recently procured Walsall’s adult weight management programmes offering an integrated weight management service operated through a single point of access. This would improve accessibility to services, target those groups most a risk and increase numbers accessing lower tier interventions.

Councillor Bird said that an opportunity to implement the Workplace Wellbeing Charter in the Council to be an exemplar employer of workplace health was

being explored. This was supported through the Health and Wellbeing Board and he hoped it would encourage other organisations to do the same.

Councillor Robertson asked the following supplementary question:

“Do you agree that we as a Council set a bad example by promoting food and drink on the premises?”

Councillor Bird said that he did not agree. Many officers eat at their desks and do not go outside. He did not agree that the Council was setting a bad example.

**(6) Exempt accommodation**

Councillor D. Coughlan asked the following question of Councillor Arif:

“When I had the responsibility for Money Home Job, I fully supported a review of exempt accommodation that attracted a lot of adverse publicity from certain providers and some criticism from certain members of this Council. Can you tell this Council what providers have been reviewed to date and the savings made so far? Are you also able to reassure this Council that the tenants who were complaining of the lack of support from certain providers are now being supported where needed?”

Councillor Arif replied that there were 49 providers in Walsall of varying sizes consisting of charities and Registered Social Landlords. Nine reviews had been completed and seven were currently ongoing. He said that housing was a statutory function.

With regard to savings Councillor Arif said there had been £594,956.35 savings to date and projected savings to 31st March 2016 of £1,076,432.01 making a total of £1,671,388.36. The government paid 40% subsidy therefore savings to central government were £668,555.34.

Councillor Arif said that the Council’s approach to placing vulnerable people in supported accommodation had radically changed. Money, Home, Job now employed a qualified social worker whose role was to assess the vulnerability of clients and to identify their individual needs, including the length of time the tenant was likely to need the care, support or supervision required.

This was an invest to save approach. He said that Birmingham was able to reduce their subsidy costs significantly by using a professional to determine if a claimant met the “vulnerability” criteria. Clients once assessed by the social worker were then placed in accommodation to meet their individual needs.

Councillor Coughlan asked the following supplementary question:

“Can you tell us if you are committed to continuing the review and that if unscrupulous landlords continue that those people will get support?”



Councillor Arif replied that the Council's approach enabled us to ensure that the care, support and supervision given by exempt accommodation was of sufficient quality to protect the Council's funding and safeguard vulnerable people and prevent further deterioration of their condition.

(7) **Ryecroft Centre**

Councillor Robertson asked the following question of Councillor Bird:

"What has the total cost to this Council been so far in establishing the Ryecroft centre in New Forest Road Blakenall over the past 3 years and what is the estimated cost of completing the refurbishment of the centre projected over the next 3 years? Can I have the updated business case for the viability of the centre and a breakdown of the accounts and will you agree to have these accounts independently audited?"

Councillor Bird replied that New Forest Road was a building previously occupied by the Council and as with all Council buildings that became vacant costs were incurred. Ryecroft Community Hub occupied the site on the 23rd September 2013 and from that time expenditure on the building had totalled £153,000. The yearly breakdown for this was £11,000 in 2012/13 and £142,000 in 2014/15. This figure had been spent on both maintenance and refurbishment.

He said that he had been made aware of some minor works that were still outstanding with a value of £5,000. No further work was planned.

Councillor Bird said that he had asked officers to send the updated business plan for the Ryecroft Community Hub to Councillor Coughlan, together with the statutory accounts. The statutory accounts were in the public domain and independently audited.

Councillor Robertson asked the following supplementary question:

"Would you agree that placing the hub on this site and not Dartmouth House has increased political pressure which is not in the interests of the residents of Dartmouth House and appears to highlight the unfair use of resources when looking at other equally deprived wards of the Borough?"

Councillor Bird said he did not agree. In July 2013 the Capital Strategy Board discussed an amendment to the Smarter Workplaces programme where the New Forest Road site was removed from scope and replaced with Dartmouth House.

He said that the Strategy Group had discussed works at Ryecroft in July 2014. The total funding request from property services was £108,108, this excluded fees and costs of £15,000 already incurred. £50,000 was utilised from the Ryecroft Community hub grant.

The lease with Ryecroft Neighbourhood Resource Centre had not yet been signed.

Councillor Bird said that he was aware that Councillor Robertson had decided not to visit the premises. It was a pilot project and had created jobs and enterprise training for 170 people, youth services including a junior youth club, education activities in collaboration with Walsall College and Walsall Housing Group and support for 11 start up businesses employing 24 people and 12 volunteers many of which were constituents of Councillor Robertson's ward. He thought that this was a success story. Cabinet had agreed a further funding of £50,000 to make the centre self sufficient now and in the future.

45. **Recommendation of Cabinet – Council purpose and priorities**

The report to Cabinet on 9 September 2015 was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Bird, seconded by Councillor Andrew and:

**Resolved**

That the high level purpose and priorities set out in the report be adopted, pending completion and approval of the full Corporate Plan alongside the budget setting process.

46. **Recommendation of Audit Committee –Annual Treasury Management report 2014/15**

The report to Audit Committee on 1st September 2015 was submitted.

Councillor Chambers thanked former Councillors Barker and Illmann-Walker for their contribution to the report. It was **moved** by Councillor Chambers, seconded by Councillor Craddock and it was:

**Resolved**

That the Treasury Management annual report 2014/15 (Appendix A of the report) be approved.

47. **Annual report of Audit Committee 2014/15**

Councillor Chambers presented the report and acknowledged the contribution of the Independent Chair and two independent members. He also thanked Miss R. Neill, Head of Internal Audit who would be leaving the authority after 15 years excellent service.

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

**Resolved**

That the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2014/15 be noted.

48. **Annual Scrutiny Report 2014/15**

Councillor Murray presented the report.

It was **moved** by Councillor Murray, seconded by Councillor Bird and:

**Resolved**

That the Annual Scrutiny Report 2014/15 be noted.

49. **Report of Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education  
September 2013 to September 2014**

Councillor Towe presented the report.

It was **moved** by Councillor Towe, seconded by Councillor Harris and:

**Resolved**

That the report of the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education  
September 2013 to September 2014 be noted.

50. **Portfolio holder briefings**

(a) **Economy, infrastructure and development**

Councillor Andrew, portfolio holder for Economy, infrastructure and development gave a presentation.

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

(b) **Clean and green**

Councillor Harrison, Portfolio holder for Clean and green gave a presentation.

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

51. **Membership of Committees**

(a) **Vacancies on Committees**

It was reported that Councillor Smith had resigned as a member of the following Committees:

Audit Committee  
Health and Wellbeing Board

Standards Committee  
Scrutiny Overview Committee  
Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Mayor invited nominations from the independent members on the Council to the above vacancies.

### **Resolved**

That Councillor P. Bott be appointed to serve on the Health and Wellbeing Board and Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

### (b) **Chair of Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The following nominations were made to the above:

Councillor Burley – 28 votes  
Councillor E. Hazell – 28 votes.

The Mayor exercised her casting vote in favour of Councillor Burley and it was:

### **Resolved**

That Councillor Burley be appointed Chair of the Education and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the remainder of the municipal year.

### 52. **Notice of motion – Righty to buy**

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

(1) This Council notes:

- The new Government's proposal to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants, to be paid for by selling off the most expensive Council housing stock;
- With alarm the shortage of affordable rented homes in Walsall with 3,831 on waiting lists and is very concerned that the current government plans risk making matters far worse;
- The recent LGA "First 100 Days" campaign which highlighted there are 1.7 million households on waiting lists for affordable housing across England and that more than 3.4 million adults between 20 and 34 live with their parents;

- That a recent opinion poll showed that just 16% of the public believed that extending the Right to Buy to housing association tenants would be the most useful way of tackling the affordability crisis; the public's top choice was to help housing associations or Councils to build more affordable homes, selected by 46% of the public;
- The recent report from June 2015 which shows that there could be a funding gap of over £1 billion to pay for the scheme.

(2) Council opposes the forced sell off of Council housing to pay for this plan and is concerned that the Government also:

- Fails to address the situation for many local authorities which no longer have any housing stock to sell as they have transferred theirs to housing associations as is the case here in Walsall;
- Fails to address the situation in areas of high housing demand where there are often few suitable sites to build replacement social housing stock;
- Fails to recognise that this means housing associations will simply be trying to catch up with replacing homes rather than building affordable housing to give more people homes they need.

(3) Council notes that even the Conservative Mayor of London said he did not want to see Councils "deprived at a rapid rate of their housing stock" if more homes were not being built to replace them.

(4) Council recognises the desire by many to own their own homes, and suggests that proposals put forward by the Liberal Democrats over a "Rent to Own" model and Shared Ownership housing would represent a better way of reaching this goal.

(5) Council also notes that there are existing routes for housing association tenants to own their own properties – some Housing Association tenants already have the Right to Acquire.

(6) Council resolves:

- To work with other neighbouring authorities and housing associations to oppose the current government proposals;
- To write to Walsall's 3 MPs, Wendy Morton MP (Conservative) Aldridge Brownhills, David Winnick MP (Labour) Walsall North and Valerie Vaz MP (Labour) Walsall South asking them to support the Council's position; to speak up in Parliament for more social housing and not less and to push for a genuine "one for one" replacement but not at the cost of losing more social housing in the Borough.

**Amendment** moved by Councillor S. Coughlan and seconded by Councillor Nazir:

That paragraph (4) be amended to read as follows:

Council recognises the desire by many to own their own home and suggests that building more homes and providing better and sustainable financial help to first time buyers is a better way than undermining the business plans of organisations that provide much needed homes to rent through Housing Associations.

Councillor Shires accepted the amendment.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried – 35 members voting in favour and it was:

### **Resolved**

(1) This Council notes:

- The new Government's proposal to extend the Right to Buy to Housing Association tenants, to be paid for by selling off the most expensive Council housing stock;
- With alarm the shortage of affordable rented homes in Walsall with 3,831 on waiting lists and is very concerned that the current government plans risk making matters far worse;
- The recent LGA "First 100 Days" campaign which highlighted there are 1.7 million households on waiting lists for affordable housing across England and that more than 3.4 million adults between 20 and 34 live with their parents;
- That a recent opinion poll showed that just 16% of the public believed that extending the Right to Buy to housing association tenants would be the most useful way of tackling the affordability crisis; the public's top choice was to help housing associations or Councils to build more affordable homes, selected by 46% of the public;
- The recent report from June 2015 which shows that there could be a funding gap of over £1 billion to pay for the scheme.

(2) Council opposes the forced sell off of Council housing to pay for this plan and is concerned that the Government also:

- Fails to address the situation for many local authorities which no longer have any housing stock to sell as they have transferred theirs to housing associations as is the case here in Walsall;
- Fails to address the situation in areas of high housing demand where there are often few suitable sites to build replacement social housing stock;

- Fails to recognise that this means housing associations will simply be trying to catch up with replacing homes rather than building affordable housing to give more people homes they need.

(3) Council notes that even the Conservative Mayor of London said he did not want to see Councils “deprived at a rapid rate of their housing stock” if more homes were not being built to replace them.

(4) Council recognises the desire by many to own their own home and suggests that building more homes and providing better and sustainable financial help to first time buyers is a better way than undermining the business plans of organisations that provide much needed homes to rent through Housing Associations.

(5) Council also notes that there are existing routes for housing association tenants to own their own properties – some Housing Association tenants already have the Right to Acquire.

(6) Council resolves:

- To work with other neighbouring authorities and housing associations to oppose the current government proposals;
- To write to Walsall’s 3 MPs, Wendy Morton MP (Conservative) Aldridge Brownhills, David Winnick MP (Labour) Walsall North and Valerie Vaz MP (Labour) Walsall South asking them to support the Council’s position; to speak up in Parliament for more social housing and not less and to push for a genuine “one for one” replacement but not at the cost of losing more social housing in the Borough.

It was **moved**, duly seconded and:

**Resolved**

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

At 8.45 p.m. the meeting adjourned.

The meeting re-commenced at 8.58 p.m.

**53. Notice of motion – Combined Authority**

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given, was **moved** by Councillor E. Hazell and seconded by Councillor Craddock:

(1) The Council notes:

- (a) The creation of a Combined Authority is being driven by the current Government, without the Government stating what powers will be devolved.
- (b) According to the Queen's speech powers from local Government could be transferred to the Combined Authority. This is the opposite of devolution.
- (c) Councillors are democratically elected for a term of office and should not be making this kind of decision as it is irreversible.
- (d) A Combined Authority does not offer democracy to the people of Walsall and the West Midlands.

(2) Council opposes:

- (a) The EU led regionalisation drive to create Combined Authorities and the undemocratic method being used to implement them.
- (b) The centralisation of power and the reduction of local decision making.
- (c) The cost of setting up a Combined Authority and the ongoing costs associated with it.

(3) Council therefore calls for:

- (a) A referendum to be held on whether Walsall Council should be part of the proposed Combined Authority.
- (b) That all of the Walsall registered electorate should be given the opportunity to vote.
- (c) The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet authorise no further payments to the proposed cost of setting up the Combined Authority.
- (d) The Leader of the Council request that all Leaders of the proposed Combined Authority hold referendum in each area.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared lost – only 6 members voting in favour.

#### 54. **Notice of motion – Wheelchairs in taxis**

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given, was **moved** by Councillor D. Hazell, seconded by Councillor E. Hazell and:



## Resolved

### (1) The Council notes:

- (a) There have been a number of cases of taxis being stopped by Council officers, where disabled passengers and their wheelchairs have not been correctly strapped in or harnesses/restraints not being used.
- (b) The safety of disabled passengers and their wheelchairs should not be at a disadvantage.
- (c) The MOT manual (Section 5 – Seat Belts) does not currently require the straps and restraints for wheelchairs to be checked.
- (d) Walsall Council MOT check does not routinely check wheelchair straps and restraints.

### (2) Council believes:

- (a) An additional requirement should be added to the MOT manual check as follows:
  - Additional to MOT manual. Vehicles designated wheelchair accessible must be equipped with appropriate belts for securing a wheelchair and seat belts for a wheelchair passenger.
- (b) An additional condition should be added to the MOT manual check as follows:
  - Additional to MOT manual. For vehicles designated wheelchair accessible wheelchair belts and seat belts for a wheelchair passenger must be checked for condition.
- (c) The method of checks, inspection and reason for rejection should be as stipulated in the 'MOT testing manual' of all other seat belts.
- (d) The safety of wheelchair users is as important as any other passenger.

### (3) Council therefore calls for:

- (a) Walsall Licensing and Safety Committee to implement the additions to the MOT check.
- (b) The Leader of the Council and the Cabinet to lobby the central Government to incorporate these changes into the 'MOT testing manual'.

The meeting terminated at 9.50 p.m.