



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 16th November 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
“ 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
“ K. Hussain

Councillor D. James

“ L.D. Jeavons
“ C. Jones
“ T.J. Jukes
“ A. Kudhail
“ M. Longhi
“ Mrs. R.A. Martin
“ 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
“ G.S. Sohal
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ S. Wade
“ P. Washbrook
“ F.J. Westley
“ V. Whyte
“ T.S. Wilson
“ R.V. Worrall
“ A. Young

59. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meetings held on 21st September and 19th October 2015 copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as correct records and signed.

60. **Declarations of interest**

Councillor Harrison declared an interest in item 10(2) – the Gambling Act 2005 – revision of statement of principles.

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

There were no items to be considered in private session.

62. **Mayor's announcements**

(1) **Paris terrorist attacks**

The Mayor referred to atrocities around the world and particularly to the terrorist attacks in and around Paris on Friday 13th November. She said that the Council's deepest sympathies to the many people and families in Paris and across France affected by the shocking events had been sent to the President of France and Mayors of Mulhouse and Drancy.

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

(2) **Combined authority for the West Midlands**

Councillor Bird referred to the work that had taken place to secure devolution; a statement of intent would be made on 17th November 2015 and would set out the terms of the proposed agreement between the West Midlands Combined Authority Shadow Board and the government for the radical devolution of powers. This would be subject to the spending review and further public consultation and agreement by the constituent authorities.

A full debate would take place at a future meeting of the Council to enable a fully informed decision to be made.

63. **Petitions**

The following petitions were submitted:

- (1) Councillor Ditta:
 - Increased traffic enforcement of heavy goods vehicles through Bescot Crescent.
 - More traffic control measures on Wednesbury Road bridge.
- (2) Councillor Jones – Somerfield Road speeding traffic – strict safety measures.
- (3) Councillor D. Shires – traffic calming on the bend in Spring Lane by industrial units.
- (4) Councillor Martin - Bernard Street – development of multi-occupancy dwelling and impact on parking.
- (5) Councillor Sarohi – closure of Apna Ghar Day Centre.

64. **Questions from members of the Council**

(1) **Wednesbury Road – speed limit**

Councillor Ditta asked the following question of Councillor Andrew:

“As many of us are aware Wednesbury Road has sadly been the scene of many accidents over the years, some tragically fatal. For many years now my fellow ward Councillors and I have been campaigning for the reduction of the speed limit but unfortunately to no avail. After yet another serious accident on the Wednesbury Road will the cabinet member and the Council finally agree to reduce the speed limit?”

Councillor Andrew advised that in accordance with Department of Transport guidance the Council undertook an assessment of road speed limits. Speed survey data obtained in 2014 for Wednesbury Road indicated an average speed of 26mph with an 85th percentile of 31mph. This data confirmed that a speed limit of 30mph was appropriate for this road which was a district distributor.

He said that within the Local Transport Settlement and Transport Capital Programme 2015/16 two sections of Wednesbury Road had been identified as qualifying for inclusion. The first was between Hillary Street and Tasker Street and the second section was between Hillary Street and Mountrath Street. As usual with such a large scheme, the route had been split to enable the improvements to be delivered in a phased approach.

Councillor Andrew said that utilising this method for reviewing these, the section of Wednesbury Road between Hillary Street and Tasker Street was ranked in 7th position and the section of Wednesbury Road between Hillary Street and Mountrath Street was ranked in 12th position.

Councillor Ditta asked the following supplementary question:

“Could a warning sign be erected on Wednesbury Road, Pleck to warn vehicles of the dangerous bend?”

Councillor Andrew agreed that signage in the area was poor and that officers would be requested to take appropriate action.

(2) **Walsall South Library**

Councillor Ditta asked the following question of Councillor Harris:

“The Walsall south library is a crucial facility for the people of Delves as it is the only public library facility that is reasonably nearby. In fact the library has been at the heart of the Delves for many years now, why has the cabinet member targeted the only library facility available for the people of Delves?”

Councillor Harris replied that the Library Service had made substantial savings in recent years without significant impact on the service to customers. However, 80% of the libraries' budget was tied up in providing staff and buildings and with the cuts now being faced consideration had to be given to reducing the number of outlets or providing access to the service in a different way. The current proposals would save £487,912. The libraries put forward for consideration of closure (including the mobile library) accounted for only 17% of the 1.1 million visits to libraries in Walsall received each year and 26% of the items loaned. In fact, South Walsall received fewer annual visits than any other library.

He said that in drawing up these proposals careful consideration had been given to how the Council could maintain a service that was still accessible to residents. There would still be a library within 2 miles of every household in the borough, the housebound library service would deliver to those people who could not leave their homes, digital access was available including the loan of e-books and e-audio and it was hoped to provide local “book exchanges” in partnership with community organisations, in line with Bentley Community Library which opened in September.

Councillor Harris said that as yet, no decisions had been made and significant consultation was being undertaken on the proposals. Questionnaires were available online and from every library and face to face drop-in sessions would be held at each library involved. The result of this consultation would be fully considered before a final decision was made.

Councillor Ditta asked the following supplementary question:

“With regard to your election literature why were Streetly and Pheasey not under threat?”

Councillor Harris replied choices had to be made and he would do his utmost to keep Delves Library open, however, in times of budget constraints all services were facing budget reductions. He stated that there was a need to work with the community.

(3) **West Bromwich Road – road safety**

Councillor Ditta asked the following question of Councillor Andrew:

“West Bromwich Road between Walstead Road and Bell Lane, is another area that has seen many car accidents over the last few years. Why has the Council not responded to the demands of local residents and installed digital speed recorders to ensure public safety?”

Councillor Andrew advised that Vehicle Activated Speed Signs had been used previously on this road and as was best practice they would again be used on a cyclic basis to maximise the impact on driver behaviour on this stretch of road.

Councillor Andrew also said that in accordance with Department for Transport advice, the Council undertook an assessment of road speed limits. Speed data obtained in 2014 for West Bromwich Road indicated an average speed of 29.5mph with an 85th percentile speed of 34mph. This data did not indicate any concerns of excessive speed and these speeds were typical for a district distributor road.

Councillor Ditta asked the following supplementary question:

“Why was the previous 20mph speed limit removed?”

Councillor Andrew had no comment to make.

65. **Annual review of Treasury Management policies and mid-year position statement 2015/16**

The report to Audit Committee on 9th November 2015 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That the Treasury Management Policies (Appendix A of the report) be approved.

66. **Recommendations of Licensing and Safety Committee**

Councillor Harrison left the meeting.

(1) **Licensing Act 2003 – review of statement of licensing policy**

The report to Licensing and Safety Committee on 14th October 2015 was submitted.

Resolved

That the revised statement of licensing policy be approved, the revised statement to be effective from 7 January 2016.

(2) **Gambling Act 2005 – revision of statement of principles**

The report to Licensing and Safety Committee on 14th October 2015 was submitted.

Resolved

That the revised Statement of Principles under the Gambling Act, 2005 as given in appendix 2 of the report, be approved, the revised statement to take effect from 31 January 2016.

67. **Portfolio holder briefings**

(a) **Care and safeguarding**

Councillor Hughes, portfolio holder for Care and Safeguarding gave a presentation.

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

(b) **Learning skills and apprenticeships**

Councillor Towe, portfolio holder for Learning Skills and Apprenticeships gave a presentation.

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

68. **Suspension of Council procedure rules**

It was **moved** by Councillor I. Shires and seconded by Councillor D. Shires

That for the purpose of open debate on Agenda item 12 (Notice of motion – Child poverty) Council procedure rule 15.5 “When a member may speak again” be suspended for the duration of Agenda item 12.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared **lost**.

69. **Notice of motion – child poverty**

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given was **moved** by Councillor Robertson and seconded by Councillor S. Coughlan:

Council notes that there has been a continued net rise in the numbers of children living in poverty and in extreme poverty over the past 10 years with levels in some areas such as Blakenall reaching 42%. A survey of 3500 young people in 2014 found that 9% are always or often hungry because there is not enough food at home (equivalent to 2450 young people in Walsall).

This has had indirect consequences of driving more families into debt, forcing a rise in levels of inequality, contributing to adoption of a poor diet and subsequently a rise in numbers with unhealthy weight and worsened education attainments .

Council further notes that future cuts in funds from Central Government of around £24M in the next financial year alone will , combined with the introduction of universal credit, the continuation of the imposition of the bedroom tax and cuts to working tax credits, further increase these numbers especially in the less well off parts of Walsall.

Council has adopted in 2013 a children and young people’s plan for 2013 to 2016 that includes a priority of, ‘Reducing the impact of child poverty’ and notes that the Children and Young People’s Partnership Board has also been tasked to produce a report on this area of concern. The Council’s Health and Wellbeing Strategy also includes a priority to: ‘Reducing child poverty and the impact on families of workless parents’.

However we feel this area is now so serious and imminent to need an urgent updated review and to establish a task and finish group hosted by the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel to formulate an action plan that could mitigate the effects of this rise in child poverty levels bringing all relevant partners round the table .

Councillor E. Hazell pointed out that the Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel referred to in the motion should read “Education and Children’s Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee Panel”. Councillor Robertson accepted the inclusion of this in the motion and accordingly it was:

Resolved (unanimously)

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The meeting terminated at 8.05 p.m.