



Minutes of the **ORDINARY MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 6 November, 2023, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Present

Councillor C.D.D. Towe (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor G. Ali

“ A. Andrew
“ H. Bashir
“ M.A. Bird
“ C. Bott
“ P. Bott
“ R. Burley
“ S. Cheema
“ S.J. Cooper
“ S.K. Ditta
“ S. Elson
“ K. Ferguson
“ M. Follows
“ A. Garcha
“ P. Gill
“ N. Gultasib
“ A. Harris
“ L. Harrison
“ F. Hassan
“ A.J. Hicken
“ C. Horton
“ A. Hussain
“ I. Hussain
“ K. Hussain
“ T. Jukes

Councillor P. Kaur

“ R. Larden
“ N. Latham
“ E. Lee
“ R. Martin
“ R. K Mehmi
“ E. Morgan
“ J. Murray
“ S. Nasreen
“ A.A. Nawaz
“ A. Nazir
“ A. Parkes
“ K. Pedley
“ G. Perry
“ W. Rasab
“ S. Samra
“ K. Sears
“ P. Smith
“ C.A. Statham
“ M.A. Statham
“ M. Ward
“ V.J. Waters
“ J. Whitehouse
“ T. Wilson
“ R.V. Worrall

51. Apologies

Apologies were received on behalf of Councillors Rattigan, Flint, Singh Sohal, S. Hussain, Underhill, Gandham and Allen.

52. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th September, 2024, a copy having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record.

53. **Declarations of interest**

There following members declared an interest in Item 14 – Notice of Motion relating to no fault evictions.

Councillors K. Hussain, Ali, Ditta, Nazir, Murray, Mehmi, Wilson, Parkes, Samra, Andrew, Martin, A. Hussain and Kaur.

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

Resolved

There were no items in private session.

55. **Mayor's announcements**

New Chief Executive

The Mayor welcomed Emma Bennett to her first meeting of Council as Chief Executive.

Planning Committee

The Mayor announced that he was saddened to hear of the disruption in the public gallery at Planning Committee held on Monday 30th October, 2023. He explained that anyone attending a Council meeting, whether a councillor, a member of the public or the press should not be subjected to, or overhear, abusive and discriminatory comments, the likes of which he hoped would not be witnessed again. The Mayor explained that despite the actions of a few at that meeting, all Members of the public are welcomed and encouraged to attend council meetings to watch democracy in action.

Armed Forces Community Networking Event

The Mayor announced he will be attending the Armed Forces Community Networking Event on 18 November, 2023 in the Town Hall to sign the Covenant on behalf of the people of Walsall. Details of the event having been circulated, the Mayor encouraged members to attend and promote the event.

Remembrance Sunday

The Mayor invited members to attend the Walsall Cenotaph on Sunday 12th November, 2023 for Remembrance Day to remember those that fought for the freedoms we are able to enjoy today.

Come Dine with the Mayor

The Mayor asked members to inform the Mayor's office or Councillor Worrall if they would like to attend the 'Come Dine with the Mayor' event taking place on Sunday 19th November at Davinci's, Aldridge.

Mayors Parlour

The Mayor welcomed members to join him in the Mayors Parlour following completion of the meeting.

56. Petitions

The following Petitions were received: -

- (1) Councillor Cheema – To install CCTV and to secure the old Lakeside School site at Holman Close, Willenhall
- (2) Councillor Worrall – Scheme to address parking, environmental and safety issues affecting Autumn Drive, Pelsall

57. Questions

(a) From the public: None

(b) From members of the Council:

Councillor Smith

Walsall Town Hall, located in Leicester Street, which opened 120 years ago in 1903 and designated a Grade II listed building in 1986, is a landmark feature of our town, with which so many people, perhaps especially those who have lived the whole or much of their lives in Walsall, have had a connection with at one time or another.

Given this and also that apart from the nostalgic significance, there is a great deal of local historical significance to the Town Hall, some examples of which include:

- The famous pipe organ, made by the local firm of Nicholson & Lord and installed in 1908 to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria
- The matched pair of pictures by Frank O. Salisbury which were installed at the back of the stage, commissioned by a former local member of Parliament and Freeman of the Borough Joseph Leckie "to commemorate the never to be forgotten valour of the South Staffordshire Regiments in the Great War 1914 - 1918" and completed in 1920.
- The memorial plaque to Walsall's three recipients of the Victoria Cross, John Carless, James Thompson and Charles George Bonner unveiled there in December 2009: and

The countless memorable events and personalities at the Town Hall over the years including the famous organist Harold Britton recording a concert "Organist Extravaganza in 1991, the presence of the Antiques Roadshow in 1997, the performance of Rock musicians there including Slade in 1966, The Who in 1966, Robert Plant of Band of Joy (later of Led Zeppelin) in 1967, Black Sabbath in the late 1960s, the heavy metal band, Jameson Raid, in 1980 and the rock band Reverend and the Makers performed there in 2012,

Given all that and much more, can the appropriate Portfolio Holder inform me, this Council and the citizens of Walsall, why this beautiful building is standing unused most of the time and what plans there are for ensuring that our Town Hall has a future as the town centre's Number One community asset, owned by the Council and vibrant with activities and events as it has been for most of the past 120 years?

Councillor Ferguson gave the following response:

Internal and external bookings of the Town Hall are managed by the Soft FM team within Corporate Landlord. As with many event venues, utilisation is still being affected by the impacts on the events market of Covid.

Since bookings of the Town Hall have been able to re-commence, the Town Hall has hosted a reduced number of bookings, including NHS Blood Donors, Mayor Making, internal meetings, staff training and exhibition events. In the year to date, there have been 48 events held in the Town Hall and events booked up to the end of the year include Remembrance Sunday, a memorial service, and a carol concert.

In order to expand the scale and number of events in the Town Hall, there would be a need for capital investment in the ancillary facilities such as the bar and toilet facilities. It is proposed to seek advice from external consultants to understand the scope of facilities required and the likely opportunities for larger events and revenue generation to assess the viability of the Town Hall as a venue.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

Given that the use of the Town Hall that you have just been referring to, are fairly middle to low level events, what we need to do is to make it a place that brings people in to the town centre in such a way, and the only way to do that is by upgrading it to the level that perhaps we have got in Wolverhampton at the Civic.

We do accept that part of that investment means stage alterations to protect the organ, new kitchens, toilets that are Victorian and out of date and a loading bay that is unsuitable. Can you tell us, in terms of how you responded, a timescale for the outside advice we are going to get in terms of the investment that is required to bring it up to the level where we can get big events.

Councillor Ferguson gave the following response:

I agree it would be nice to be able to put on larger events, hence the consultation to find out what we require such as upgrading toilets and other amenities, and it would be nice to bring the likes of the groups that you have already mentioned, to me it would be great.

We have to seek the information on what we need and then look at the capital investment to bring that up to a standard, the timescale depends on how quick we receive the information back to us. I totally agree, it would be nice to have it as a main events hall.

Councillor Cheema

With many families struggling to heat or eat, and given the cold winter months are drawing in, will Walsall MBC follow in the footsteps of neighbouring local authorities, to provide additional help during the cost-of-living crisis to struggling residents?

Councillor Ali gave the following response:

Walsall Council is already providing substantial financial support to its residents. Through numerous schemes we will be providing £6.3m worth of support to the most financially vulnerable in our area. Financial support is provided in the form of

- Direct payments to households with children in receipt of council tax reduction.
- Assistance with the purchase and installing of more energy efficient boilers.
- Help with rent payments so that residents can remain in their home when otherwise faced with eviction.
- Increased council tax support for those on low income.
- Further assistance for care leavers and through the council's early help team and voluntary and community partners.

There is currently a scheme open and accepting applications for struggling residents to apply for financial support through the Walsall Local Welfare Provision Scheme and a further £1m worth of direct payments will be made to the most financially vulnerable before Christmas.

Councillor Cheema asked the following supplementary question:

When I referred to neighbouring local authorities and what they do, for example Stoke-on-Trent City Council they provide residents with schemes such as financial MOTs to make sure their finances are in check, they do help is at hand, warm hubs, and community lounges. I know we have the Walsall Connected Hubs, but they are not marketed or branded as warm hubs, is that something we could look at?

Councillor Ali gave the following response:

Warm hubs started a few months ago and information will be emailed to you.

Councillor Smith

Given that at a meeting of the Social Care and Health OSC on 13/7 23. I asked a question about the extent of debt with regard to outstanding client contributions to Adult Social Care packages, with the Committee then being informed that as at January 2023 the debt stood at approximately £9million broken down into three key cohorts:

- (i) One cohort amounting to £2m being “not real debt” as it represented the bills sent out from the Council that clients may not even have yet received,
- (ii) A second cohort of approximately 60% (approx. £5.4m) of the total (£9m) being a figure that may not be accurate as it represents all those recipients of care packages where circumstances could change regularly and therefore where original invoices may be incorrect and therefore possibly needing a long process to credit those individuals, and
- (iii) The third cohort which was described as “real debt” (the remainder of the debt, approx. £1.6m) where clients may be in dispute or where a death may have occurred resulting in delays over Probate/Estate matters,

and given that it was also stated that a Report on this would be going to Cabinet CMT “later this month” and a report “will then go on to Cabinet” within the next couple of months” and be in the public domain, can the appropriate Portfolio holder inform me, this Council and the public, given that 3 months has elapsed since then, what is the present level of debt regarding client contributions towards Adult Care package costs and what

level of debt is being anticipated as the Council prepares for its 2024/5 Budget?

Councillor Pedley gave the following response:

You make a valid point around the regarding debt, and it is worth noting that the term 'debt' refers to any invoice as soon as a bill is generated on the corporate finance system.

As of the 2nd October 2023, the client debt stands at approximately £8.2 million.

However, £2.7 million of that you can mark as payment pending as that is invoices that are 0-59 days old, so are invoices that are due to be processed and payment to be received.

£5.5 million of that is 60+ days old and we are working on that process to ensure an end-to-end financial process is in place so people understand their contributions towards Adult Social Care and leaflets will be going out so that people have timely information about their contributions and liability towards care cost. It is worth noting that the £5.5 million is a significant reduction from the previous £7 million as it stood at the time of writing. That is because we have our end-to-end processes in place, we have reviews in place, and we are making sure people are informed of the correct process and client contributions. What I would say in terms of the timely report is that it did go to Cabinet CMT in August, and it is being considered by the Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee in December.

Councillor Smith asked the following supplementary question:

In terms of the "real debt", if there is such a thing, you have not quite told us exactly how much and, do you think that it is a situation where the people will not pay or unlikely cannot pay.

Councillor Pedley gave the following response:

In terms of that debt, again, when we are looking at "real debt" as it stands that is 60 days old, but we have still not established which of those that are 60 days old is "real debt" stands at £5.5 million and it is a mixture of both factors. What we need to understand is Adult Social Care financing and charging is a complex situation with ever changing variants and situations which is what the team closely monitor and review as the process goes along and make sure that we have got end-to-end processes in place and key information for service users to follow.

Councillor Cheema

What percentage of goods and services procured by Walsall MBC come from the borough itself and what checks are being carried out on procurement contracts to ensure cost effectiveness and value for money, and how often are these checks carried out?

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

The Administration has a policy of the “Walsall Pound” being spent in Walsall and there are constant checks to make sure that it happens. We are also looking at the opportunities for breaking down the large contracts that we issue.

We have a new Officer for Procurement, and this is given their priority to look at all the contracts we have currently, whether they are performing in accordance with what we would expect to see, whether they are value for money and furthermore, to implement the policy more rigorously of spending the “Walsall Pound” in Walsall, which means keeping that business with Walsall businesses.

Councillor Cheema

Given the huge popularity of Willenhall Bonfire celebrations, can the Portfolio Holder inform me why the decision was made to axe Willenhall Bonfire Night, and why only Bloxwich and Walsall were given consideration and the go ahead.

Councillor Bird gave the following response:

Due to the size of the event space, Willenhall Memorial Park is limited in its site capacity for this type of event. The number of people allowed on site is further reduced as most of the field is cordoned off for the bonfire and fireworks for safety reasons.

Although the event in 2022 went ahead with no casualties, due to the various pinch point on the site, and the distance people must be held back, movement on the site is difficult. The site does not have good visibility, we have had problems with people hiding on site (numerous locations to check) which is a security risk and a potential risk to the individuals if they are in the firework fall out location. Should an incident take place, safely managing the crowd off site would be extremely difficult and following the sell-out event in 2022, we would have had to reduce the capacity further to be content that we were putting on a safe event.

Willenhall Park is an excellent site for other events and has a good programme delivered throughout the summer, the Council should work in partnership with these organisers to provide a continued programme of excellent events for the Willenhall residents.

Unlike many councils, Walsall still puts on traditional bonfire events as we recognise that bonfire night is a centuries old tradition enjoyed by many. However, there are several associated issues, including health and safety, antisocial behaviour, animal welfare and sustainability. Some of these issues can be mitigated through professionally organised public bonfire events. Financial and site constraints have meant that we have stopped our 2 smallest events and now focus on the 2 larger events.

Councillor Cheema

Considering the increasing number of electric vehicles on the road, does Walsall MBC have any plans to introduce a fixed number of electric vehicles charging points at Council car parks across the borough.

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

Yes, we do.

The council knows there is a big opportunity for electric vehicle charge points in our car parks and parking bays, given that we operate over 1,000 car parking spaces across the borough. We have already secured government funding for the delivery of charge points at Ashtree Road Car Park in Pelsall. There will need to be some consultation, but we expect to deliver this next year, along with our first roll out of on-street charge points in residential areas.

There are only a small number of charge points across the borough for public use right now, all operated by the private sector. The council has some big plans to deliver new charge points and the funding to back it up.

Government funding has been secured which will deliver at least 86 charge points over the next two years. This will take total provision in the borough up to 106 charge points, with some additional third-party installations also expected. This is already a substantial increase and a positive shift.

The council is also in the process of developing an electric vehicle strategy which sets out our targets for charge point installations across the borough by 2025, and longer term by 2030, given the government ban on the sale of petrol and diesel engine cars and vans from 2035.

These targets are based on forecast uptake in electric vehicle ownership in the borough over the coming years. There will be a mix of on-street and car park provision of new points. We will be working closely with the private sector and charge point operators to support the delivery programme across the borough. We will make sure that we utilise the best commercial model, and provide high quality, safe and inclusive infrastructure to our residents, businesses, and visitors.

Councillor Cheema asked the following supplementary question:

I know you mentioned that the car park in Pelsall will have electric vehicle charging points. Are there any other car parks that have been identified I know there are the ones in the town centre and the Wakes Ground Car Park have they been looked at too?

Councillor Andrew gave the following response:

I will provide you with the list.

58. **Annual Audit Report**

The report to Audit Committee held on 25th September, 2023 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That the Annual Report of the Audit Committee 2022/23 be approved.

59. **(A) Biodiversity Net Gain**

The report to Cabinet held on 18th October, 2023 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That:

- 1.1 Council notes that the legal requirement to deliver biodiversity net gain from January 2024 and the planning processes required for its effective implementation.
- 1.2 Council adopt and publish biodiversity net gain guidance for Walsall, as set out in Appendix 1.
- 1.3 Council adopt and publish the Black Country Local Nature Recovery Map and Strategy, as set out in Appendix 2, to be used as guidance and evidence in the planning process.

(B) Food Law Enforcement Plan

The report to Cabinet held on 18th October, 2023 was submitted.

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

Resolved

That Council approves and adopt the Food Law enforcement plan for the year 2023/24.

60. **Appointment of Independent Remuneration Panel**

A report was submitted (see annexed).

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

Resolved

That:

1. the following persons be appointed to the Independent Remuneration Panel:
 - a. Philip Tart
 - b. Richard Hood
 - c. Indra Cheema
2. the allowance issues to be considered by the Independent Remuneration Panel, as set out in Part 6 to the report submitted, be noted.
3. the Independent Remuneration Panel considers the annual uplift applied to members allowances and Mayor and Deputy Mayor allowances.

61. **Portfolio Holder Briefings**

Deputy Leader and Regeneration

Councillor Andrew gave a presentation.

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

Adult Social Care

Councillor Pedley gave a presentation.

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

62. Notice of Motion – Noddy Holder

With the consent of the Council, Councillor Smith **moved** the following altered motion (deleted wording struck through) which was seconded by Councillor Bird.

It has recently been made public that Noddy Holder, a “Walsall –born Rock legend” as the Express & Star has recently described him, with his roots in Caldmore and Beechdale and who holds the Freedom of the Borough of Walsall, has been battling ~~threat~~ cancer for 5 years.

On behalf of the people of Walsall, this Council sends it thoughts and very best wishes to Noddy and his family and wishes him well for the future.

Amendment moved by Councillor Nawaz (additional wording in bold and deleted words struck through) and seconded by Councillor K. Hussain that:-

It has recently been made public that Noddy Holder, a “Walsall–born Rock legend” as the Express & Star has recently described him, with his roots in Caldmore and Beechdale and who holds the Freedom of the Borough of Walsall, has been battling ~~threat~~-cancer for 5 years.

On behalf of the people of Walsall, this Council sends it thoughts and very best wishes to Noddy and his family and wishes him well for the future.

In doing so, the Council also recognises that many residents are also battling cancer and this Council takes this opportunity to send them and their families our thoughts and best wishes and wish all of them well for the future.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was declared **lost**.

The substantive motion was put to the vote, declared carried and it was:

Resolved

It has recently been made public that Noddy Holder, a “Walsall –born Rock legend” as the Express & Star has recently described him, with his roots in Caldmore and Beechdale and who holds the Freedom of the Borough of Walsall, has been battling cancer for 5 years.

On behalf of the people of Walsall, this Council sends its thoughts and very best wishes to Noddy and his family and wishes him well for the future.

63. **Notice of Motion – No fault evictions**

Having declared an interest in this item, Councillors K. Hussain, Ali, Ditta, Nazir, Murray, Mehmi, Wilson, Parkes, Samra, Andrew, Martin, A. Hussain and Kaur left the room.

The following notice of motion was **moved** by Councillor Nawaz and seconded by Councillor Jukes that:-

This Council recognises

- The importance of secure and stable housing for our residents, their families, and their children.
- The number of residents in Private Rented Housing has increased hugely in the borough of Walsall
- That the cost of renting a property has increased exponentially in Walsall and that this has had a major impact on our resident's quality of life
- The importance of ensuring that tenants are protected from unscrupulous landlords and the continued threat of eviction
- The impact that an eviction has on a family and particularly children and their mental wellbeing.
- The increased cost to the tax payer to find housing for those that are made homeless.

This Council calls upon the leader to write to the Government to express this Council's concern and opposition to the delay in outlawing section 21 – i.e. No fault evictions and other housing reforms and to stress that the impact of this will be felt most strongly by the children of Walsall, who need a stable and safe home free from the risk of no fault eviction.

Amendment moved by Councillor Perry (additional wording in bold and deleted words struck through), and seconded by Councillor Bird that:-

This Council recognises

- The importance of secure and stable housing for our residents, their families, and their children.

- The number of residents in Private Rented Housing has increased hugely in the borough of Walsall
- That the cost of renting a property has increased exponentially in Walsall and that this has had a major impact on our resident's quality of life
- The importance of ensuring that tenants are protected from unscrupulous landlords and the continued threat of eviction
- The impact that an eviction has on a family and particularly children and their mental wellbeing.
- The increased cost to the tax payer to find housing for those that are made homeless.

~~This Council calls upon the leader to write to the Government to express this Council's concern and opposition to the delay in outlawing section 21— i.e. No fault evictions and other housing reforms and to stress that the impact of this will be felt most strongly by the children of Walsall, who need a stable and safe home free from the risk of no fault eviction.~~

The Leader writes to the Government, to express this Council's concerns about the delay in outlawing 'No Fault Evictions' and other Housing Reforms, stressing the impact that this may have on the children of Walsall, who need a stable and safe home free from the risk of no-fault eviction. That he requests that the government continues with the implementation of no-fault evictions, but addresses the concerns raised by landlords, by urgently fast-tracking any court reforms, to enable landlords to be able to quickly remove tenants, where there is evidence that they have been persistently problematic.

On being put to the vote, the amendment was declared **carried** and became the substantive motion.

Members voted on the substantive motion and it was:-

Resolved

This Council recognises

- The importance of secure and stable housing for our residents, their families, and their children.
- The number of residents in Private Rented Housing has increased hugely in the borough of Walsall
- That the cost of renting a property has increased exponentially in Walsall and that this has had a major impact on our resident's quality of life

- The importance of ensuring that tenants are protected from unscrupulous landlords and the continued threat of eviction
- The impact that an eviction has on a family and particularly children and their mental wellbeing.
- The increased cost to the tax payer to find housing for those that are made homeless.

The Leader writes to the Government, to express this Council's concerns about the delay in outlawing 'No Fault Evictions' and other Housing Reforms, stressing the impact that this may have on the children of Walsall, who need a stable and safe home free from the risk of no-fault eviction. That he requests that the government continues with the implementation of no-fault evictions, but addresses the concerns raised by landlords, by urgently fast-tracking any court reforms, to enable landlords to be able to quickly remove tenants, where there is evidence that they have been persistently problematic.

The meeting terminated at 8:30 p.m.

Mayor:

Date: