



Walsall Council

Dear Councillor,

You are hereby summoned to attend a meeting of the Council of the Metropolitan Borough of Walsall to be held on **MONDAY 19TH day of NOVEMBER, 2012 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House, Walsall.

Dated this 9th day of November, 2012.

Yours sincerely,

Chief Executive.

The business to be transacted is as follows:

1. To elect a person to preside if the Mayor and Deputy Mayor are not present.
2. Apologies.
3. To approve as a correct record and sign the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 24th September, 2012.
4. Declarations of interest.
5. Mayor's announcements.
6. To receive any petitions.

7. To answer any questions in accordance with Council procedure rules:

(a) From the public

Mr. D. Birch, Pelsall Road, Brownhills – The Saxon Hoard

“I would like to ask the Cabinet member for leisure, Councillor Harris, why Walsall Council have, to date, resisted the numerous calls made for an exhibition of The Saxon Hoard to be held at The New Art Gallery, given that The Potteries Museum in Stoke-on-Trent is currently enjoying high visitor numbers as a result of their exhibition wouldn't he agree that a similar display would contribute significantly to the regeneration and reputation of Walsall Borough as well as providing residents with a good reason to visit the publicly-funded gallery?”

(b) From members of the Council

(1) Councillor James – Public Services (Social Value) Act

“The Public Services (Social Value) Act received Royal Assent on 8th March 2012 and is due to be implemented in January 2013. For the first time local authorities will be requested to consider how the services they commission and procure might improve the economic, social and environmental well being of the area.

How will Walsall Council coalition implement the Act to ensure full compliance, to ensure public money is maintained in the public sector and or not for profit sector thus protecting Council jobs and developing Walsall's local economy?”

(2) Councillor D. Coughlan – Benefits call centre

“I'd like to thank the Council for returning the benefits call centre back where it belongs thus creating local jobs for local people. Will this mean that the people of Walsall will now benefit from a cheap local rate telephone line instead of the 0845 premium rate previously charged?”

(3) Councillor James – Leisure, art and tourism

“Does the portfolio holder agree that every effort should be made to increase the footfall to Walsall town centre to support our declining retail trade and promote our leisure, art and tourist sector at venues such at The New Art Gallery by providing a coach park in 2013/14. A service to operators, users, and of course the wide town economy. An affordable day visitors and tourist coach dropping off and picking up point. There are several dual purpose parking arrangements that can be developed at modest cost. A coach park for Walsall now, rather than delayed in the APP timeline, in four years time.”

(4) **Councillor James – Graphic Information Management System**

“The Graphic Information System (GIS) developed by the Highways and Engineering section has, as we know, won a national award as a result of staff endeavours. Further development of this system will increase the delivery of effective and efficient data to enable improvements to our services. Can the coalition provide an assurance that both staff and capital resources will be maintained in this essential service area in 2013/14?”

8. To report the result of the by-election for the **Bloxwich West Ward** to be held on 15th November 2012

(Note: Note to be circulated around the Council Chamber prior to the meeting.)

9. To confirm the following recommendation of the **Licensing and Safety Committee**:

Gambling Act 2005 – Revision of statement of principles

That the amended revised statement of principles relating to the Gambling Act, 2005 as set out in paragraph 2 to the report be approved.

(Note: Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting.)

10. **Annual report of Audit Committee 2011/12** Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting. The Chairman of Audit Committee to present the report for noting.

11. **Revenue contributions to fund capital expenditure.** Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting.

12. **Board composition and membership of Walsall Housing Group.** Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting

13. **Designation of Statutory Scrutiny Officer.** Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting.

14. **Portfolio holder briefings.** To receive 5 minute presentations from the following portfolio holders:

- Regeneration (Councillor A. Andrew)
- Social care and health (Councillor McCracken)

(Note: A member of the Council may ask the portfolio holder any question and another associate question without notice upon the each report. Questioning by members is limited to 10 minutes for each report presented.)

15. **Appointments to Charities:**

- (a) **Sheffield Playing Fields Charity:** The term of office of Councillors R. Andrew and Rattigan will expire on 18th December 2012. To appoint two trustees for a period of 4 years expiring on 18th December 2016.
- (b) **Walsall Schools Holiday Camp Trust (Bryntysilio):** Report to follow.

16. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors I. Shires, D.A. Shires, Woodruff and Barker:**

This Council notes the important work being undertaken by the Coalition Government in tackling the empty homes problem in this country and addressing the legacy left by the last Labour Government of over ¾ million empty homes.

This Council also welcomes recent announcements made by Liberal Democrat MP Andrew Stunell, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at Communities and Local Government, on the introduction of the Empty Homes Fund, the New Homes Bonus and also the new Empty Homes Premium which will change the rules on Council tax discount for vacant properties, potentially generating additional income for Councils like Walsall to invest in keeping communities together by bringing long term empty homes back into use rather than demolish.

The Council further notes that the initial target of the empty homes initiatives of bringing 3,300 homes back into use has been massively exceeded and, current estimates indicate that £215m of investment will ensure a total of 11,200 homes brought back into use, with further investment to come.

This Council therefore resolves that the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Minister:

- (a) Welcoming the recent initiatives on the Empty Homes Fund, New Homes and the Empty Homes Premium all of which will assist Walsall Council in tackling the current homes shortages.

- (b) Urging the investment of the remaining Government money available under the Empty Homes Fund as a matter of priority.

(Note: Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting.)

17. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors I. Shires, D.A. Shires, Woodruff and Barker:**

This Council notes the importance of an electrified railway network.

This Council notes between 1997 and 2010 under the last Labour Government, only 39 miles of railway track was electrified.

This Council welcomes recent announcements made by the Conservative Liberal Democrat Coalition to invest £9.4 billion into modernise our railways, including the electrification of the Walsall to Rugeley Trent Valley railway line and increasing capacity in the West Midlands.

This Council therefore resolves that the Chief Executive be requested to write to the Minister welcoming this investment.

(Note: Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting.)

18. To consider the following motion, notice of which has been duly given by **Councillors Oliver, James, Burley, Cassidy and Sarohi:**

This Council notes recent legislation introduced by the coalition government in relation to Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

This Council notes in particular the detrimental implications of:

- The changes in Housing Benefit eligibility, including the introduction of restrictions relating to the number of bedrooms and criteria for single adults aged up to 35 years – which we are officially told will impact on over 4,000 households in the borough of Walsall.
- The passporting to local Councils of the estimated Council tax benefit with a reduction of 10%, along with the responsibility for devising eligibility criteria (but with additional restrictions imposed), and associated increases in administrative costs.
- The similar passporting and cutting of the social fund, providing hardship loans and grants.

The Council is of the view that:

- These changes will specifically impact on the disadvantaged in our local communities in Walsall, and in particular those in low paid employment.

- These changes will specifically impact on those Councils with already high and growing numbers of benefit claimants, increasing population, and low employment growth – including the borough of Walsall – resulting in poorer areas paying more for less, while richer areas will pay less for more.
- These changes transfer from central to local government the invidious decisions to cut help for those who need it at a time of ever-contracting budgets. As Councils have no (or very limited) powers to raise additional monies, politically the government is “passing the buck without passing the bucks”.

This Council therefore resolves to inform both the Secretary of State for Local Government, Eric Pickles, and the Local Government Association, of our opposition as above to these changes introduced under the banner “localism”, which will increase inequalities both within local communities and between Council areas – and to call for a re-assessment of these unfair policies introduced by the coalition government.

(Note: Report reproduced in the reports booklet for this meeting.)