



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 19th November 2012 at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

Present

Councillor D.A. Anson (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor M. Nazir (Deputy Mayor)

“ A.J.A. Andrew
“ R.E. Andrew
“ T.G. Ansell
“ M. Arif
“ I. Azam
“ D.J. Barker
“ O.D. Bennett
“ M.A. Bird
“ R. Burley
“ B. Cassidy
“ K. Chambers
“ A.G. Clarke
“ J. R. Cook
“ D. Coughlan
“ S.P. Coughlan
“ C.U. Creaney
“ A. Ditta
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul
“ J. Fitzpatrick
“ S.F. Fitzpatrick
“ M. D. Flower
“ A.D. Harris
“ L.A. Harrison
“ E.F. Hughes
“ K. Hussain
“ G. Illmann-Walker

Councillor D. James

“ L.D. Jeavons
“ T.J. Jukes
“ P. Lane
“ M. Longhi
“ Ms. R.A. Martin
“ Mrs. B.V. McCracken
“ J. Murray
“ G. Perry
“ L.J. Rattigan
“ J. Rochelle
“ E.B. Russell
“ H.S. Sarohi
“ K. Sears
“ Mrs. D.A. Shires
“ I. Shires
“ R.M. Thomas
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ A. Underhill
“ D.J. Turner
“ S. Wade
“ F.J. Westley
“ V. Whyte
“ R.V. Worrall
“ A. Young
“ Zahid Ali

54. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors C. Bott, P. Bott, Oliver, Phillips, Smith and Woodruff.

55. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 24th September 2012 copies having been sent to each member of the Council, be approved as a correct record and signed.

56. **Declarations of interest**

Councillor Worrall declared a personal interest in item 15(b) – appointment of the trustees to School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall.

57. **Mayor's announcements**

(1) **Councillor Lane**

The Mayor extended a welcome to Councillor Patti Lane the newly elected member for Bloxwich West ward.

(2) **Drinks**

As this was the last meeting of the year, the Mayor invited members to join him in the Mayor's Parlour for drinks.

58. **Petitions**

The following petitions were submitted:

- (1) Councillor D. Coughlan – to keep access to Gomer Street surgeries and the Chart Centre via Wolverhampton Street car park open and made safe for wheelchair and pushchair users.
- (2) Councillor Jukes – objection to proposed extension of double yellow lines at Bloxwich Road, Harden Road and Leamore Lane

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

The Saxon Hoard

Mr. Birch of Pelsall Road, Brownhills asked the following question of Councillor Harris:

“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?”

Councillor Harris replied that far from resisting calls for an exhibition of the Staffordshire Hoard, Walsall had made several enquiries since the Hoard was first found. In the first place, Walsall was not eligible to become an Acquiring Partner as neither the New Art Gallery or the Leather Museum had an archaeological collecting policy, nor the necessary professional, archaeological expertise to house or preserve the Hoard. The treasure was now owned by Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery and the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, in Stoke on Trent. He said that Stoke was the designated archaeological museum for Staffordshire and was the only museum in the region, apart from Birmingham, able to meet the requirements to provide a permanent home for the Hoard.

Further enquiries were made by officers in Walsall about an exhibition, but curators at Birmingham and Stoke had indicated that there was no likelihood of any items being loaned for exhibition in Walsall for some considerable time, at least 5 years, as they were currently in the middle of a research and preservation programme.

Councillor Harris said that any future request for an exhibition of the less significant items would require a proposal explaining the rationale behind the request, how the exhibition would be interpreted and displayed and an assurance that adequate security and environmental conditions were in place. The New Art Gallery was designed to display contemporary art and, as such did not have the facilities to host a display of the Staffordshire Hoard, nor the expertise to curate and interpret it. Birmingham curators suggested that the cost of any display including the design, purchase of cases, transport and security would cost between £70,000 and £100,000. Any items loaned would not include the “star” pieces.

Councillor Harris said he had every sympathy with the frustration of being so close, it did not mean that the Council would give up on the achievement of others and hoped that the Walsall Museum and Leather Museum would be integrated.

Mr. Birch asked the following supplementary question:

On a recent BBC TV programme it was established that out of the top 50 or so rated historical finds in this country, the Staffordshire Hoard was rated the third most important of all time. As such it was felt that it deserved a prominent marker for the benefit of visitors, historians and students. In view of the national historical significance of the find and the fact that it was discovered within the Brownhills community, just a few metres outside the Brownhills board due to 1974 boundary changes, he asked if Walsall Council was going to liaise with neighbouring authorities with a view to the installation of a permanent monument adjacent to the site?

Councillor Harris said that he supported the request and would pass it on to the appropriate officers for action.

60. **Questions by members of the Council**

(1) **Public Services (Social Value) Act**

Councillor James asked the following question of Councillor Arif:

“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?”

Councillor Arif replied that in implementing the Act the Council had already added the focus on local providers to our procurement processes and all service areas are encouraged, by Think Walsall and the procurement team, to approach local suppliers first.

Price and quality would still be factors and it was expected that local organisations would be able to match others on both of these. The regeneration team worked with local businesses and organisations to help them prepare to bid for Council work.

The Think Walsall project had already helped Walsall companies secure around £6m worth of contracts by supporting them to find and bid for work. The Council was working with “find it in Walsall”, www.finditinwalsall.co.uk, website in August 2011.

He said that regeneration officers were exploring how the “find it in Walsall” website could be developed further to support more local businesses through greater marketing and working in partnership with existing business support organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce to access opportunities.

The Council annually spends around £280m on supplies and services. In the calendar year 2010, 30% of the Council's spend was with local suppliers - £85 million and in 2011 this was increased to 35% - £95m

The implementation of the Social Value act would help to continue this positive trend.

Councillor Arif said that the Council was always required by law to have open and competitive tendering processes.

(2) **Benefits call centre**

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

“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?”

Councillor Towe said that 0845 numbers were not premium numbers but operated on local rates. He went on to say that officers would be reviewing and evaluating a number of alternatives for the benefits helpline in the future which would include reducing costs to the public.

Councillor Coughlan asked the following supplementary question:

When looking at reducing costs for residents can you give consideration to older people, free schools meals, people with disabilities and those paying Council tax by telephone?

Councillor Towe replied that wherever we could get costs to a uniform level we would do so, but pointed out that different providers charged difference costs. He gave an assurance that consideration would be given to reducing costs across the Council wherever possible.

(3) **Leisure, art and tourism**

Councillor James asked the following question of Councillor Ansell:

“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.”

Councillor Ansell agreed that the retail, leisure, art and tourist sectors needed to be supported by efficient and convenient transport systems which helped visitors access the excellent facilities Walsall has to offer.

He said that coach parking was already provided to help attract visitors to the town centre. Coaches could park in Shaw Street near to the New Art Gallery, for a maximum of 20 minutes, which was enough time for dropping-off and picking-up passengers. Unrestricted coach parking was provided in Wisemore, at the side of the Leather Museum and bus stops in Hatherton Street were also used daily by coaches.

The New Art Gallery and Leather Museum between them already received about 90 coach parties per year, all using existing parking facilities. Clearly the provision of more coach parking facilities might help with attracting more coach parties and more visitors, but he was not aware of any demand for additional provision at the present time.

Councillor Ansell said that the Council would be consulting shortly on the Walsall Town Centre Area Action Plan. Councillor Andrew was leading on this work and if the consultation revealed demand for more coach parking, then he was sure that he would take this into account in the future plans for the town centre.

(4) Graphic Information Management System

Councillor James asked the following question of Councillor Ansell:

“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?”

Councillor Ansell replied it was true that the team had received national recognition for the geographical information system which showed traffic accidents, skid resistance and road condition data to inform the highway maintenance programme. Since that time the system had been developed further and it now showed the full road works history, inspection reports and insurance claims data, all of which assisted in focussing the Council’s limited resources.

Clearly savings needed to be made right across the Council. There would be substantially less resources in the next few years and he could not give an assurance that any section of the service would have the same level of resources that it had now. However, he welcomed the support that was being given to this service.

He said that the Council had to make the most of staff, technology and systems. The benefits of GIS in helping managing assets was clear and that this and other facilities are utilised to the best effect, including that generated by the highway

inspectors and gully cleansing crews but we also needed to ensure that this supported functions such as the new Flood Risk Management duties of the authority.

Councillor James asked the following supplementary question:

In the future could we look at how this system could be rolled out to other departments to increase efficiency?

Councillor Ansell said that he could not see into the future.

61. Bloxwich West ward by-election

The Council noted the result of the by-election held on 15th November 2012 for the Bloxwich West ward:

Names of candidates	No. of votes polled	Candidate elected
Cockayne, Christine	61	
Hazell, Elizabeth	195	Patricia Lane
Patricia Lane	1049	
Pitt, Abigail	783	

Percentage turnout 21.17%

**62. Recommendation of Licensing and Safety Committee – Gambling Act 2005
Revision of statement of principles**

The report to Licensing and Safety Committee was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Sears, duly seconded and:

Resolved

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

63. Annual report of Audit Committee 2011/12

The annual report was submitted.

The Chairman of Audit Committee, Councillor Hughes presented the report.

Resolved

That the annual report of the Audit Committee 2011/12 be noted.

64. Revenue contributions to fund capital expenditure

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Towe, seconded by Councillor A. Andrew and:

Resolved

- (1) That the projects already approved by Cabinet set out in Table 1 of the report be noted.
- (2) That the revenue contributions to fund capital expenditure as detailed in Table 2 of the report be approved.

65. Board composition and membership of Walsall Housing Group

The report was submitted.

Resolved

That Councillors Hughes, I. Shires and Wade be nominated to sit on the Board of WHG.

66. Designation of Statutory Scrutiny Officer

The report was submitted.

Resolved

That the Executive Director, Social Care and Inclusion be designated as the Statutory Scrutiny Officer.

67. Portfolio holder briefings

(a) Regeneration

Councillor A. Andrew, portfolio holder for Regeneration gave a presentation.

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

(b) **Social care and health**

Councillor McCracken, portfolio holder for Social care and health gave a presentation.

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

68. **Appointments to Charities**

(a) **Sheffield Playing Fields Charity**

The following nominations were made to the above:

Councillor Worrall
Councillor R. Andrew
Councillor Rattigan

The nominations were put to the vote and it was:

Resolved

That Councillors R. Andrew and Rattigan be appointed Trustees of the Sheffield Playing Fields Charity for a period of 4 years expiring on 18th December 2016.

(b) **School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall**

The report was submitted.

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

Resolved

That Councillors Jeavons and Thomas be appointed Trustees of the School Holiday Camp Fund of Walsall for the balance of the period of 4 years expiring on 25th August 2016.

69. **Notice of motion – Empty homes**

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

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, the then 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.

Amendment moved by Councillor S. Coughlan and duly seconded:

This Council notes that figures released by the DCLG show that based on council tax base lines for 2009-10, 87 empty properties were brought back into use, but in 2010-11, 57 became empty losing Walsall £53,255 in empty homes bonus

This Council cautiously welcomes recent announcements made by Liberal Democrat MP Andrew Stunell, now replaced by Don Foster as 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.

Concern though must be shown by this Council that authorities up and down the country are using these un-ring fenced grants to shore up the coalition Governments savage cuts to local councils, for example:

Elmbridge – includes ‘funding for other charitable groups ... affected by the cuts in government funding’ and ‘funding for public libraries under threat of closure’,

Wychavon – 40% passed to parishes to spend on community facilities – for example, village hall improvements, flood protection, bus subsidies, play areas, allotments and green initiatives.

The Vale of White Horse District Council – “used the bonus to introduce free car parking to the three market towns”.

Bath and North East Somerset Council “used the bonus to introduce £12m savings target and protect priority frontline services”. Includes street cleaning, libraries, paying for foster care places.

Rugby Borough Council – NHB “ has meant that front line services have been maintained and in some cases enhanced”. Includes refuse collection and leisure centre.

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, and raising concerns that Walsall is losing out by allowing funding meant to tackle empty homes being used by councils to shore up budget cuts

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared lost – 26 members voting in favour and 28 against.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried – 28 members voting in favour and 25 against and it was:

Resolved

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, the then 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.

70. **Notice of motion – Electrified railway network**

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

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.

Amendment moved by Councillor S. Coughlan and seconded by Councillor Jeavons:

This Council notes the importance of an electrified railway network that between 1997 and 2010 under the last Labour Government:

- railway track was electrified; and, further:
- modernisation of the West Coast Main Line was completed (2008);
- the High Speed 2 project was initiated with cross-party backing (2009);
- Great Western electrification (London-Bristol-Swansea) was committed (2009);
- Liverpool-Manchester electrification (Chat Moss route) was committed (2009);

- gauge enhancements for container traffic from South and East coast ports to the West Midlands were completed, paving the way for future electrification and that, seventy per cent of people want to see Britain's railways renationalised, according to a new survey.

This Council calls on the Coalition Government to renationalise the rail network.

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.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared lost – 26 members voting in favour and 28 against.

The motion was put to the vote and declared carried – the voting at the request of several members of the Council being recorded as follows:

**For the motion -
28 members**

Cllr: Bird
I. Shires
A. Andrew
R. Andrew
Ansell
Arif
Azam
Barker
Bennett
Clarke
Cook
Douglas-Maul
Flower
Harris
Harrison
Hughes
Longhi
Martin
McCracken
Murray
Perry
Rattigan
Rochelle
Sears
D.A. Shires
Towe
Turner
Zahid Ali

**Against the amendment –
25 members**

Cllr: Anson
Burley
Cassidy
Chambers
D. Coughlan
S. Coughlan
Creaney
Ditta
J. Fitzpatrick
S. Fitzpatrick
Hussain
Illmann-Walker
Jeavons
Jukes
Lane
Nazir
Russell
Sarohi
Thomas
Underhill
Wade
Westley
Whyte
Worrall
Young

**Neutral –
1 member**

Cllr: James

and it was:

Resolved

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.

71. Notice of motion – Housing benefit and Council Tax benefit

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

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.

Amendment moved by Councillor I. Shires and duly seconded:

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 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 and recognises:

- 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.

- The positive work being done by coalition partners working with others on this Council to allow as far as possible unnecessary hardship in the short, medium and long term, which calls for a report to go to Cabinet and appropriate Scrutiny Panels itemising those systems and policies, both in place and in progress through this Council and other agencies.
- Those changes within the Act transfer from central government the invidious decisions which inevitably will lead to vulnerable people being put at risk in a climate of ever-contracting budgets during this time of austerity, noting that councils have few powers to raise additional monies which effectively passes the buck without 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 of “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.

At 8.00 p.m. the Council adjourned to enable members to consider the amendment.

The meeting reconvened at 8.20 p.m.

On being put to the vote the amendment was declared carried.

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

Resolved (unanimously)

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 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 and recognises:

- 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.
- The positive work being done by coalition partners working with others on this Council to allow as far as possible unnecessary hardship in the short, medium and long term, which calls for a report to go to Cabinet and appropriate Scrutiny Panels itemising those systems and policies, both in place and in progress through this Council and other agencies.
- Those changes within the Act transfer from central government the invidious decisions which inevitably will lead to vulnerable people being put at risk in a climate of ever-contracting budgets during this time of austerity, noting that councils have few powers to raise additional monies which effectively passes the buck without 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 of “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.

The meeting terminated at 8.35 p.m.

Mayor:

Date: