



Walsall Council

Minutes of the **MEETING** of the Council of the Walsall Metropolitan Borough held on **Monday 23rd April, 2007, at 6.00 p.m.** at the Council House.

Present

Councillor Mrs. B.V. McCracken (Mayor) in the Chair

Councillor M.G. Pitt (Deputy Mayor)

“ A.J.A. Andrew
“ T.G. Ansell
“ D.A. Anson
“ M. Arif
“ A. Aslam
“ C.M. Ault
“ J.M. Barton
“ L.A. Beeley
“ A.G. Bentley
“ Mrs. J. Beilby
“ M.A. Bird
“ P. Bott
“ M.R. Burley
“ B. Cassidy
“ K. Chambers
“ A.G. Clarke
“ J. R. Cook
“ S.P. Coughlan
“ C.U. Creaney
“ B.A. Douglas-Maul
“ M. D. Flower
“ A.E. Griffiths
“ A.D. Harris
“ L.A. Harrison
“ E.F. Hughes
“ A.D. Johnson
“ H. Khan
“ M. Longhi

Councillor S.W. Madeley

“ Ms. R.A. Martin
“ Mrs. C. Micklewright
“ M. Nazir
“ J.G. O'Hare
“ T.S. Oliver
“ A.J. Paul
“ G. Perry
“ J.D. Phillips
“ K. Phillips
“ Mrs. E.E. Pitt
“ I.C. Robertson
“ R.S. Robinson
“ J. Rochelle
“ B. Sanders
“ H.S. Sarohi
“ K. Sears
“ Mrs. D.A. Shires
“ I. Shires
“ C.D.D. Towe
“ D.J. Turner
“ W.T. Tweddle
“ A. Underhill
“ R.A. Walker
“ G. Wilkes
“ V.G. Woodruff
“ M. Yasin
“ Zahid Ali

92. **Apologies**

Apologies for non-attendance were submitted on behalf of Councillors D. Pitt and Young.

The Mayor, on behalf of the Council, wished Councillor Des Pitt a speedy recovery from his recent accident.

93. **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 26th February 2007 copies having been sent to each member of the Council be approved as a correct record and signed.

94. **Declarations of interest**

The following members declared an interest in the items indicated:-

Councillor Oliver	Youth service – employee of Palfrey Community Association (personal)
Councillor Sears	Acorn home care (personal)
Councillor Arif	Community wardens (personal)
Councillor Beeley	Community wardens

95. **Mayor's announcements**

(1) **Councillor Bentley**

The Mayor informed the Council that this would be Councillor Bentley's last Council meeting after 25 years service as a Councillor. Councillors I. Shires, Ansell and Bird paid tribute to his service to the people of Walsall over many years. The Council wished Councillor Bentley a long and happy retirement.

(2) **Point of order – Fly posting**

The Mayor stated that she had been informed by the Leader that he would be raising a point of order concerning a notice of motion passed at Council on 15th January 2007 relating to fly posting, under paragraph 15.12 of the Council's procedure rules concerning a point of law.

That Mayor said that this item would be taken as the last item of business this evening.

(3) **Mayor's drinks**

The Mayor invited members to join her for drinks at the conclusion of the meeting.

96. **Petitions**

The following petitions were submitted:

- Councillor Towe – Objection to application to build nine flats at 152 Beacon Road
- Councillor Creaney – Developments to housing, such as new window, kitchens, bathrooms and central heating.
- Councillor Robinson:
 - (1) Hardy Road – brown bins.
 - (2) Hardy Road – illegal motorcycle activity on common land
 - (3) Derelict former Raglan and Manor House Public House in Mill Street/Leckie Road – anti-social behaviour and safety hazard
- Councillor Robertson:
 - (1) Parking problems outside Edgar Stammers School on Harden Road and Coalpool Lane.
 - (2) Closure of Derby Street to prevent tipping of rubbish in old railway cutting
- Councillor Martin – Installation of CCTV in Bentley shopping areas.
- Councillor Beeley – road safety concerns on Ingram Road and surrounding roads
- Councillor D. Pitt – Off road parking in the vicinity of Abbey Square, Mossley Estate
- Councillor Sanders - Change of route of 374 bus route through Chuckery on its way to and from Gillity Village (2 petitions)
- Councillor Burley – Community wardens

97. **Question by members of the Council**

Replacement wheelie bins

Councillor Burley asked the following question of Councillor Walker:

Do you believe that your policy of making a charge for replacement wheelie bins, when the bin has been stolen and the theft reported to the police, to be a fair one bearing in mind that a such a policy penalises many and leads to further possibilities of fly-tipping?

Councillor Walker replied that unaccustomed as she was to referring to past history, she wanted to remind Councillor Burley and her colleagues that instigated the charging policy in 1996 at a charge of £35. This had to be withdrawn pretty quickly after 2 months as it was realised that fees were far too high and the cost of administering the scheme was unreasonable given that only 50 cases were reported annually. The current policy was revisited by the Environmental Services Committee in January 2001 and the motion, that a charge be introduced, was carried by that Committee to be introduced from April 2001. Councillor Burley was indeed a member of that Committee and present at that meeting. Although I don't have a record of voting on the motion, I do know that the charging policy was introduced to enable the Council to implement Bank Holiday bin collections. This was something I know Councillor Burley to be deeply in favour of given that she lobbied the Council with petitions on this subject. At that time, the cost to the Council was some £60000 per year, with some 4000 bins disappearing. It was felt that by charging for replacements it would encourage residents to take greater care of their bins. The cost merely reflects part of the cost to the Council and the Council makes no profit. Although I feel some sympathy with the residents who suffer the unfortunate experience of theft or damage, the policy is balanced and does not implement unreasonable charges. There is no evidence to suggest that fly tipping has increased as a result. Any relaxation of the policy may well result in an increase in the number of cases reported and a significant increase in costs to the Council.

98. **State of Walsall debate**

Madam, Mayor, when we look back over the last 12 months we can all take pride in the way the council has improved. We know this from the many inspections and assessments we have. All of these tell a consistently good story. Walsall Council is good and getting better.

However, what I want to do this evening is focus on the difference we are making to people's lives. What do residents think of their council? What impact are we really making?

The first and perhaps most important thing to say is that resident satisfaction with the council and its services have increased by 11 percentage points. That isn't always the story you read about in the local press or the sort of thing which gets debated here. But it is the real story – out there amongst the people of Walsall.

In looking in more detail, firstly I would like to highlight some of the changes for older people and people with disabilities. Over the past year, more vulnerable people are being supported to live in their own homes than ever before. And more have the opportunity to manage their own care, through Direct Payments. Over 5,000 people have received housing support.

In 2005/06 there was a big queue of people waiting for occupational therapy services. Now that queue has been cut in half and the time taken to get the service has also been slashed.

Disabled people are now better able access council buildings. Over 83% of buildings are now accessible – placing Walsall as one of the best performing councils in this area. And they are also benefiting from our new service which matches disabled people to suitably adapted accommodation. People with disabilities and their carers are now enjoying the Centre for Independent Living in the town centre, providing information and training. And 150 more carers received support from the council to help them care for their loved one. Next year people will be able to access our social care services out of office hours, to reflect better the expectations of service users and carers.

At the other end of the age range, there have also been significant changes in services for the children of the borough. We are changing the way we deliver children's services to ensure that there is a flexible range of provision in education, early years and youth settings and that there is early intervention and effective protection of our most vulnerable children.

Children are now enjoying the 10 new Children's Centres which we have built in the Borough, one ahead of schedule and a further 6 will be built by 2008.

Our 7 year olds are now achieving at above the national average whilst our 11 and 14 year olds have made huge progress to get close to the national average figure. At key stage 2 (age 11), Walsall is the third most improved council in the country in recent years.

Walsall is in the top 25 of 150 local authorities nationally with regard to the numbers of children adopted. People leaving our care are more likely to go into employment, education or training than elsewhere – Walsall has reached the top national standard for this.

Young people are also enjoying our new and healthy school dinners, prepared by better trained and qualified cooks. Through the healthy eating award scheme they get free use of sports facilities if they choose fruit and vegetables with their lunch.

Nearly 1 in 4 of young people aged between 8 and 19 took part in our summer programme of activities, which helped reduce crimes associated with young people by 26%.

I would now like to move on to say something about where people live. More homeless people in Walsall are getting re-housed and more quickly – with much less use of Bed and Breakfast. And next year people will benefit from 236 more homes brought up to the decent home standard. Two hundred vulnerable people will be enjoying better standards of heating and insulation in their homes.

People who are reliant on housing benefits are now getting their claim processed in 28 days compared with 90 days the year before. It is still too long but it is a big improvement.

Young and old people alike want clean, green and safe neighbourhoods and we can show excellent results here too.

Without doubt people are enjoying cleaner streets. There has been a 20% improvement in cleanliness on roads since 2005 and this is reflected in the big increase in public satisfaction. We've also clamped down on littering and dog fouling with a big increase in the number of fixed penalty notices for culprits.

In terms of feeling safe, crime is the main concern of many residents. This year has seen an 8% fall in overall crime, one of the biggest falls across the West Midlands.

In terms of a green environment, more and more households are keen to recycle their waste. Last year we provided 4,500 home composting kits. Households are increasingly satisfied with the recycling service and as we roll out the brown bins to all eligible households, I know that this will continue. Residents are also more satisfied with their parks and open spaces and with leisure facilities.

The people of Walsall have many other priorities and we have addressed some of the most urgent of these also.

We have continued to tackle the legacy of underinvestment in roads. We've improved 28 miles of roads this year. Short term, that means disruption but longer term it means roads in better condition. Bus users are finding bus travel easier as a result of our work with Centro to provide 30 new bus shelters with better passenger information.

More people are getting involved in issues affecting their community through their local neighbourhood partnerships. All of the LNPs are now delivering local improvements and we're going to strengthen this still further next year.

Alongside all of the service modernisation and improvements across the Council, the exciting regeneration of our Borough is also fast taking shape. Working constructively with our partners both in the Borough and across the Black Country, we have seen a number of major achievements over the past year and interest in Walsall by developers and investors is at an unprecedented level.

The first phase of the St. Matthews Quarter will be completed in June with a new superstore and 1,000 space car park. This will also offer high quality affordable housing. The second phase of converting Shannons Mill into more housing plus office space will start in July.

Over the past year we have approved planning applications with a value of over £300 million, which has already seen the start on site of the new College as part of a £100 million business campus – a project vital to equipping our residents with the skills for the future. The iconic scheme for Walsall Waterfront will create an exciting new quarter for Walsall of national significance.

But this Council is not just focussing on the Town Centre, important as it is. We have put in place the framework and resources to regenerate our district and neighbourhood centres. Exciting, but deliverable, plans for Bentley, Goscote Valley and Willenhall are coming to fruition which will transform those areas creating new housing choice, community facilities and employment opportunities, thereby helping inject new confidence and hope into local communities. We are also committed to setting out a new direction for the community led regeneration of Birchills.

Residents of Brownhills are enjoying their fantastic new library. Whenever we improve a library there is a big increase in membership and usage. Blakenall last year, Brownhills this year, and next year New Invention, Walsall Wood and Aldridge.

Regeneration is not just a physical process. We continue to work to create the conditions for existing businesses to grow and diversify, and to attract new businesses into the Borough. We have set up a Town Centre Management Programme covering both Walsall and the district centres; we are developing exciting plans for our Markets and are looking to focus future transport investment to unlock new opportunities.

But above all regeneration is about people. Projects to address worklessness and to improve skill levels have and will continue to be a key priority for this Council and its partners. The launch of a new sustainability standard will ensure that we maximise the benefits to local communities – in terms of new employment and training – from the major investment that is coming into the Borough over coming years.

Over the past year, we have also given some attention to some of our back office activities which although not in the public eye, are nonetheless essential for a large multi million pound business.

The First Stop Shop goes from strength to strength and this year, it dealt with 330,000 customer enquiries with 99% of customers surveyed being happy with the service received. Next year more services will be available through the contract centre and there will be a mobile bus services, offering access to services in local neighbourhoods.

Major work has been done to re-organise our IT services and make the best use of the complex networks across the Council. Also linked to this we have refined our procurement approach which has produced real and cashable savings. This will be further developed in 2007/08 into areas such as the Corporate Property Review where we would hope to reduce property occupancy in the town centre by 20%. Other work has been done to modernise the business support infrastructure of the local authority and in terms of savings this has released £1.2

million for reinvestment and across the whole transformation programme this is set to go up to £2.2 million next year. The new telephone contact centre is operational and providing an improved telephone service to people of the Borough and the new Council website has been launched in order to improve the quality and ease of the access to information available to citizens.

In this chamber we sometimes make the mistake of focussing too much on things that happen within the council rather than outside in the real world. I recognise that we've faced difficult challenges, not least two Employment Tribunal cases, from which lessons have been learnt. But the things that really matter are those that affect local people, things that they want to talk about on their doorsteps. The examples I have referred to show how we are making real improvements and real difference to people's lives. Also we have honoured around 90% of the 20 pledges that we made to people of the borough and we are on course to meet the remainder early in the coming year.

So what does all this mean? Well, the Audit Commission have confirmed that Walsall Council retains 3 stars and is improving well. We're one of the best authorities in the region for our environmental and housing services. We've also been rated highly for the way we use resources. We've achieved almost all the targets we agreed with Government as part of our Local Area Agreement to improve Walsall.

Overall, it's an excellent end of term report from Government but more importantly from our own citizens. We can all take pride in these achievements and I particularly want to pay tribute to the skill, dedication and enthusiasm of our staff. Walsall faces major challenges ahead, it probably always will. But our record over recent years, and certainly over the last 12 months, shows that we are helping to really make Walsall a better place for people to live and work.

Councillors Oliver and I. Shores spoke briefly to the statement made by the Leader.

99. **Review of polling station and polling places in the Borough**

The report was submitted.

It was **moved** by Councillor Ansell, seconded by Councillor O'Hare and:

Resolved

- (1) That a review of Polling Districts and Places Working Party be established, for the period 30 June 2007, to 31 December 2007, for the purpose of considering submissions received, issues raised and making recommendations for each polling district/polling place to Council, in sufficient time for the inclusion of any changes in the new electoral registers to be published on 1 December 2007

- (2) That the Working Party membership be:
- Council's Electoral Services Manager and Assistant Electoral Services Manager:
 - A representative (and substitute) from each political group within Council
 - Two representatives from the Walsall's Disability Forum
- (3) That the Working Party appoint a chairperson at its first meeting

100. **Corporate risk management**

The report was submitted:

(see annexed

It was **moved** by Councillor Longhi, seconded by Councillor Ansell and:

Resolved

- (1) That report and appendix setting out the range of activities that have embedded risk management in all Council activities be noted.
- (2) That the Council acknowledge the work undertaken by the Audit Committee in ensuring that risk is being actively managed within the organisation.

101. **Notice of motion – Neighbourhood wardens**

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

That this Council:

- Recognises the contribution made to community safety in the borough by neighbourhood wardens and their popularity with the public.
- Notes that the warden scheme in this borough has attracted widespread praise and has also received national awards and recognition.
- Notes that the scheme does not feature in the current budget passed by the Council.

However, this Council asks that officers will use their best endeavours to secure further funding to allow reinstatement of the neighbourhood warden scheme in partnership and with the support of the Police, the Police Community Support Officers, local schools, Walsall tPCT, the voluntary sector and WHG.

Councillor Burley presented a petition in support of her motion.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried and it was:

Resolved

That this Council:

- Recognises the contribution made to community safety in the borough by neighbourhood wardens and their popularity with the public.
- Notes that the warden scheme in this borough has attracted widespread praise and has also received national awards and recognition.
- Notes that the scheme does not feature in the current budget passed by the Council.

However, this Council asks that officers will use their best endeavours to secure further funding to allow reinstatement of the neighbourhood warden scheme in partnership and with the support of the Police, the Police Community Support Officers, local schools, Walsall tPCT, the voluntary sector and WHG.

102. Notice of motion – Youth service

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given, was **moved** by Councillor Robinson and duly seconded:

This Council note that:

- As local Councillors across the Borough we continue to receive ongoing comment and complaints as to anti-social behaviour and the lack of positive and diversionary activities for young people.
- That the base budget for Walsall Youth Service in the current financial year is £3.58 million.
- That all Walsall Youth Service work and potential contracts with other service providers are based on the “Transforming Youthwork” curricular guidelines which, despite its benefits, also brings constraints and reduction in work – in particular – “hard to reach” young people.

- That in order to achieve the above, it was advised in Walsall that a minimum of 90% of the former Youth & Community budget should be spent toward the “Transforming Youthwork” agenda, leading to major cuts, closures and decrease in service delivery across many local community organisations.
- Across Walsall very little funding has been made available to young people below the age of 11 and this disenfranchises this age group.

As from 8.1.07 under Section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, local authorities are expected to secure access for young people to “positive activities” including youth clubs, sports facilities and arts projects. “Positive activities” might include sports clubs, cultural events, volunteering schemes or arts projects but the scope is broad and activities can be educational or recreational – so long as they contribute to young people’s well being. Projects should be delivered in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

This Council therefore requests the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel to consider this duty, and further that the responsible Cabinet member provide a report to Council (within six months) as to the implementation of the requirement of the 2006 Act.

Amendment moved by Councillor Zahid and seconded by Councillor O’Hare:

That this Council note that:

- (1) As local councillors across the Borough we continue to receive ongoing comment and complaints as to anti-social behaviour and the need for further positive and diversionary activities for young people.
- (2) That the base budget for Walsall Youth Service in the current financial year is £3.58 million.
- (3) That all Walsall Youth Service work and potential contract with other service providers are based on the “Transforming Youth work” curricular guidelines.
- (4) That in order to achieve the above, it was advised in Walsall that a minimum of 90% of the former Youth & Community budget should be spent towards the “Transforming Youth work” agenda.
- (5) Across Walsall funding for young people below the age of 11 is also crucial.

As from 8.1.07 under section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, local authorities are expected to secure access for young people to “positive activities” including youth clubs, sports facilities and arts projects. “Positive activities might include sports clubs, cultural events, volunteering schemes or arts projects but the scope is broad and activities can be educational or recreational – so long as they contribute to young people’s well being”. Projects should be delivered in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

This Council therefore requests the Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Panel to consider this duty and investigate the provision for positive activities available to different age groups. Furthermore, the responsible Cabinet Member provides a report together with any recommendations from Scrutiny to full Council (within six months) as to the implementation of the requirement of the 2006 Act.

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

The amendment was put as the substantive motion, declared carried and it was:

Resolved

That this Council note that:

- (1) As local councillors across the Borough we continue to receive ongoing comment and complaints as to anti-social behaviour and the need for further positive and diversionary activities for young people.
- (2) That the base budget for Walsall Youth Service in the current financial year is £3.58 million.
- (3) That all Walsall Youth Service work and potential contract with other service providers are based on the “Transforming Youth work” curricular guidelines.
- (4) That in order to achieve the above, it was advised in Walsall that a minimum of 90% of the former Youth & Community budget should be spent towards the “Transforming Youth work” agenda.
- (5) Across Walsall funding for young people below the age of 11 is also crucial.

As from 8.1.07 under section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, local authorities are expected to secure access for young people to “positive activities” including youth clubs, sports facilities and arts projects. “Positive activities might include sports clubs, cultural events, volunteering schemes or arts projects but the scope is broad and activities can be educational or recreational – so long as they contribute to young people’s well being”. Projects should be delivered in partnership with the voluntary and community sector.

This Council therefore requests the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Panel to consider this duty and investigate the provision for positive activities available to different age groups. Furthermore, the responsible Cabinet Member provides a report together with any recommendations from Scrutiny to full Council (within six months) as to the implementation of the requirement of the 2006 Act.

103. **Notice of motion – Corporate parent strategy**

The following motion, notice of which had been duly given was **moved** by Councillor Hughes and seconded by Councillor Zahid Ali:

This Council welcomes the progress that has been made in improving outcomes for looked after children in Walsall through the implementation of the corporate parenting strategy. In particular it notes the remarkable achievement of leading all 150 English Councils in providing care leavers with education, training and employment opportunities.

The Council is committed to continue to develop support services which provide children with stability, enable them to grow up in good health, to do well at school, have a good range of training and employment opportunities enabling them to look forward to a positive future.

The corporate parenting action plan has been refreshed accordingly and is attached to this motion.

We call for this Council to reaffirm it's commitment to looked after children. We request that in 2007/08:

- (1) all looked after children have access to cultural and leisure facilities by providing a "leisure pass";
- (2) establish a "virtual school" with specialist and dedicated support for all looked after children;
- (3) ensure care leavers have specific opportunities for work placements and employment within all Council departments.

On being put to the vote the motion was declared carried and it was:

Resolved

This Council welcomes the progress that has been made in improving outcomes for looked after children in Walsall through the implementation of the corporate parenting strategy. In particular it notes the remarkable achievement of leading all 150 English Councils in providing care leavers with education, training and employment opportunities.

The Council is committed to continue to develop support services which provide children with stability, enable them to grow up in good health, to do well at school, have a good range of training and employment opportunities enabling them to look forward to a positive future.

The corporate parenting action plan has been refreshed accordingly and is attached to this motion.

We call for this Council to reaffirm its commitment to looked after children. We request that in 2007/08:

- (1) all looked after children have access to cultural and leisure facilities by providing a "leisure pass";
- (2) establish a "virtual school" with specialist and dedicated support for all looked after children;
- (3) ensure care leavers have specific opportunities for work placements and employment within all Council departments.

104. **Point of order – fly posting**

The Leader of the Council rose on a point of order relating to an alleged breach of the law whereby potentially unless the motion approved at Council on 15 January 2007 relating to fly posting was amended, the Council would be at risk of acting in an ultra vires manner. He referred to Council to paragraph 15.12 of the Council's procedure rules:

In order that the matter could be dealt with this evening it was **moved** by Councillor Ansell, duly seconded and:

Resolved (unanimously)

That the Council's procedure rules be suspended for the remainder of the meeting.

Amendment moved by Councillor Ansell and seconded by Councillor O'Hare

That to improve the street scene and improve the environment, the Council's political groups have agreed, from today, not to affix or erect any posters seeking election for a candidate to the Council within the Borough on any Council's assets.

Further, if posters are affixed upon street furniture or assets, belonging to the Council, it authorises all officers of the Council to remove the same. Also, the Council requests the Chief Executive to contact all of the Council's partner organisations to seek their commitment to remove any election posters that may be attached to their assets within the Borough.

In response to a question as to whether the earlier minute should be rescinded, Mr. Cox, the legal representative, stated that the reason why Council procedure rules were suspended was in order to avoid any confusion, but as a statutory body we were bound by general statute to take this corrective action as this Chamber is taking a lead on this matter whilst recognising that we cannot constrain all candidates.

Upon being put to the vote, the amendment was declared carried and it was:

Resolved

That to improve the street scene and improve the environment, the Council's political groups have agreed, from today, not to affix or erect any posters seeking election for a candidate to the Council within the Borough on any Council's assets.

Further, if posters are affixed upon street furniture or assets, belonging to the Council, it authorises all officers of the Council to remove the same. Also, the Council requests the Chief Executive to contact all of the Council's partner organisations to seek their commitment to remove any election posters that may be attached to their assets within the Borough.

The meeting terminated at 8.15 p.m.