

## COUNCIL

Wednesday, 5th September, 2018

Time of Commencement: 7.30 pm

**Present:-** The Mayor - Councillor Mrs Gill Heesom – in the Chair

**Councillors:**

Burgess	Panter
Burnett	Parker
Miss J Cooper	Pickup
Mrs J Cooper	Proctor
John Cooper	Reddish
Driver	Robinson
Dymond	Rout
Fear	Shenton
Fox-Hewitt	Spence
Gardner	Stubbs
Harrison	Sweeney
Holland	J Tagg
Horsfall	S Tagg
Johnson	Walklate
Johnson	J Waring
Jones	P Waring
Kearon	G White
Maxfield	Wilkes
Moffat	G Williams
Northcott	J Williams
Olszewski	Wright

**Officers** Executive Director Operational Services- David Adams, Janet Baddeley, E (Regeneration and Development) - Neale Clifton, Geoff Durham - Mayor's Officer, John Tradewell - Acting Chief Executive / Head of Paid Service and (Resources and Support Services) - Kelvin Turner

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Councillor Simon White.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. **MINUTES**

**Resolved:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July, 2018 be agreed as a correct record subject to the amendment written below:

Replacing the third to sixth paragraphs under 'Questions to the Mayor, Cabinet Members and Committee Chairs' with the following:

The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Northcott confirmed "the petitions that had been submitted in response to the Preferred Options Document consultation and would be considered in the preparation of the Draft Local Plan". At this stage it was not known when they would be going to Cabinet.

Councillor Robinson asked why there was no item for Clough Hall Playing Fields on this agenda, having received a letter saying that it would be. Councillor Robinson asked if the petition procedure could be placed on the Council's website. Councillor Northcott agreed to meet with Councillor Robinson regarding the matters raised

**4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Members were reminded of the Remembrance Sunday Parade and church service on 11 November and were asked to support the Mayor.

**5. CRACKLEY PLAYING FIELDS PETITION**

Ms Karen Blacknell spoke as the petition organiser stating that residents wanted the site to remain as green space. The site is used by people of all ages for many pastimes.

Over the years, Chesterton and Crackley had lost shops, public houses and a community hall. Ms Blacknell stated that the land had been given by the people, to the people, for the people.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth, Councillor Paul Northcott thanked the residents for the petition and stated that all petitions were taken seriously and that all of the required criteria had been met.

Members were informed that Aspire Housing had received funding last year to undertake research on the site for a master plan. Councillor Northcott had met with Aspire and if a consultation had taken place, no results were discussed at that meeting.

Councillor Proctor referred to the petition stating that the area had a shortage of playing fields but that the Apedale Valley was nearby. In addition, the petition had been started while the consultation was in progress and felt that it would be wrong of the Council to do anything whilst the consultation was still going on.

Councillor Fear said that the petition was 'heartfelt' and should be considered in the broader process.

Councillor Gardner stated that the funding that Aspire received did not include the Crackley playing field and that the site was not included in the Local Plan. The area was under represented by greenspace and the health and wellbeing of the community needed to be taken into consideration.

Members also stated that the land was well used for a number of activities and felt that it was important to take the petition seriously as part of the consultation.

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg agreed that the petition should be considered as part of the Local Plan process and that the petition be forwarded to Aspire and that no decision be made until the consultation had been completed and all sites had been considered.

- Resolved:**
- (i) That the petition be considered as part of the Local Plan process and that it be forwarded to Aspire as landowners.
  - (ii) That no decision be made on the future of the council-owned land until such time that the consultation is completed and all potential sites have been considered.

## **6. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL**

The Leader submitted a report providing an update to Members on the activities and decisions of the Cabinet together with the Forward Plan.

Members asked the following questions on the Leader's Statement:

### *Cabinet Meetings.*

Cabinet had not met since the previous Full Council meeting in July.

Councillor Kearon asked the Leader what 'actions' had taken place in respect of the Ryecroft and whether the town ward Councillors' had been consulted?

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg stated that discussions had taken place and a full report would be given later in the meeting.

### *Grot Spot – Fly Tipping Removal.*

Councillor John Cooper stated that this was an excellent idea which had his full support.

Councillor Julie Cooper welcomed the roll out of this and stated that the number of complaints that she had been receiving in respect of fly tipping had reduced.

Councillor Robinson asked the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling, Councillor Trevor Johnson if the 'clean- up activities' would work alongside Communities to clean up?

Councillor Johnson stated that there were no plans at present to involve the community but that the scheme had been trialled in May Bank, Newcastle and Wolstanton and had had no recurrence of fly tipping in the areas that had been cleared. Sites that had been cleared had a sign put up stating that any evidence found on such sites would be pursued and the offender would be prosecuted.

Councillor Simon Tagg said that this was a good move forward and that it complimented other activities that were going on. Councillor Tagg noted and

welcomed that Parish Council's and community Groups would like to get involved and would develop the scheme in the future.

*In Bloom and Champion of Champion's Finals.*

Members congratulated staff on the work that had been done – especially through the very hot and dry summer.

Councillor Robinson asked the Leader who would be attending the ceremony which would be held in Belfast later in the year.

Councillor Simon Tagg Thanked officers and communities around the Borough for their hard work and stated that this was good for the Borough. In respect of the visit to Belfast, the Leader and Mayor would be attending this year, accompanied by a couple of staff members. The Leader informed Members that he was paying for his own flight to Belfast and stated that he hoped that the Borough did well at the awards.

*Modern Slavery Charter.*

Councillor Kearon reminded the Leader that there was an 'appetite' from the Labour Group to take an active part in this.

The Portfolio Holder for Leisure, Councillor Holland stated that, as per the Motion, a report would be taken to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee and that the process would get underway as soon as possible.

*Heatwave.*

Members expressed their thanks to staff who had had to work outside, in very hard working conditions.

The Leader echoed Members' comments, stating that he had sympathy for all who had to wear protective clothing as a requirement of their job. Councillor Tagg asked all Executive Directors to pass on thanks to all staff in this respect.

*A new deal between Newcastle Borough Council and Staffordshire County Council.*

Councillor Maxfield said that it was good to see the two Authorities working together and requested more details.

Councillor Shenton asked what was happening in respect of the Ryecroft and hoped that the site would be a priority for the new deal. Councillor Robinson asked for assurance in respect of discussion with the County Council.

Councillor Simon Tagg confirmed that meetings had been taking place and that the Borough had a good relationship with the County Council. In addition, Kidsgrove was at the centre of the strategic alliance.

Councillor Kearon stated that he was pleased to hear about collaboration where it was in the best interest of the residents. Councillor Kearon asked if there had been any discussions about Newcastle merging with other Councils?

Councillor Simon Tagg stated that he had spoken with Philip Atkins and there was no interest in any merging of Authorities as this would result in a 'North Staffordshire

Authority'. Mr Atkins wanted districts and the county to work better and would bring proposals forward on where savings could be made.

Councillor Horsfall asked if the impact of domestic violence had been discussed?

The Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing, Mrs Jill Waring was involved with this, along with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

Councillor Brian Johnson referred to 'potential investment in Knutton' and asked for assurance that any new deal would be fully consulted. Councillor Johnson was advised to speak with the Executive Director for Regeneration and Development, Mr Neale Clifton to get a fuller picture.

Councillor Moffatt asked if any discussions had taken place with the County council in respect of Universal Credit. The Leader stated that the Portfolio Holder for finance and Efficiency would speak on this later in the meeting. Members were advised that Council staff would receive training for this.

#### *Constitution and Member Support Working Group*

Councillor Shenton welcomed that the Group had now met and that the meeting had been very productive. Councillor Shenton asked if a date could be given when a draft constitution would be completed.

Councillor Holland, the Chair of the Working Group, assured members that work would take place over the next few months to assess how the 'new' (fewer Councillors) Council was functioning and that all Members would be asked to complete a questionnaire.

#### *Guildhall*

Councillor Gary White commented on the maintenance of this important building, stating that there was graffiti and a window boarded up plus weeds growing and pigeon droppings. He asked if a regular inspection could be made to ensure that the building did not fall into disrepair.

Councillor Kearon echoed Councillor White's comments stating that it was a symbol of Newcastle – used in many badges and logos. Councillor Kearon said that it was really important that it was not abandoned and that it not be empty for long. He suggested that a cross party group be formed and to work with the Friends of the Guildhall to ensure that it was back in use quickly.

The Leader stated that the graffiti had now been dealt with but that the boarded window could not simply be replaced as the Guildhall is a Listed Building and would. It would be dealt with in due course. Work would soon begin to remove the weeds and the mess left by pigeons. Work was also required by the County Council on the trees next to the building which were causing 'greening' of the masonry.

Meetings on its future use were still being held and this would be dealt with by the Cabinet and referring to the relevant Scrutiny Committee.

#### *Forward Plan*

There were no questions from Members.

**7. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES**

Councillor Fear, Chair of the Planning Committee advised Members that the Committee had met on its regular cycle and thanked officers for the 3D system that had been used for marking out at a recent site visit. Councillor Fear stated that the 3D effect should be used for all future site visits.

**Resolved:** That the verbal and printed reports be received.

**8. MOTIONS OF MEMBERS**

There were no Motions.

**9. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS**

- (i) Councillor Robinson asked the Leader how long the former Civic Offices would remain boarded up.

The Leader stated that Councillor Robinson will be aware of the recent Members briefing (on the Agenda) and a press release detailing the current situation relating to the HDD student & retail development.

The key issue is the 18 months 'back stop' which was agreed and signed off by the previous administration of the council that expires in September 2019. This means that the developer has until that date to start the permitted development.

During that time the Council is still responsible for the building (and therefore such things as the business rates and the security of the building) and it was envisaged in that agreement that there would be a period of boarding up to secure the building.

Officers have been in talks with the developer to gain an insight on their plans and the current position remains as previously stated in the member briefing and press coverage and they say that they would find it difficult to deliver the previous administration's 'retail aspirations' for the site.

An agreement has now been made with the County Council to work towards a back-up scheme for a mix of accommodation on the site with appropriate supportive retail.

This will hopefully enable people of all ages to live on the edge of the town centre and to contribute to footfall which will help the town centre to adapt to become a live, work and service led centre.

Updates will be reported to members and the public in due course.

- (ii) Councillor Stubbs asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency how much the Council would be paying each year in non-domestic rates for the empty Civic Offices.

Councillor Sweeney advised that the rates were £162,169.15p. Once empty, there would be an exemption period of three months and once the

building had been decommissioned, the Council's Property Section would put forward proposals to reduce the amount.

Councillor Stubbs asked if the rates had been budgeted for and would the amount be built into next year's budgets.

Councillor Sweeney stated that there was a budget for this and had been put onto the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

- (iii) Councillor Kearon asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency what impact the continued delay in obtaining a capital receipt for the sale of the Civic Offices had on budgetary pressures for the Council.

Councillor Sweeney stated that there was no impact on the budget as £200,000 had been included for 2018/19 and it was still included for 2019/20.

Councillor Kearon queried whether the former Civic Offices site would be more appealing to developers if the building was demolished and asked what the cost of such a project would be.

Councillor Sweeney would provide a written report for this.

- (iv) Councillor Burnett asked The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency whether the external auditor's final report, discussed at the previous council meeting, had been received and what the final out-turn figure was.

Councillor Sweeney confirmed that it had been received and had been taken to the Audit and Standards Committee on 30 July. There Was no change to the final outcome figure. Councillor Sweeney thanked the Finance Team for their hard work.

- (v) Councillor Gardner asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency what measures had been put in place for people suffering domestic violence to arrange for Universal Credit payments to be made separately.

Councillor Sweeney stated that single payments could be requested by a single member of a partnership and fully trained teams were in place at job centres and they were also trained in Safeguarding. The Department for Work and Pensions were currently considering a report on this to suggest further improvements. The Government would respond in due course. At Newcastle, there was the ability to separate Universal Credit payments if there was evidence of domestic violence. The Council would give support and advice to anyone but had no control over the actual payments.

Councillor Gardner asked what provision had been made in respect of those with 'digital exclusion' – namely the elderly and people without computer devices.

Councillor Sweeney stated that front line staff were trained and could help when it goes live. Councillor Sweeney would give a fuller, written response to this after the meeting.

- (vi) Councillor Gardner asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Jill Waring what extra resources and support the Council were providing to ensure that the problems surrounding 'Monkey Dust' were tackled effectively.

Councillor Jill Waring agreed that the drug was cheap and easy to obtain. The Council supported the Police and Crime Commissioner in what had been raised and to have it reclassified as a 'Class A' drug. The Council needs to ensure that it is better informed and that people are educated and awareness be raised on the problem. A meeting on this was due to take place next week.

Councillor Gardner stated that the police and social workers had highlighted problems and asked if support was being given to officers on this. Councillor Waring would give a written response.

- (vii) Councillor Robinson asked the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Recycling, Councillor Trevor Johnson why missed waste and recycling collections were still happening.

Councillor Johnson stated that the number of missed collections had reduced and that refresher training was currently underway for staff.

Councillor Robinson stated that a resident had recently been told that his recycling would not be collected because there were too many steps to the property and had been told to bag it but it wasn't collected.

Councillor Johnson had not been made aware of this but reminded Members that they should contact himself – as Portfolio Holder if any problems were reported.

- (viii) Councillor Dymond asked the Leader what was happening in respect of the 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the County Council for Kidsgrove Sports Centre.

The Leader stated that an item on this would be going to Cabinet on 19 September and the County council would be taking a report to their Board. In addition, a Business Plan, from the community group was also ready to go.

Councillor Dymond asked the Leader if any work had been carried out prior to the Memorandum of Understanding in respect of the commitment to open within six months.

The Leader stated that, until now they were not in a position to commit to a scheme because of the reasons already stated but have been working with the community group to develop their plan.

**10. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS**

No petitions were received.

**11. STANDING ORDER 18 - URGENT BUSINESS**

There was no urgent business.



**THE MAYOR - COUNCILLOR MRS GILL HEESOM**  
**Chair**

Meeting concluded at 8.55 pm