

COUNCIL

Wednesday, 30th January, 2019
Time of Commencement: 7.00 pm

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

Councillors:

S. Burgess	A. Parker
G. Burnett	S. Pickup
Miss J Cooper	B. Proctor
Mrs J Cooper	M. Reddish
J. Cooper	K. Robinson
S. Dymond	A. Rout
A. Fear	E. Shenton
A. Fox-Hewitt	C. Spence
A. Gardner	M. Stubbs
D. Harrison	S. Sweeney
M. Holland	J Tagg
E. Horsfall	S Tagg
B. Johnson	J Walklate
T. Johnson	J Waring
D. Jones	P Waring
T. Kearon	G White
A. Lawley	S White
H. Maxfield	G Williams
P. Northcott	J Williams
M. Olszewski	R. Wright
B. Panter	

Officers

Executive Director Operational Services- David Adams,
Geoff Durham - Mayor's Secretary / Member Support Officer,
Simone Harris- Marketing and Communications Officer,
John Tradewell - Acting Chief Executive / Head of Paid Service and
Interim Executive Director - Resources and Support Services - Jan Willis

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors' Moffatt and Wilkes.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest stated.

3. MINUTES

Resolved:

That, subject to the undermentioned amendments, the Minutes of the meeting held on 21 November, 2018 be agreed as a correct record:

Leader's Statement - Paragraph 14: penultimate sentence, commencing 'Councillor Waring advised...', the last part should read 'from five to four'.

Mayor's Announcements, second line typing error..... to read Christmas Craft Fayre.

4. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor advised members of three upcoming events:-

Forensic Talk on Tuesday 12th February
Annual Civic Mass on Sunday 3 March
Mayor's Charity Ball on Saturday 6 April.

5. INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2019/20

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency, Councillor Stephen Sweeney introduced a report on the Investment Strategy for 2019/20 asking Members to approve the Strategy.

Members were advised that an additional page - 'Investment Indicators' had been tabled this evening which replaced page 15 of the agenda. The page gave more information for the vacancy levels.

Councillor Sweeney thanked the officers who had produced the document.

Councillor Shenton enquired as to the Council's current level of borrowing. Councillor Sweeney confirmed that, at present the Council had no short term borrowing.

Resolved: That the Investment Strategy report for 2019/20, be approved.

6. STATEMENT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

The Leader, Councillor Simon Tagg submitted a report which provided an update to Members on the activities and decisions of the Cabinet, together with the Forward Plan.

The Statement was taken a paragraph at a time to allow for questions to be asked.

Paragraph 2.1:

Councillor Maxfield welcomed the Growth Deal stating that she was pleased that the County Council and the Borough were working together on this.

Councillor Shenton enquired whether the decision taken at Cabinet last November in respect of the Market would be overridden by the Growth Deal.

The Leader said that it was a great document and that it set out a plan for the County and Borough to work together. With regard to the Market, the Growth Deal did not overwrite the decision taken at Cabinet as that was a Borough project. Councillor Sweeney was currently undertaking a review of the Market and Members would be made aware of any feedback.

Paragraph 2.2:

Councillor Julie Cooper asked if the CCTV Review would ensure that any new cameras would be sited in appropriate locations and not simply replacing existing cameras.

Councillor Kearon welcomed any improvement to the CCTV arrangements and welcomed the commitment to include towns and villages around the Borough in the future. Councillor Kearon queried how much the additional equipment would cost and also, when towns and villages would be included.

Councillor Gary White really welcomed this. He stated that Madeley and Audley had already done this and asked that the Cabinet keep this project 'on the agenda'.

The Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Jill Waring welcomed the work being done to upgrade the current system. A visit was being made to Stoke on Trent next week to view their system. Newcastle's cameras were approximately twenty year's old and there was much better technology nowadays. An effective system was needed in the Town Centre.

The Leader explained that there was not a solution for monitoring as yet but once this was sorted the project could be looked into further. A new system would assist the Police with their duties so they could be asked to contribute to an upgrade.

Paragraph 3.2:

Councillor Harrison stated that the adoption of this document had been warmly welcomed. Councillor Gardner thanked the officers for the work that had been undertaken.

The Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth, Councillor Paul Northcott stated that Conservation was taken seriously and that Maer already had a Conservation Area which needed the contents of this Document to protect its character.

Paragraph 4:

Councillor Burnett advised Members that funding was in 'full flight' for the sports centre.

Councillor Paul Waring said that he was pleased that things were moving on. Project Managers had been sorted and there was a possibility of obtaining funding from Sport England.

Councillor Robinson enquired about the gas supply shared by the Kings School and the sports centre.

The Leader stated that it needed to be ensured that the project management was in place for the project.

The Kings School are happy to work with the gas supply company to get it back in place.

Paragraph 5:

Councillor Kearon welcomed any improvement to the Planning Enforcement Protocol. Residents had expressed concerns in respect of this, to engage a response when there were clear breaches. Councillor Kearon asked what plans were in place to restore confidence in the planning process.

Councillor Panter felt encouraged by the initiative and would like to learn more about the enforcement process.

Councillor Gary White referred to the last sentence which mentioned a Members Information Event in the near future and asked when this would be.

Councillor Northcott explained that this was a Protocol for issues that had been raised where Members and officers had not been clear on what was expected of each other. The Protocol was in its last stages and would be finalised very soon before it is formally adopted.

There were staffing issues and this was being looked into'. The Council would be looking for a second Senior Enforcement Officer.

Members would be notified, on a weekly basis of live cases within their ward.

The Leader stated that the Council was in a jobs market where the private sector was looking for planning officers and also, Newcastle was located near to a Unitary Authority.

By the Council meeting in April, it was hoped that Members would receive a presentation about the Enforcement Protocol.

Councillor Robinson asked who planning enforcement came under since the departure of the Executive Director of Regeneration and Development, last month.

The Leader advised that the Acting Chief Executive had taken this on and from Monday 4 February, the Council's new Chief Executive, Martin Hamilton would take on the role.

Paragraph 6:

Members commented on the Guildhall and enquired as to its long term future.

Councillor Jennifer Cooper stated that the Council's parking machines were outdated and asked if there were any plans to replace them? In addition, she welcomed the news of the government's Future High Street Fund and asked when bids needed to be in by?

Councillor Sweeney confirmed that the deadline for bids was 22 March, 2019.

Councillor Shenton referred to street parking and a proposal by the County Council to put more parking meters on roads. Would there be any liaison with the Borough Council for this?

Councillor Shenton also asked when Members would be informed about the Ryecroft.

The Leader said that it was good to see the Guildhall back in use. The reception area was now open during the day and staffed by volunteers.

Councillor Sweeney stated that as part of the Borough Growth Fund, some of the parking machines that were between twenty and thirty years old would be replaced that would also be able to give more targeted information such as indicating footfall in the town during certain periods.

With regard to on-street parking, Councillor Sweeney confirmed that it was a misleading article in the Sentinel. The County Council were only doing three or four roads and those suggested in Newcastle were ideas for the future. Councillor Sweeney himself disagrees with the idea.

The Leader updated the Council on the current situation with the Ryecroft site and about a 'backstop' agreed by the previous administration which meant that the council's hands were tied until at least September 2019 or even to Spring 2020. A residential oriented development was preferable but this was not be currently progressed without the permission of HDD. A new way forward would be discussed in the near future.

Councillor Fear welcomed the approach in looking at parking charges. There was evidence that the concessions made over the Christmas period had increased footfall in the town. Councillor Fear asked if the charges would have an impact on Council revenue?

Councillor Sweeney stated that statistics released by the BID were very encouraging and showed a great benefit. Concessions such as this do have a knock on effect to revenue so the Ten Year Car Parking Strategy was very important.

Councillor Fox-Hewitt asked what the 17%, referred to in the first paragraph was benchmarked against and also asked if the Ten Year Parking Strategy was being done in conjunction with the Air Quality Management Report.

Councillor Sweeney confirmed that the 17% was benchmarked on week 34 (financial year) to the end of the year based on the previous year.

Councillor Kearon was pleased to hear about the work of the Friends of the Guildhall and wished to formally thank and acknowledge them for their incredible work.

Councillor Kearon was pleased to see that the free parking had made a difference. He suggested that the former Civic Offices/Sainsbury's car parks could be made free on Saturday's and at other key points in the week in conjunction with the BID.

Councillor Brian Johnson asked if the reduced income of £10,000 from parking had been good value for money?

The Leader agreed that the Friends of the Guildhall had done great work along with Support Staffordshire. This council had 'injected a purpose into the project with a can do attitude' and it had gone from strength to strength as a result. Councillor Sweeney gave credit to the Leader for his 'drive' which had helped to reopen the building.

With regard free parking, it needed to be tied in with events that would help generate footfall in the town centre. More work was needed on this and discussions had been generated.

7. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEES

Written reports were submitted for the Economy, Environment and Place Scrutiny Committee and the Health, Wellbeing and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair, Councillor Stubbs gave a verbal update for the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee:

The Committee had met twice since the last Full Council meeting and they had looked at the Treasury Management Strategy, Revenue, Budgets and Fees and Charges.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

8. REPORTS OF THE CHAIRS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEES

Written reports were submitted for the Committees that had met since the last Council meeting except for the Planning Committee where the Chair gave a verbal update:

The Chair Councillor Fear, advised that many applications had been put before the Committee as had appeals, one of which had challenged the Council's Five Year Housing Land Supply where the Planning Inspectorate had agreed with the Council's decision.

Resolved: That the reports be received.

9. MOTIONS OF MEMBERS

Two Motions were received:

1. 'Ethical Debt Collection', proposed by Councillor Gardner and seconded by Councillor Pickup.

An amendment to the Motion, proposed by Councillor Holland and seconded by Councillor Simon Tagg was submitted, as follows:

This Council believes:

That it is incumbent on all local authorities to show care and consideration to its residents and not cause additional stress and debt burden to those in financial difficulty in pursuit of council tax arrears.

That bailiff should not be used in the collection of council tax owed by individual residents.

This Council resolves:

To review its debt collection policies and implement an ethical debt collection approach by asking the Finance, Assets and Performance Scrutiny Committee to review the Council's debt collection policies and procedures and to make any recommendations.

To endorse the council's policy of not using bailiffs for the collection of council tax arrears.

To ask the Leader to write to the Secretary of State for Justice supporting the Citizens Advice call for an independent regulator for the debt collection sector.

The amendment was accepted by Councillor Gardner.

Members discussed the Motion all welcoming its contents. Councillor Simon Tagg stated that it needed to go to the appropriate scrutiny committee for further work.

Councillor Kearon suggested that the Council's website needed to be updated to clarify the issue regarding the use of bailiffs.

Resolved: That the Motion, as amended, be carried.

2. 'The Future of our Local Health Services (North Staffordshire)', proposed by councillor Gardner and seconded by Councillor Fox-Hewitt.

Members debated the Motion, all welcoming its contents. Councillor Gardner paid tribute to a particular campaigner for this, who, despite being very ill, continued to give her support to the cause.

Resolved: That the motion be Carried.

10. QUESTIONS TO THE MAYOR, CABINET MEMBERS AND COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Councillor Burnett asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency for the latest figures for sign-ups to the new charged garden waste service and for information on income and expenditure in respect of this.

Councillor Sweeney advised that, to date there had been 9,251 sign-ups with over 10,000 actual bins for where more than one bin had been requested. Councillor Sweeney confirmed that there were costs of £68,000 to get there and also the cost of collecting unwanted bins.

Councillor Fear asked the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Efficiency for an update on the asbestos situation at the former Civic Offices.

Councillor Sweeney confirmed that the Council had received specialist advice. A full refurbishment or demolition survey would be required but any survey would be intrusive, potentially disturbing the asbestos which then becomes a problem. It is therefore best to leave it alone until further decisions are made. The safety of workers and the people of Newcastle was paramount.

Councillor Marion Reddish asked the Leader for an update on actions taken in connection with the odours, believed to be emanating from Walleys Quarry, off Cemetery Road.

The Leader stated that landfill sites were regulated by the Environment Agency who would use any information from the public to progress an necessary enforcement.

Complaints had been coming from residents in and around the town centre as well as near to the site. The weather conditions had also increased the potency of the odour.

It was understood that a public meeting was being arranged for February and local ward members for Knutton and Silverdale were encouraged to attend.

The Council is working with the Environment Agency in respect of any statutory nuisances.

Councillor Reddish asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing, Councillor Jill Waring for an update on the number of registered homeless in the Borough and how many slept rough in the Town Centre.

Councillor Waring stated that there were currently 109 active cases: with 45 classed as 'prevention'; 27 classed as 'relief'; two full homeless and 35 pending enquiries.

Current intelligence suggested that last week, there were six rough sleepers in and around the Town Centre and the Lyme Trust had counted three individuals. It was not confirmed if they were 'homeless rough sleepers'.

With regard to litter/items left behind by rough sleepers, a scheme was currently being piloted between Streetscene and CCTV operatives that, where items were left, arrangements would be made to attend with the police and remove the items.

Councillor Reddish suggested that it would be interesting to know the definition of a rough sleeper.

Councillor Waring advised that it was difficult to confirm a 'genuine' rough sleeper as opposed to those who did have accommodation. Councillor Waring would advise Councillor Reddish if she found out.

Councillor Dymond asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing about the possibility of implementing a Public Spaces Protection Order (PSPO) at Clough Hall Park.

Councillor Waring stated that there had been no reports of anti-social behaviour in Clough Hall Park since September 2018. With regard to implementing a PSPO, if the evidence was robust enough to make it viable then it could be explored. A full consultation would be required.

Councillor Waring was aware that large groups gathered and that there was the same issue in Bathpool Park.

Councillor Dymond stated that she had received some complaints from residents but they had not involved the police as yet. Councillor Dymond requested a meeting with the Portfolio Holder to discuss the matter further.

Councillor Ruth Wright asked the Leader about the possibility of setting up a Town Centre Working Group to discuss various issues that were arising.

The Leader stated that there were already numerous interventions led by a number of working groups which ward members could be involved in. The Council has staff working with teams such as a rough sleepers action group which met fortnightly, there are weekly outreach sessions. In addition the Lyme Trust meet on a monthly basis. There was also work with neighbouring authorities and our partners.

Officers would be in touch with Councillors' Wright and Shenton about renewing their involvement in the town centre.

Councillor Wright then asked about a group that had been set up in Autumn 2017. Why had it been halted and if the funding was still available.

The Leader stated that he was not aware of this group as it was before he became Leader of the Council. He would ask officers to inform Councillor Wright.

Councillor Shenton asked the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Wellbeing for an update on any planning in place for Brexit, following the meeting that took place in January.

Councillor Waring stated that the Council was continuing to prepare for Brexit and was working with partners. The Government had issued further guidance to local authorities and that the Council would have a £35,000 share of the Brexit Fund.

Councillor Shenton asked what the funding would be used for.

Councillor Waring said that she would put this in writing.

11. RECEIPT OF PETITIONS

No Petitions were presented.

12. COUNCILLOR CHRIS SPENCE

Councillor Kearon acknowledged the work that had been done, both on behalf of the Council and residents by Councillor Chris Spence who was standing down as Councillor.

13. ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE - MR JOHN TRADEWELL

The Leader paid tribute to John Tradewell, thanking him for his hard work during the past year. The Council had been through a difficult period, including the introduction of all-out elections and he had played a part in the selection of the new Chief Executive – Mr Martin Hamilton. He had been a great support to the Leader and Cabinet.

Councillors' Kearon, Reddish and Gary White echoed the Leader's comments

Mr Tradewell thanked everyone for their support, saying that it had been a pleasure and privilege and that he would continue to be a 'friend of Newcastle'. He would be happy to provide future support to Newcastle.

14. STANDING ORDER 18 - URGENT BUSINESS

There was no urgent business.

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

Meeting concluded at 9.20 pm