

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City on Thursday, 29 November 2007 at 7.30pm

PRESENT: *Councillors A. Bardett (Chairman), Mrs A.G. Ashley (Vice-Chairman), D.J. Barnard, Liz Beardwell, David Billing, Judi Billing, S. Bloxham, Clare Body, John Booth, Tom Brindley, P.C.W. Burt, Paul Clark, J.M. Cunningham, Melissa Davey, Lee Downie, Tricia Gibbs, Fiona Hill, T.W. Hone, A.F. Hunter, Arthur Jarman, Sal Jarvis, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, Lorna Kercher, Joan Kirby, Marilyn Kirkland, I.J. Knighton, David Levett, Bernard Lovewell, Ian Mantle, D. Miller, M.R.M. Muir, Mrs L.A. Needham, Martin Stears, Mrs C.P.A. Strong, R.A.C. Thake and M.E. Weeks.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Chief Executive, Strategic Director of Customer Services, Strategic Director of Financial and Regulatory Services, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Democratic Services Manager and Senior Committee and Member Services Officer.*

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors John Bishop, Allison Dear, Jane Gray, Gary Grindal, R.E. Inwood, H.M. Marshall, Alan Millard, Lawrence Oliver, Deepak Sangha, R.L. Shakespeare-Smith, F.J. Smith and A.D. Young.

[At this juncture, Councillor Martin Stears raised a Point of Order in respect of Standing Order 11.2 – Motion set out in agenda, in that a motion submitted by the Labour Group in respect of the procedure and cost of the Standards Committee hearing held on 28 September 2007, had been excluded from the agenda papers for the Council meeting on the grounds that the motion did not comply with Standing Order 11.3 – Scope. Councillor Stears considered that the motion should have been included in the agenda papers, inclusive of the reason as to why it had been disallowed.

The Chairman of the Council replied that Standing Orders provided that motions on notice must be about matters for which the Council had responsibility or which affected the District (SO 11.3). The motion put did not meet these criteria. The Council did not have responsibility for Standards Committee hearings. The Standards Committee was a statutory committee which was independent of the Council. It was essential to the proper operation of that committee that it remained independent.

The Chairman stated that a review of the process had followed and that the costs in conducting the hearing in question was to be the subject of a report requested by the Chairman of the Standards Committee. The report would be considered at a meeting of the Standards Committee to be held in public on 20 December 2007.

Councillor Stears welcomed the fact that the matter was to be considered by a meeting of the Standards Committee to be held in public, but remained of the view that the motion should have been allowed for debate at the Council meeting, on the basis that it related to an item concerning the Council's Budget, a matter which was reserved to Council under the Constitution.]

44. MINUTES

It was moved by Councillor T.W. Hone, seconded by Councillor Mrs C.P.A. Strong, and

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 27 September 2007 be approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

45. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No additional items were presented for consideration by the Council.

46. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

47. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

(1) Howard Crompton – Long Service Award

The Chairman advised that Howard Crompton joined NHDC's Housing Department on 22nd November 1982 as a Senior Housing Assistant.

In December 1987 he moved to the Finance Department charged with bringing in the Housing Benefit Reforms

Howard then took on an even greater challenge, becoming Community Charge Manager in January 1989, overseeing the change from the old Domestic Rating system to the new Community Charge.

In April 1993, he became Revenues Manager, taking on responsibility for Business Rates, seeing off the Community Charge system and implementing the Council Tax system in its place.

In March 1997 Howard merged the Revenues and Benefits sections. This maximised efficiencies and improved the service for the customer who could then have their Council Tax and Benefits enquiries dealt with by the same member of staff in one transaction. He led the team to be at the forefront of use of new technology.

By introducing the Document Management System to Revenues and Benefits he attracted many other local authorities to North Herts to see how it could be done. The service achieved the ISO9001:Quality Award in 2002.

In March 2002 he became Head of Revenues and Benefits and continued the quest for quality services, gaining a Chartermark in 2006. Passionate about staff development, Howard had encouraged the use of NVQs and had recently seen the authority recognised as an assessment centre for Benefits and Council Tax NVQs.

Howard had always had a can do attitude and an excellent sense of humour. His career at North Herts had demonstrated his ability to manage change and get things done.

More recently, as Programme Manager for the service@north-herts project he had lead by example in transferring services to the new Customer Service Centre and implementing home and mobile working.

Howard had always been keen on sports, especially rugby and cricket. In the early days of Community Charge, his colleagues were never sure whether the visible bruises were a result of an encounter with an irate Community Charge customer or a sporting injury.

Nowadays, Howard restricted himself to the occasional "short" walk. When he completed the Pennine Way earlier this year, he raised £1,500 for charity and as part of his "actions speak louder than words" approach sent regular blogs to the office to demonstrate the capability of mobile working technology.

Howard was a valued and respected team member, always ready to take on a new challenge to improve services for the District's residents.

It was moved by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor T.W. Hone, and

RESOLVED: That the Council places on record its sincere thanks to Howard Crompton for his long and valuable service to local government in North Hertfordshire.

The Chairman invited Howard Crompton to come forward to receive the framed resolution of thanks agreed by the Council.

(2) Joanna Lines – Recycling Officer of the Year Award

It gave the Chairman great pleasure to inform the Council that one of its officers had received a top national award in her profession.

A long list of accomplishments and a keen sense of humour earned Jo Lines, Recycling Officer for North Herts District Council, the title of Recycling Officer of the Year category in the National Recycling Awards run by Materials Recycling Week magazine. She was nominated by her colleagues who described her as the “rock of the department” and truly environmentally minded.

Jo was a key member of the team which introduced the Council’s new waste and recycling system across the district in October. This had been a major achievement for the Council this year and it was fitting that its Recycling Officer’s efforts had been rewarded. But as well as this work which had taken up much of her time in the last year, she had also helped to establish a partnership between youth offender groups, the Council and the police during the set up of the Graffiti Reporting Database.

The award citation praised her willingness to cover for absent colleagues and to work round the clock to get things done.

“As well as her enthusiasm and dedication the judges were impressed that despite all the work she could ‘make time for a laugh’ promoting a good working atmosphere,” said the award citation.

“The judges felt Joanna was exactly the kind of person needed to get the work done and keep projects on target.”

The Chairman invited Jo to come forward to receive the award.

(3) Grounds Maintenance Team - Awards for Wilbury Hills Cemetery

The Chairman was pleased to inform the Council that the Wilbury Hills Cemetery project had won the International Phoenix Award for Cemetery Innovation and Design. The concept of this award was to promote alternative solutions to current and future demands within a cemetery while ensuring key design elements remained at the forefront of the project.

Secondly, the Cemetery won a Bronze Award in Greenapple Competition for Environmental Sustainability. Thirdly, the Cemetery was nominated for the Arts and Christianity RIBA Award for Religious Architecture. Fourth, the scheme was also nominated for a Brick Award due to the alternative use and type of brick used within the project. And finally, the Team was still waiting for the results from a visit by the Civic Trust with a view to their Environmental Sustainability Award.

For such a small team to be able to produce such a high quality project while ensuring that their day jobs were also undertaken successfully was a credit to them all.

The initial design was submitted to the Commission of Architecture and the Built Environment for review and their comments gave a good indication of the high levels of thought and enthusiasm that had gone into this project –

“The Panel welcomes the opportunity to comment on this scheme which represents a new approach to cemetery design in the area, for which we commend North Herts District Council. We applaud the approach of a local and site specific response to

inform the layout and character of different types of burial space and of creating a non-denominational building for funeral services.”

“We welcome the scheme’s overall approach to catering for different types of funeral and providing a range of interment options within a simple landscape design. We applaud the recognition by the client that a high quality landscape approach to the provision of a new cemetery will give the local community a lasting asset commensurate with its significance to them.”

The Chairman commented that as well as the numerous favourable comments and significant levels of interest, the project also came in on budget.

The Chairman gave his congratulations and well done to Andrew Mills, Neil Fairey, Carole Casey and Michael Howe (MAE Architects) for all their hard work and commitment to this project.

The Chairman invited Andrew Mills and other members of his team come forward to receive the awards.

(4) Civic Service

The Chairman thanked all councillors and officers who attended his Civic Service on 25 November 2007. He was pleased to report that £554 was raised in donations for the Living Room Project.

He stated that he would be carrying the charity forward to his Civic Reception on Friday, 22 February 2008, where Councillor Thake had kindly agreed to be the auctioneer. Donations of prizes from any appropriate source would be gratefully received. Members would receive their formal invitations to the Reception early in the New Year.

(5) Presentation by Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling

The Chairman reminded Members that Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham (Portfolio Holder for Waste & Recycling) would be giving an informal presentation immediately after the close of the meeting on the progress of the new Recycling Service.

48. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

No items were presented for consideration by the Council under public participation.

49. ITEM REFERRED FROM LICENSING & APPEALS COMMITTEE – 2 OCTOBER 2007 – PROPOSED STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY 2008-2010

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of the Licensing & Appeals Committee held on 2 October 2007, in respect of the proposed Statement of Licensing Policy 2008-2010 (Minute 5 refers). A copy of the report considered by the Licensing & Appeals Committee was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Appendix A – Schedule of comments received during the consultation, including recommendations;

Appendix B – Proposed Statement of Licensing Policy.

It was moved by Councillor Bernard Lovewell, seconded by Councillor T.W. Hone, and

RESOLVED: That the proposed Statement of Licensing Policy in respect of the Licensing Act 2003, as attached at Appendix B to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the statutory requirement that the Licensing Policy be reviewed every three years.

50. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 16 OCTOBER 2007 – PROPOSED HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY 2008-2010

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 16 October 2007, in respect of the proposed adoption of a Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2008-2010 (Minute 55 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Appendix A – Schedule of comments received during consultation, including recommendations;

Appendix B – Proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy (incorporating the amendments made by the Licensing & Appeals Committee).

It was moved by Councillor Bernard Lovewell, seconded by Councillor T.W. Hone, and

RESOLVED: That the proposed Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy, as attached at Appendix B to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the taxi trade and the public have a document which fully explains the licensing process, and to ensure consistency of approach by officers enabling fairness to the trade.

51. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 16 OCTOBER 2007 – ANNUAL REVIEW OF CONTRACT PROCUREMENT RULES

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 16 October 2007, in respect of the Annual Review of the Contract Procurement Rules (Minute 59 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda, as were the following appendices:

Appendix A – Amendments to Contract Procurement Rules 2007-08;

Appendix B – Revised Contract Procurement Rules 2007-08.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance, Councillor T.W. Hone, answered a number of Members' questions in respect of the report, and undertook to provide a written answer to Councillor Martin Stears with regard to a question concerning the process for the acceptance of Single Tenders.

It was moved by Councillor T.W. Hone, seconded by Councillor Mrs C.P.A. Strong, and

RESOLVED: That the revised Contract Procurement Rules, attached as Appendix B to the report, be adopted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Constitution contains an up-to-date version of the Contract Procurement Rules.

52. ITEM REFERRED FROM CABINET – 16 OCTOBER 2007 – HCC HIGHWAY ENVIRONMENTAL MAINTENANCE AGENCY AGREEMENT

The Council considered the minute of the meeting of Cabinet held on 16 October 2007, in respect of the HCC Highway Environmental Maintenance Agency Agreement (Minute 62 refers). A copy of the report considered by Cabinet was included with the agenda.

It was moved by Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham, seconded by Councillor T.W. Hone, and

RESOLVED: That delegation of these functions under a new Highway Environmental Agency Agreement be agreed, and that the Scheme of Delegation to Officers be amended to show that delegation of all functions under this Agreement be given to the Head of Leisure and Environmental Services.

REASON FOR DECISION: To provide sustainable working practices to best meet customer expectations for the maintenance and development of highway trees, and to provide working methods to enable NHDC to best meet customer needs and ensure value for money.

53. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

(1) Discarded Household Batteries

In accordance with Standing Order 10.4(a), the following question had been submitted by Councillor Ian Mantle to Councillor Mrs L.A. Needham (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling):

“When does North Herts intend to provide convenient town centre collection points for discarded household (dry) batteries?”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling replied that this matter had been investigated 12 months previously, but that it would seem appropriate to look at it again, especially as discarded batteries were on a Government list of Hazardous Substances. As such, therefore, it would not be appropriate to use bring bank sites for such substances.

The Portfolio Holder stated that the County Council had facilities for discarded batteries in its Household Waste Site Compounds. However, there was no financial profit to be gained, as it amounted to only £120 per tonne.

The Portfolio Holder commented that there was likely to be emerging legislation regarding discarded batteries, although if bring banks were to be used then careful consideration would need to be given regarding their design. A number of local authorities had begun kerbside collections of discarded batteries, but the majority had abandoned such schemes as they proved to be poor value for money.

Councillor Mantle asked the following supplementary question:

“Would the Portfolio Holder agree that the problem would be that more discarded batteries would end up as hazardous waste in landfill sites?”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder agreed with Councillor Mantle, and stated that this needed to stop. However, she considered that there were other forms of residual/hazardous waste that required more urgent attention than discarded batteries, such as used nappies.

(2) Gypsies and Travellers

In accordance with Standing Order 10.4(a), the following question had been submitted by Councillor S.K. Jarvis to Councillor R.A.C. Thake (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport):

“What was the cost to the Council of the Scott Wilson report of sites for Gypsies and Travellers in North Hertfordshire?”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport replied that there was no cost to the Council of the Scott Wilson report.

Councillor Jarvis asked the following supplementary question:

“Will the Portfolio Holder ensure that Gypsy and Traveller sites that did not meet the accepted criteria did not appear in the emerging Local Development Framework Site Allocations Issues and Options report?”

The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport replied that Local Authorities were required to make provision for 1,187 pitches for gypsies and travellers up to 2011. The consultants report was an initial trawl of potential sites, regarding which no public consultation had taken place. It would be unwise for the Council to make a decision on such sites prior to the end of the public consultation on the Land Allocations Issues and Options report, even if it was in a position to do so.

54. NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Additional Government Finance for Affordable Housing

Due notice having been given in accordance with Standing Order 11.1, it was moved by Councillor Lorna Kercher, and seconded by Councillor David Billing,

“That the Council welcomes the Government's Agenda on Housing and the additional finance for affordable housing, and that the Council will do everything to promote and rapidly expand the supply of high quality and well located affordable homes, in particular of housing association provision of homes for rent.”

As an amendment, it was moved by Councillor S.K. Jarvis, and seconded by Councillor Paul Clark, that the phrase "That the Council welcomes the Government's Agenda on Housing and the" be deleted and replaced with "The council notes that since the current government came to power the number of affordable homes built each year has fallen by 25%, the number of households in temporary accommodation has doubled and the number of people on waiting lists has increased by 60%. It therefore welcomes the Government's belated"; deletion of "in particular of" and its replacement with "including".

Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was lost.

As a further amendment, it was moved by Councillor Bernard Lovewell, and seconded by Councillor R.A.C. Thake, that the words "Agenda on Housing" be deleted; insertion of the word "undertakes" between "and" and "that"; insertion of the words "continue to" between "will" and "do" and the word "possible" after "everything"; deletion of the words "in particular for rent or purchase" and their replacement with "for rent or purchase"; and insertion of an additional sentence to read "This is subject to the criteria of sustainability, proper infrastructure and in line with out Housing Needs Survey and Local Development Framework".

Upon being put to the vote, this amendment was carried.

Upon the substantive motion being put to the vote, it was

RESOLVED: That the Council welcomes the Government's additional finance for affordable housing, and undertakes that the Council will continue to do everything possible to promote and rapidly expand the supply of high quality and well located affordable homes for rent or purchase.

This is subject to the criteria of sustainability, proper infrastructure and in line with out Housing Needs Survey and Local Development Framework.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm.

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Chairman