

Council Minutes

Date: 18 December 2017

Time: 6.35 - 8.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillor Miss S Brown (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs J A Adey, Mrs S Adoh, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, D J Carroll, M Clarke, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, A D Collingwood, C Etholen, R Farmer, R Gaffney, S Graham, A R Green, G C Hall, M Harris, M A Hashmi, A E Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, D A Johncock, Mrs G A Jones, M E Knight, D Knights, Mrs J D Langlely, A Lee, N B Marshall, H L McCarthy, I L McEnnis, R Newman, Ms C J Oliver, B E Pearce, G Peart, S K Raja, R Raja, S Saddique, J A Savage, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE, N J B Teesdale, A Turner, P R Turner, Ms J D Wassell, D M Watson, C Whitehead, R Wilson, L Wood and Ms K S Wood

49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Honorary Aldermen: P Cartwright, Mrs K M Peatey and Mrs P Priestley. Councillors M C Appleyard, H Bull, M Hanif, C Harriss Mrs W J Mallen and Mrs J Teesdale.

50 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 9 October 2017 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

51 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received

52 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman announced that she had undertaken many engagements since the last ordinary meeting of the Council, but did not intend to list each one. Instead she highlighted the following.

Commemoration of the International day of People with Disabilities

The Chairman stated that on 4 December she had been accompanied by Councillors Mr and Mrs Clarke, and Councillor P Turner in experiencing the use of a mobility scooter in High Wycombe.

All Members involved expressed that they had felt very vulnerable whilst using the wheelchair and somewhat invisible to the public, having to regularly brake sharply to avoid a collision. However Members emphasised that this had been a very worthwhile experience providing a deeper insight as to how wheelchair users felt going about their daily business.

53 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Question from Mr R B Colomb to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration

“With regard to the 210 tons of rubbish dumped by travellers earlier this year at the Handy Cross Hub would the Cabinet Member care to explain why no preventative action was taken to stop what must have been 70 truckloads entering the site whilst the travellers were in situ?”

Whilst I realise the rights of travellers are complicated surely it was possible to block entry to vehicles entering the site to break the law by illegal tipping of rubbish.”

Response from Councillor S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration)

“Once travellers had encroached onto the site, the District Council required a court order to restrict access. Immediately the trespass happened, the Council worked with TVP and BCC to regain possession as quickly as possible. Thames Valley Police did not invoke the relatively new power under Section 34B of the Environmental Protection Act 1990, to seize vehicles suspected of being involved in fly-tipping; however, we are working with the Police and BCC to establish how this power could be exercised in future, if circumstances deemed it appropriate, but the Council would still require a police presence at the scene, for vehicle, seizures, this would involve a high risk of disorder and potential for violent response from the vehicle owners.

Meantime, the Council is pleased to note that BCC has been successful with an initial prosecution relating to the incident, resulting in a fine and the Council understands that further prosecutions may be pending. The Council is also pleased to note the Environment Agency is currently investigating an organised crime group who have been involved in significant illegal waste deposits across North & South London and surrounding counties and will be providing them with details of the Handy X Hub incident. For the future, the Council continues to work with other stakeholders to be prepared for unauthorised occupations of whatever kind, to react as quickly as possible and use all possible legal steps to protect public funds and ensure that wrongdoers are punished.”

There was no supplementary question

54 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

(a)Question from Councillor R Raja to the Leader of the Council

“As the cabinet has now approved the replacement of Saunderton Lodge as the future temporary accommodation provision for vulnerable members of society, would the Leader like to tell us what the likely plans are for the Saunderton Lodge land and can she reassure us that the land will only be used for social use and not be sold off to increase the surplus on the council’s balance sheet?”

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council)

“Saunderton Lodge is an isolated property in need of substantial investment. If and when it is declared surplus, the Council will be required to meet its statutory obligation upon disposals, which is to achieve the ‘best price reasonably obtainable’. This may well come from users such as a nursing home, sheltered housing or the like, or from an ‘institutional’ user, which have quasi-social purposes, but I cannot at this stage guarantee that this will be the case. The priority will be to find a future custodian so that once vacant, the property does not become vandalised. Any proceeds of disposal will be used to ‘cross finance’ the cost of the proposed new Temporary Accommodation, if that is the route we go down.”

Supplementary Question

“I would hope that we do see some action and that the land is not sold off. We need to use the land for the benefit of the residents. ”

Supplementary Response

“As I said in my original answer any proceeds of disposal will be used to cross finance the cost of the proposed accommodation. The proposals will not result in an increase the balance sheets.”

(b)Question from Councillor M Knight to the Leader of the Council

“It has been reported that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Sajid Javed, is very close to making a decision regarding the unitary authority proposals. If he were to bring news that 2018 is to be a happy new year for you do you anticipate any changes would be made to the plans given that they were put together almost a year ago?”

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

“I’m delighted that you recognise that our submission is the stronger and have confidence it is the one most likely to receive the go-ahead. However I think we need to await the announcement before making decisions on our implementation plans.”

Supplementary Question

“Given that the decision is going to be later than originally expected, how do you envisage that this will impact upon the timelines and deadlines for changes to be implemented?”

Supplementary Response

“Clearly the implementation plans stated within the submission will need to be revised. However we cannot revise this until we get the required timelines.” Therefore I am unable to answer your question at the moment.”

c) Question from Councillor K Ahmed to the Cabinet Member for Community

“A Children’s Centre in Totteridge has 979 children under the age of 5 living in its catchment area. 628 of these (more than 64%) are registered with the Children’s Centre. 375 of these children (over 38%) have had at least one contact with the Children’s Centre over the last year and 191 (over 19%) have had multiple.

Clearly, this is a vital service on which many local residents rely, so why isn’t WDC protesting more actively against planned closure of this and many other centres?”

Response from Councillor G Peart (Cabinet Member for Community)

“Thank you Cllr Ahmed for asking this question about an issue that is very current and also for doing some research into the numbers of children registered with the Castlefield Children’s Centre. There has already been a question about this matter at a recent Council meeting.

As you will be aware BCC has announced a review of the delivery of children’s services generally including the children’s centres and we await the outcome early in the New Year. Until that review is complete and the results published it is not possible to make any further useful comment.

I can confirm that there has been communication with the relevant members of BCC on the matter to raise concerns about the delivery of children’s services that are much needed to better assist the most vulnerable families in Wycombe and particularly the children within those families. We have also offered to work closely with BCC to give assistance locally where we are able to provide it.

When the proposals are made known we will be able to assess the proposals and respond accordingly.”

Supplementary Question

“The Children’s Centre in Totteridge has 979 children under the age of 5 living in its` catchment area. More than 64% are registered with the Centre. 375 of these children have had at least one contact with the centre over the last year whilst 191 have had multiple.

Clearly this is a vital service on which many local residents rely, so why isn’t WDC protesting more actively against its planned closure?”

Supplementary Response

“We hope to see an improved connection and consequent improvement in delivery. We work closely with Bucks CC but cannot comment until the review is complete. ”

(d) Question from Councillor M Asif to the Cabinet Member for Planning

“Would the Cabinet Member for Planning like to tell us whether he is confident that WDC residents have given him a good idea about their concerns and reservations about the local plan; and would he like to tell us about the broad areas of public approval or concern?”

Response from Councillor D Johncock (Cabinet Member for Planning).

“The latest consultation on the New Local Plan was the final one before the plan is submitted for scrutiny in March next year. Many people have given us their input and played an active part in the local plan process. The plan we will be submitting to the Planning Inspector is the result of five years of detailed technical work and a number of different consultations over that period with local people and key stakeholders right across the District and beyond. I am therefore confident that we have a good handle on the issues and concerns that residents across the District have about the Plan. I am also pleased that the latest consultation has drawn many positive comments as well as negative ones.

At this stage, it is too early to give any detail on the broad areas of concern or approval as there has been a high level of response and the consultation only ended last Monday. My officers will, however, be producing a summary of the issues raised primarily for the benefit of the Inspector undertaking the examination of our Plan but I will ensure that all Members see an early draft of this document so that they too have a good understanding of the issues that have been raised by both local people and our statutory consultees.”

There was no supplementary question.

e) Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Housing

“Please can you update us on the numbers of residents currently placed in Bed and Breakfast outside of Wycombe District? I am particularly concerned about families with young children being placed there.”

Response from Councillor Mrs J Langley (Cabinet Member for Housing).

“At present we have 10 households with children staying in bed and breakfast out of the district. This changes on a weekly basis, but I can advise that these families are primarily in Slough on an average for about 4 weeks, and this changes on a weekly basis. We hope to move at least 4 families back to the District before Christmas. We have had some more properties released at Daws Hill.”

Supplementary Question

“I am pleased to hear that 4 of the families will be moving back to the district prior to Christmas, leaving just 6 out of the district. Does Saunderton Lodge offer the provision which will make B&Bs a thing of the past?”

Supplementary Response

“Subject to planning permission when the new temporary accommodation in Desborough Road is completed this will increase our capacity to house homeless households in the district considerably and do away with B&Bs.”

(f) Question from Councillor M Abdullah Hashmi to the Leader of the Council

“In light of the many episodes of harassment reported elsewhere and the lack of adequate processes for victims to make confidential complaints that these reports exposed, does WDC have any plans to update its own complaints procedures to offer greater guarantees of confidentiality to those raising the complaints and does the council have procedures in place to investigate such harassment complaints satisfactorily?”

Response from Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

“I share your concerns and had already discussed with the Chief Executive and with the Head of Legal Services, Head of Democratic Legal & Policy Services the adequacy of our existing complaints processes which also deal with issues of confidentiality. I am satisfied that they do allow action to be taken (within the scope of the legislation available to us) if we have concerns about any member or officer of this Council.

- The Council has a complaints process for members of the public to raise concerns about staff conduct,
- We have a separate process if it is alleged that Members have breached the code of conduct for members
- There are informal and formal mechanisms in place which are set out in the Council’s Grievance Policy, Procedure and Toolkit for staff who wish to raise concerns about other staff including managers.
- We have the member/officer protocol for dealing with concerns by staff against members or vice versa
- and finally we have a whistleblowing policy if staff or members of the public wish to raise concerns directly without going through the relevant service area or manager.

As you will appreciate there may be a need for a criminal investigation in some cases and where this is the case the complainant will be urged to consider making a complaint to the police. It is my view that where a Member or Officer is subjected to harassment as a result of their membership or employment with the authority then we will offer support to them if they wish to make a complaint to the police.

I personally would take any complaint I received about harassment by a member of this Council very seriously and would want to reassure anyone who was the victim of harassment that their complaint will be listened to and acted upon. I know that the Chief Executive shares my view about this with regard to any member of staff. In light of the recent reports in the media staff have been reminded in our weekly newsletter of the Council’s commitment to creating a safe and healthy working environment that is free of discrimination and harassment. As Leader of the Council I would like to make the same statement to every member of this Council - you do not have to suffer in silence. You were elected to serve your communities and that

involves, as we all know, taking criticism from time to time, but that does not mean you have to suffer harassment or abuse.”

There was no supplementary question

(g) Question from Councillor S Graham to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration

“The Bucks Free Press dated 24.11 2017 features a story that the historic Library could be used for offices.

The building has stood empty since the library moved to the Eden shopping centre.

A number of options have been considered for its future over the years including putting it up for sale or handing it over to charitable trust, but so far none of those options have come through.

The County Council now wants this historic town centre building to be used for a wide range of purposes including offices and community use.

My question to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development is whether he has been involved, or been contacted by the County Council, in respect of their interests as have been reported in the Free Press’?”

Response from Councillor S Broadbent (Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration)

“Over the past 10 years, the Council has frequently sought to encourage the County to bring this building back into beneficial use. The Council is pleased to note that the County is now progressing its own proposals for re-use.”

Supplementary Question

“Have the Conservatives given up on community cohesion? Many community organisations are crying out for meeting places. Why hasn’t this issue been considered with Bucks CC?”

Supplementary Response

“Discussions have been in shared areas. The focus has been on remedial work of the building. I am not influencing the choice of what is decided, and they will do as they see fit. We just want a suitable use for the Town Centre.”

(h) Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development & Regeneration

The question was withdrawn

(i) Question from Councillor M Knight to the Cabinet Member for Community

“Attending the Christmas light switch on in Frogmoor it was a delight to see it full of many families from High Wycombe and the wider district enjoying themselves. It is unfortunate that the rest of the year Frogmoor is increasingly becoming an area which families avoid due to a small minority of people being drunk and behaving erratically. I hope to think that we all recognise that a balanced approach is needed to tackle this issue where both enforcement and comprehensive support for people with substance misuse issues go hand in hand. We have been promised a multi-agency coordinated approach in the past.

Could you provide an update on how this is going and what factors are inhibiting progress?”

Response from Councillor G Peart (Cabinet Member for Community).

“Thank you Cllr Knight for asking this question about a matter that is a great concern for all Members. We all want our main town areas to be an attractive and welcoming place for people to visit and spend time in.

In November a multi-agency meeting took place, which included both enforcement agencies and those agencies within the town who can offer support to people with housing and drug/alcohol issues. At this meeting we agreed that there is a need to raise awareness of the support that is available, and to try to encourage the public to support these agencies, rather than giving money directly to people who may be begging as for many it is probable that any money they are given will be used for drink or drugs.

At this meeting it was suggested that High Wycombe BIDCo consider relocating the food or general markets to Frogmoor to increase the number of shoppers in this area. Frogmoor was leased to the BidCo as they wished to develop more events there and we hope this will become a reality when their new Manager is appointed.

Regular multi-agency meetings are being organised by our new Anti-Social Behaviour Officer, Nick Adkins, to develop and implement action plans for each of the street drinkers/beggars so that we can safeguard the general community, and also protect these very vulnerable people.

We already have a Public Spaces Protection Order restricting drinking in the town and are issuing Fixed Penalty Notices. We will have posters printed asking the public to support Wycombe Homeless Connection. This will be followed up in the New Year with more signposting to support agencies and material to hand out to people begging or drinking, providing contact details for the support agencies. Nick will also contact other local towns to see if there is additional best practice that we can apply locally.”

Supplementary question

“I agree it is difficult to ensure we have sufficient policing resources, and there have been approximately 18% budget cuts in this area. Perhaps you ought to lobby your national party on these cuts which have had such a massive impact on our town.”

Supplementary Response

“I cannot comment on the police budget, but the police have been active and cooperative. The problem is twofold. Firstly, the problem of beggars, and secondly the issue of the welfare of people who need help. Both these issues need to be prioritised and pursued.”

The Corporate Director clarified that Chiltern Shopping Centre was due to be purchased which would improve the area around Frogmoor. In addition the meeting was informed that the markets were run by Estates within the Council and not BidCo.

55 PETITIONS

No petitions were received by the deadline of 5pm on Monday 4 December 2017.

56 CABINET

Minute 43 - Options for Temporary Accommodation Provision

A Member commented that the sighting of Saunderton Lodge in Desborough Road was unfair on vulnerable people.

(P Turner wished it to be recorded that he had abstained from the vote on this item).

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet held on 13 November be received, and the recommendations as set out at minute numbers 39, 43, 46, and 47 be approved and adopted.

57 STANDARDS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Standards Committee held on 10 October 2017 be received and the recommendations as set out in minute numbers 32 and 33 be approved and adopted.

58 IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission held on 8 November 2017 be received.

59 AUDIT COMMITTEE

In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman of the Committee rose to present the minutes.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 16 November 2017 be received.

60 HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee held on 21 November be received.

61 PLANNING COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Planning Committee held on 20 September and 18 October be received

62 REGULATORY & APPEALS COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Regulatory & Appeals Committee held on 27 November 2017 be received.

63 NOTICE OF MOTION

A motion was submitted by Councillor Miss K S Wood and seconded by Councillor D H G Barnes.

“WDC notes the increasing concern of councillors and members of the public regarding an apparent rise in instances of anti-social behaviour across the district and within Wycombe town centre in particular.

WDC believes giving greater prioritisation to the enforcement of available anti-social behaviour measures by Thames Valley Police will improve the situation before it becomes overly detrimental to the residents, businesses and visitors to the district.

WDC resolves to seek swift re-prioritisation of TVP resources to tackle this issue in conjunction with improved partnership working with other stakeholders to improve neighbourhood policing.”

In proposing the motion, the Leader began by emphasising that it gave her no pleasure in bringing this forward before Full Council. She stated that Thames Valley Police (TVP) was an outstanding and exemplary force providing an excellent service overall for our residents. As such she had a great deal of respect for the force and was very grateful for the work they did.

The Leader stated that in spite of this she could not ignore that anti -social behaviour across the district was on the rise, and that implementation of policies and programmes alone designed to minimise such activity were ineffective in tackling the problems which presented themselves. The only way to resolve such issues was by working in close collaboration with TVP.

The Leader went onto state that whilst she fully understood that the significant levels of operational rationalisation and efficiency measures had an impact, she felt that TVP had not given the increasing level of disorder and unrest the focus

required to shut it down before it became too established in such areas as Frogmoor. She also gave mention to the negative response Councillor A Hussain had received from Chief Constable Habgood at a CC meeting with regards to the issue, whereby it had been asserted that enforcement was not the first option. The importance of engaging and working closely with charitable organisations locally was re-emphasised, but that TVP was now required to support us.

In seconding the motion, the Deputy Leader stated that he wished to echo the proposer's words and sentiments in every respect. He highlighted that he was passionate about improving and protecting the community, and had positive memories of working with the police who had very much shared that passion. As such he felt a sense of disappointment in having to present such a motion.

He emphasised that he felt that TVP had focused resources and strategy away from dealing with the types of low level crimes rife at Frogmoor. He informed the Members that he had been alarmed that upon having challenged on the issues of concern, TVP had connected the problems to the current level of homelessness in the district. The Deputy Leader felt that it was essential to draw a clear distinction between homelessness and anti-social behaviour.

The seconder then reiterated the duty to work together in tackling the issues, and expressed the Council's heartfelt desire to work, engage and achieve together.

In opening up the debate to Members, Councillor Ms J Wassell stated that there should be an interagency effort towards contributing resources to the cause. This she emphasised may not be in the form of hard cash but may be achieved through a set of plans and initiatives. She stated that the origins of this behaviour was brought about by a very complex set of underlying issues, which TVP alone would struggle to tackle. As such she felt that a more generous spirit towards the TVP should be displayed.

Councillor Ms J Wassell wished to propose an amendment to the motion. The proposal included the insertion of additional wording in the third paragraph of the submitted motion which would read as follows. "WDC resolves to seek swift reprioritisation of TVP, WDC and partner agencies who need to ensure resources."

Debate on the amendment then followed:

Councillor M Knight agreed that the Police alone could not shoulder the responsibility particularly in the light of severe budget cuts to the Police on a national level. He expressed the view that other options besides enforcement should be considered and that there should be an equal emphasis to deliver the desired outcomes.

Another Member pointed out that neighbourhood policing was limited and that there was a strong need for people on the ground. It was also highlighted by Councillor A Turner that the amendment was unnecessary, as the motion in its current form already dealt with the issue of partnership and collaboration in its final paragraph.

Upon a vote being taken the amendment was lost and the debate returned to the motion as originally proposed.

Councillor A Hussain also commented that he was very passionate about the Town Centre and that the current situation there saddened him deeply. He stated that someone needed to take a leading role, with a set timeline put into place for action to be taken.

A number of other Members also rose to present their views. Councillor L Wood stated that WDC was already doing much in collaboration with Partners to tackle the situation, and it was through an act of desperation that TVP was now being asked to step up and play their part in dealing with the issue at hand.

In summing up the Leader concluded that she still believed that the Force was an outstanding one, but that there was a very real concern as to the rise in anti-social behaviour for which swift action was required to be taken. She had felt heartened by Superintendent Brown`s willingness to engage, but that this attitude was required from officers at every level. As such she hoped that the Chief Constable would work with WDC to develop joint projects that addressed the needs of the whole District.

Upon a vote being taken, the motion was carried as a result of more than half of those Members present voting in favour of the Motion.

64 QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.2

There were none

65 COMMITTEE CHANGES / APPOINTMENTS

The change to membership of the outside body as set out in the summons as follows was duly noted.

Health & Wellbeing Board

Councillor Miss K Wood was replaced by Councillor G Peart to serve on the Health and Wellbeing Board until May 2018.

66 URGENT ACTION TAKEN BY CABINET OR INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER

The urgent action taken by Cabinet or individual Cabinet Member as set out in the summons was noted.

67 REFRESHMENTS

The Chairman wished all those present a Merry Christmas and Happy New year, and invited all Honorary Aldermen, Members and colleagues to join her in some light refreshments at the close of the meeting.

Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

- Dave Anderson - Interim Corporate Director
- Ian Hunt - Democratic Services Manager
- Iram Malik - Senior Democratic Services Officer