WYCOMBE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council Minutes

Date: 19 December 2019

Time: 6.34 - 7.17 pm

PRESENT: Councillor P R Turner (in the Chair)

Councillors Mrs J A Adey, K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, D H G Barnes, Ms A Baughan, S Broadbent, H Bull, D J Carroll, M Clarke, Mrs L M Clarke OBE, A D Collingwood, M P Davy, C Etholen, R Farmer, R Gaffney, A R Green, A E Hill, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, D A Johncock, M E Knight, D Knights, Mrs J D Langley, A Lee, Mrs W J Mallen, 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, N J B Teesdale, A Turner, Ms J D Wassell, D M Watson, C Whitehead, L Wood and Ms K S Wood

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs S Adoh, M C Appleyard, Miss S Brown, S Graham, G C Hall, M Hanif, M Harris, M A Hashmi, A Hussain, Mrs G A Jones, R J Scott, D A C Shakespeare OBE, Mrs J E Teesdale, R Wilson and Honorary Alderman M Blanksby, Mrs Peatey and Mrs P Priestley.

55 MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 21 October 2019 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

56 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

57 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman reported that since the last meeting, he had attended twenty seven engagements bringing the total number to date to seventy three since becoming Chairman. He then reported on his recent engagements carried out:

- The Poppy Appeal events and Remembrance services in High Wycombe, Downley and The Disraeli School;

- Awards ceremonies to recognise achievements by local organisations and individuals including The South East Reserve Forces and Cadets Association Lord Lieutenants Awards; The Princes Centre in Princes Risborough who received their Queens Award for Voluntary Service; the Bucks & Milton Keynes Sports Awards; the presentation of the British Empire Medal to Councillor Graham Peart; the annual High Wycombe Sea Cadets awards and also presenting, along with the Chief Executive, long service awards to members of staff at WDC;

- A Royal visit by The Princess Royal at the official opening of the new puppy breeding centre at Hearing Dogs for Deaf People in Saunderton;

- Celebrating the 40th anniversary of St Vincent and The Grenadines Independence with His Excellency The High Commissioner at an event organised by SV2G.

- Attended to very moving services; one being the 14th annual road death memorial services at St Mary's in Thame with the Leader of the Council. The Light Up A Life service organised by the Rennie Grove Hospice Care.

- With the Mayor of High Wycombe and the star of the Wycombe Panto, attended the switch on the High Wycombe Christmas Lights. Attended two festive carol concerts and a Christmas Lunch.

The Chairman concluded in wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

58 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from Members of the Public.

59 QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS

a) Question from Councillor M Knight to Cabinet Member for Environment

In recent months my colleagues and I have received numerous complaints from across the district about household refuse collections by our contractor, Serco.

Collections seem to be frequently missed, collection days have been changed without notice, the required location of bins to be placed for collection has been changed, again without notice, and damaged bins have not been replaced like for like.

Increasingly it would appear that collection crews are having to work late into the evening in order to complete rounds which are perhaps unrealistic. This makes me concerned for staff welfare and safety.

Can you explain to me the reasons for these changes to the service and if you find them reasonable and within the expectations set out in the contract?

Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment)

The contractor has recently experienced an increasing number of difficult to access sites that are served by bulk bins. Narrow roads, particularly those serving flatted accommodation have been blocked by carelessly parked vehicles and this results in crews needing to revisit and attempt collection later in the day or soon after this. Each site has slightly different problems, and officers from the Joint Waste Team try to work with building managers, residents and motorists, by placing signs, delivering letters and leaving information on cars.

As the number of flatted developments has increased in the district, an additional collection resource has been introduced and changes have been made to bulk bin collections to try and re-balance collection rounds, so bringing some certainly around scheduled collection days. Officers of the Joint Waste Team have tried to communicate changes but it can be a challenge to ensure that the message reaches every household affected.

The changes that have been made recently were intended to improve service reliability, and they have been implemented in response to growing pressure on the bulk bin service in particular. However, where failings occur in any aspect of the service these are addressed through normal contact mechanisms.

I am not aware of any widespread issue with the like for like replacement of lost or damaged waste containers. However, I am more than happy to receive details from you and I will pass them on to officers for investigation and rectification.

Regarding the change of location of bins for collection, I believe you are referring to some on roads in Micklefield. There has been full communication with the residents and I believe a compromise has now been reached with those who were affected.

Finally, crews will on occasion need to work later into the afternoon to complete rounds that have been disrupted for whatever reason, and naturally residents expect collections to take place on their allotted day whenever possible. Additional vehicle resources can be drafted in to provide support in these situations. Whilst refuse is undoubtedly a physically demanding job, the welfare of staff, I can assure you, remains of paramount importance to both the waste team and the contractors.

Supplementary Question

There had been a deterioration of service and increased complaints and I have tried to find evidence of the suggestion that rounds have been changed around the Micklefield area although I was informed that it was for Health and Safety reasons. I have asked for evidence but, to date, I have not received any. My concern is that the contractor is trying to save money and those savings are not being passed on to the Council. Can you assure me that I will see the evidence I have asked for, particularly the Risk Assessments and be assured that the changes are not about making money for the contractor?

Supplementary Response

I hope that you will see a continuation of good service. In reference to the Risk assurances, I would hope that they had been sent to you, however, I shall chase this.

b) Question from Councillor B Pearce to Cabinet Member for Environment

As you know, the new waste disposal contractor, Serco, only operate large collection vehicles.
This unfortunately presents a problem in two roads in the ward that I represent.

One is Squirrel Lane in Booker. The lane is very narrow and can only really accommodate large vans. Residents in this road have to struggle and put out bags which can be quite heavy, sometimes as many as eight and these obviously haven't got wheels.

When they are put out the night before, foxes and dogs tend to rip the bags open in order to obtain food items.

Another road where there is a problem is Gillfield Close in Cressex which again is a narrow road with often many parked cars and the collections are often missed due to lack of accessibility.

Would you not agree with me that it would be advantageous for this company to purchase small wheely bin type refuse vehicles similar to the ones operated by Biffa in South Bucks?

Verbal reply given by Councillor Mrs J Adey (Cabinet Member for Environment).

I feel I must correct you on a couple of points in your question, the contractor is not new but has been servicing our waste collection for nearly seven years now, also they do operate smaller vehicles.

Some smaller narrow access vehicles are available under our current contract and the collection arrangements you refer to can be reviewed by the Joint Waste Team. However, even a narrow access vehicle can be defeated by careless parking and this is a perennial problem. The Joint Waste Team is currently trying to tackle a number of locations in Wycombe where access is difficult due to parked vehicles by working with affected residents, building owners and motorists. I will refer the areas you have mentioned to the team.

We are not looking to purchase any further new vehicles under the present waste contract. I would though, make the comment that where people do have to use bags for some of their waste, animals are only likely to rip them open when they smell food inside and of course food waste should go into the small waste bins for collection not the bags.

Supplementary Question

Since writing my questions and under the Freedom of Information I have found out they do operate smaller vehicles which I did not know at the time of writing. Why do they not use smaller vehicles in Squirrel Lane?

Supplementary Response

I am sure they could be used and will look into the matter.

c) Question from Councillor T Green to the Leader of the Council

Would the Leader agree with me that given all the good work carried out by Wycombe District Council on community cohesion, it was disappointing to see people encouraging residents to vote in the recent election on religious grounds rather than political ones?

Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

I am immensely proud of the work done by Wycombe District Council on community cohesion. I believe we have worked hard to put integration and cohesion at the heart of our community strategies, structures and processes and to work through the challenges brought by an increasingly diverse society.

I believe that religion and politics should not mix even though, historically, that sadly does happen. However, I am sure that our residents expect us politicians to encourage people to vote on political grounds alone.

Having said that, your vote is your own whoever you choose to support and you should be free to express your opinions, no-one else has any right to influence it.

Councillor Green did not have a supplementary question.

d) Question from Councillor Ms J Wassell to the Leader of the Council

I was disappointed to read that there was not wholehearted support for suggestions for improving the Market.

Do you think themes such as locally produced products or international cuisine could be reconsidered?

Verbal reply given by Councillor Ms K Wood (Leader of the Council).

This was referred to Cabinet from the High Wycombe Town Committee at the November meeting and is reported in the Cabinet minutes we are approving later this evening. From those, you can see that the suggestions from the High Wycombe Town Committee were noted and that this Council continued to welcome discussions with the operator to maximise future opportunities and that we also remain open to exploring international food market opportunities. I therefore do not think you can say that there was not wholehearted support for improving the market as we are indeed remaining open to all opportunities.

Having said that, the Council is commissioning external consultants to advise on the market operation and way of improving the current offering. We will request that both local products and international cuisine are explored as part of this process and in accordance with the Cabinet resolution.

Supplementary Question

I am pleased to hear some enthusiasm for international food market and products. With Brexit on the horizon and the trade deals to be made, we shall hopefully see an international food market within a month.

Supplementary Response

I am not sure that Brexit will affect the market, but we shall keep an eye on the situation to see the outcome.

60 PETITIONS

No petitions were received prior to the deadline of 5pm Thursday 12 December 2019.

61 CABINET

Minute 43 – Cabinet response to the Recommendations of the Improvement and Review Commission – Parking Task and Finish Group Recommendations

The Chairman of the Parking Task & Finish Group (TFG) commented that the minutes did not contain the opportunities that the Parking TFG had identified to improve capacity in Marlow. This was raised with Cabinet although they did not specify this opportunity.

The Leader responded that the recommendations had been noted and she confirmed that the Parking TFG report had been sent to the Shadow Authority to be fed into the unitary process.

Minute 48 – Use of S106 Accrued Funds for Affordable Housing

Members congratulated officers for their dedication in bringing this scheme to fruition and commented that they had shown the passion they have for supporting Wycombe District residents.

> **RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting of the Cabinet of 11 November 2019 be received and the recommendations as set out at minute numbers 47 and 48 be approved and adopted.

62 PLANNING COMMITTEE

The Chairman of the Planning Committee: Councillor Alan Turner stated that the 13 November Minutes were before Members at this meeting and indicated there was one small amendment.

A member explained that at the previous evening's Planning Committee, there was a glaring omission from those Councillors invited to attend – the name of their colleague Tony Lee was missing.

Councillor Lee had resigned the Conservative whip some weeks ago and today stands as an independent. Consequently, because rules that determine that Committees should be politically balanced, Councillor Lee has been dropped from the Committee.

Two points need to be made:

1. This Planning Committee is probably, and thankfully, the most apolitical in the Council, and rightly so. That is what makes its decisions so robust. We listen to all views, whoever offers them and we respect those views. We speak as we see it without any political favour.
2. Councillor Lee has been a member of the Planning Committee since he joined the Council nearly five years ago. Over that time he has arguably been one of the more prominent members of this committee, always forthright, always honest and often to the point. Just because he is no longer a Conservative does not make him any less sincere.
   To expel him from this Committee seems to be churlish in the extreme and actually downright silly. The Planning Committee and indeed the Council, are the poorer for it.

So, he hopes that you will support him in urging the Leader of Council to use her authority to waive this so-called political balance rule in favour of common sense and invite Councillor Lee to rejoin our Committee for its final three months.

The Chairman of Planning Committee responded that Democratic Services would review the position and that he would respond to Councillor Whitehead in due course.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee of 16 October 2019 and 13 November 2019 be received.

63 IMPROVEMENT & REVIEW COMMISSION

Council thanked the Environmental Services team for their hard work in relation to Houses of Multiple Occupation. It was suggested that the Portfolio Holder pass on Council's thanks.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Improvement & Review Commission of 6 November 2019 be received.

64 PERSONNEL & DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Personnel & Development Committee of 20 November 2019 be received.

A member queried why the Regulatory and Appeals Committee minutes from meeting on Tuesday 17 December 2019 were not included. An officer confirmed that there had not been sufficient time since the meeting to present the minutes to this meeting.

65 HIGGINSON PARK TRUST - 2020-21 BUDGET

The Council Meeting had before it a detailed report in respect of the Higginson Park Trust (HPT) Budgets for 2020/21.

In previous years the Council as sole trustee had approved the budgets for the Trust as part of the overall Council's budget setting process following recommendations from Cabinet.

Wycombe District Council would be the sole trustee until 31 March 2020. Therefore, in its capacity as sole trustee, the Council would need to approve the 2020/21 budgets for the HPT charity. From 1 April 2020, the trusteeship of the HPT charity was to be transferred to the new Buckinghamshire Council.

A member suggested that the Trust should be handed to the Marlow Town Council in light of the transition to a Unitary Council in April 2020.

In response, the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources stated that he understood that no request had been made by the Town Council. However, if a request were to be made, the decision would need to be taken by the Shadow Executive.

In response to a further query in relation to governance expenditure the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources confirmed that he would clarify the query and respond accordingly.

RESOLVED: That the Higginson Park Trust Charity Budget for 2020/21 as set out in the Report be approved.

66 HIGGINSON PARK TRUST AUDITED ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

Members considered the Higginson Park Trust Charity annual report 2018-19 attached to the agenda.

The Charites Act of 2011 required the Trust to produce a statement of accounts for each year. These accounts in turn must be approved by Trustees; Wycombe District Council being the sole Trustee for The Higginson Park Charity.

The Draft Annual Report was considered by the Audit Committee on 17 October 2019. Due to the General Election, there had been a rescheduling of the Audit Committee and therefore the final audited Annual Report was directly brought to the Council for approval with the consent of the Audit Committee Vice-Chairman.

RESOLVED: That the Higginson Park Trust Charity audited Annual Report and Financial Statement for the year ended 31 March 2019 be approved.

67 QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 11.2

There were no questions submitted under Standing Order 11.2

68 COMMITTEE CHANGES / APPOINTMENTS

Members noted that Councillor Tony Lee was no longer a member of the Conservative Group and was now siting as an Independent member.

Whilst Councillor Brian Pearce was no longer an independent member and had joined the Wycombe Independent Party Group.

69 URGENT ACTION TAKEN BY CABINET OR INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER

The Individual Cabinet Member Decision as set out in the summons and featured below was noted.

- 4 December 2019 – Making the Daws Hill Neighbourhood Plan – **7/2019** Executive Leader of the Council

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Chairman

The following officers were in attendance at the meeting:

John East	-	Acting Chief Executive
Liz Hornby	-	Senior Democratic Services Officer
Catherine MacKenzie	-	Principal Democratic Services Officer