

Meeting of the Council

Minutes - 15 July 2015

Attendance

Mayor Cllr Ian Brookfield (Lab)
Deputy Mayor Cllr Barry Findlay (Con)

Labour

Cllr Ian Angus	Cllr Steve Evans	Cllr Peter O'Neill
Cllr Harbans Bagri	Cllr Val Evans	Cllr Phil Page
Cllr Harman Banger	Cllr Bhupinder Gakhal	Cllr Rita Potter
Cllr Mary Bateman	Cllr Val Gibson	Cllr John Reynolds
Cllr Philip Bateman	Cllr Julie Hodgkiss	Cllr John Rowley
Cllr Payal Bedi	Cllr Keith Inston	Cllr Judith Rowley
Cllr Peter Bilson	Cllr Jasbir Jaspal	Cllr Sandra Samuels
Cllr Alan Bolshaw	Cllr Milkinderpal Jaspal	Cllr Caroline Siarkiewicz
Cllr Greg Brackenridge	Cllr Andrew Johnson	Cllr Stephen Simkins
Cllr Paula Brookfield	Cllr Rupinderjit Kaur	Cllr Jacqueline Sweetman
Cllr Ian Claymore	Cllr Welcome Koussoukama	Cllr Paul Sweet
Cllr Craig Collingswood	Cllr Roger Lawrence	Cllr Bert Turner
Cllr Claire Darke	Cllr Linda Leach	Cllr Martin Waite
Cllr Bishan Dass	Cllr Elias Mattu	Cllr Daniel Warren
Cllr Jasbinder Dehar	Cllr Lynne Moran	

Conservative

Cllr Mark Evans	Cllr Paul Singh
Cllr Christopher Haynes	Cllr Wendy Thompson
Cllr Christine Mills	Cllr Andrew Wynne
Cllr Patricia Patten	Cllr Jonathan Yardley
Cllr Arun Photay	

Liberal Democrat

Cllr Richard Whitehouse

UKIP

Cllr Malcolm Gwinnett

Employees

Paul Brown	Communications Advisor
Tracey Christie	Head of Legal
Tony Ivko	Service Director - Older People
Tim Johnson	Strategic Director - Place
Kevin O'Keefe	Director of Governance
Martyn Sargeant	Group Manager - Corporate Administration
Mark Taylor	Director of Finance

The proceedings opened with Prayers

Item No. *Title*

1 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllrs Hardacre, McGregor and Tersaim Singh, and from Keith Ireland, Managing Director.

2 Declarations of interest

Kevin O'Keefe, Director of Governance and Solicitor to the Council, and Mark Taylor, Director of Finance, declared a pecuniary interest in item seven, Amendments to the Constitution.

3 Minutes of previous meeting

The Mayor proposed, the Deputy Mayor seconded, and it was resolved:

That the minutes of the previous meeting on 20 May 2015 be agreed as a correct record and signed accordingly by the Mayor.

4 Communications

Terror attacks

The Mayor invited Councillors to join with him in expressing profound sadness in relation to the recent terror attacks in France, Kuwait and Tunisia and the consequent deaths of many innocent people.

The late Mr Derek Allen

The Mayor reported with great sadness the death of Mr Derek Allen on Sunday 24 May 2015. He advised that he had attended Derek's funeral service with the Mayoress on Tuesday 23 June at Rakegate Methodist Church and extended the deepest sympathies of the Council to Cllr Claymore and Derek's family at this very sad time.

Those present stood in silent tribute to Mr Derek Allen and the victims of the recent terror attacks.

Dr James McElligott

The Mayor invited Councillors to join him in wishing Jim McElligott, the Council's Director of Education, a speedy recovery after he was recently taken ill while on holiday. He reported that Jim was now back home and awaiting further tests and advised that he would be sending a card to Jim, offering the good wishes of the Council.

The Queen's Birthday Honours

The Mayor reported that five people with connections to the city received awards in the Queen's Birthday Honours in June:

- **Christine and John Whatton**, who have fostered numerous local children as part of the Council's Fostering for Wolverhampton team and who have been awarded MBEs for services to children.
- **Georgetta Holloway**, head teacher at Heath Park Academy in Wolverhampton, who received an OBE in recognition of her 20 years in education.
- **Jeremy Hobbs**, who received the BEM for his services to local charities, especially Compton Hospice.
- **Jane Redshaw**, awarded the MBE for services to the community and to charity in Wolverhampton.

He congratulated each of the recipients on their awards and thanked them on behalf of the Council and the city for their efforts and dedication.

Civic Events

The Mayor thanked those who were able to attend recent Civic events, specifically:

- Civic Sunday Service on 7 June.
- Armed Forces Day flag raising ceremony on 22 June.
- Armed Forces Day parade on 27 June.

5 Future Space

Cllr Johnson outlined the imperative for the Future Space project, to undertake essential repairs to a 37 year old building and car park, in order that they can continue to operate efficiently and safely. He emphasised that the Council was considering the lowest cost option, whilst rationalising its property portfolio to get best value from its assets, and deliver an annual revenue saving of £500,000.

Cllr Yardley challenged the preparation of the cost estimates for alternative options, suggesting there was insufficient detail to make a robust comparison.

Cllr Thompson suggested that the proposed scheme was unpopular at a time when the Council was making cuts to key services. She supported Cllr Yardley's challenge that further cost evaluation should be carried out.

Cllr Lawrence advised that the Civic Centre was no longer fit for purpose. He noted that both public and private sector organisations faced the challenge of ensuring that buildings were in an appropriate state to facilitate the efficient conduct of the Council's business. He assured Councillors that robust advice had been sought from both employees and external advisers.

Cllr Gwinnett queried whether arrangements were already in place for existing buildings to be let out, per the proposals. He also queried the additional costs budgeted over and above those for the car park improvements and essential mechanical and electrical works.

Cllr Johnson assured Councillors that the development of the proposals had been robust. He referred to the risk assessment in the report and noted some key risks to the building and the Council's ability to continue to deliver key services.

It was proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Lawrence, and resolved:

That the Council approve an additional capital allocation of £390,197 for asset rationalisation and investment, and an additional allocation of £716,382 for car park repairs.

6 Corporate Plan

Cllr Thompson highlighted the measures in the corporate plan and the importance of effectively analysing whether the Council was achieving its objectives. She encouraged the Council to ensure every effort was made to achieve the targets, suggesting there was scope to be more ambitious in some areas.

It was proposed by Cllr Lawrence, seconded by Cllr Bilson, and resolved:

That the Council approve the Corporate Plan for 2015/16.

7 Amendments to the Constitution

Cllr Johnson explained that normally Constitution changes consequent upon legislation would be automatically incorporated but that, because of the posts affected by these amendments, advice had been received that they must be specifically approved by the Council.

It was proposed by Cllr Johnson, seconded by Cllr Thompson, and resolved that the Council:

1. Approve the following changes to the Constitution in order to comply with The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015:

- (a) That the following definition be included:

“Protected Officers: The Protected Officers are the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and the s.151 Officer.”

- (b) Article Four, The Full Council, section J be amended as follows:

“Confirming the appointment of the Head of Paid Service, Strategic Directors (as defined by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989), the Monitoring Officer and the s.151 Officer.

“By way of a vote confirming the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer and the s.151 Officer after taking into account:

- any advice, views or recommendations of a Special Committee constituted for this purpose under 29.9 of the Employee Employment Procedure Rules (including the two independent members from the Standards Committee);
- the conclusions of any investigation into the proposed dismissal;
- any representations from the protected officer concerned.

“Confirming the dismissal of the Strategic Directors (as defined by the Local Government and Housing Act 1989).”

- (c) Employment Procedure Rule 29.5.4 be amended as follows:

“Any Special Appointment Committee will follow the procedure required by the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001 (“the Regulations”) as amended by The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.”

- (d) Employee Employment Procedure Rule 29.9.1 be amended to include the Monitoring Officer and s.151 Officer.

- (e) Employee Employment Procedure Rule 29.5 be amended to include the following:

“Any Special Committee established for the purposes of the dismissal of the Head of Paid Service, the Monitoring Officer or the s.151 Officer will include the two independent members of the Standards Committee and will follow the procedure required by the Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) Regulations 2001 (“the Regulations”) as amended by The Local Authorities (Standing Orders) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2015.”

2. To note that, upon agreement, the officers affected by these changes will be formally notified by Human Resources.

8 **Annual scrutiny report**

Cllr Simkins introduced the annual scrutiny report for 2014/15, commending Cllr O’Neill for his leadership of the scrutiny function over recent years.

It was proposed by Cllr Simkins, seconded by Cllr Findlay, and resolved:

That Council receive the annual scrutiny report for 2014/15.

9 **Capital budget outturn**

It was proposed by Cllr Bilson, seconded by Cllr Johnson, and resolved that the Council approve:

1. The revised medium term General Fund capital programme of £270.2 million, an increase of £49.1 million from the previously approved programme, reflecting the latest projected expenditure for the medium term.
2. The revised medium term Housing Revenue Account (HRA) capital programme of £271.2 million, an increase of £6.7 million from the previously approved programme.
3. The additional resources for eight new and 32 existing General Fund projects totalling £49.1 million and for ten existing HRA projects totalling £6.7 million.

4. The details of the capital financial strategy relating to: the approval of future capital projects, the declaration of identified underspends and the use of capital receipts to reduce the Council's need to borrow to fund the approved capital programme.

10 Questions to Cabinet Members

Household Waste Recycling Centres

Councillor Paul Singh asked the following question:

Can the Cabinet Member for City Environment advise Council upon the steps that the authority is prepared to make towards changing the opening out of the two household waste recycling centres in the City, at Shaw Road and Anchor Lane, given the continuation of long queues at weekends, and whether the extension of opening hours during at least some weekdays to allow people to use these facilities after work is under consideration?

Cllr Steve Evans confirmed that the opening hours had been under review and there was a possibility of extended opening hours in due course.

Cllr Singh asked what the timetable was for any changes.

Cllr Evans responded that extended opening hours would be in place at peak periods (such as bank holidays and weekends).

Government Funding

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Can the Cabinet Member for Resources advise Council how much government funding is being received by Wolverhampton for all purposes in this financial year, and how much is anticipated to be due to Wolverhampton in the next financial year?

Cllr Johnson advised that total government revenue funding for 2015/16 was £426.6m, which included revenue support grant of £63.3m, top-up grant of £35.9m, new homes bonus of £3.2m and business rates support grant of £2.2m. He explained the balance of funding, totalling some £322m and consisting primarily of dedicated schools' grant, public health grant and housing benefits grants were 'passported' meaning the Council had little if any discretion over its distribution. He further noted a capital grant of £34.8m in 2015/16.

In terms of 2016/17, Cllr Johnson advised projected government support of £416.5m, including revenue support grant of £52.6m, top-up grant of £36.7m and new homes bonus of £4m. The projected balance of £323.2m was designated as described previously. He further advised a projected capital grant of £26.9m. He noted that the future figures must be treated with some caution, pending the autumn spending statement.

Car Park Charges

Councillor Paul Singh asked the following question:

Can the Cabinet Member for City Environment assure Council that there are, and will be, no plans to levy charges on all car parks in the city?

Cllr Steve Evans confirmed this.

Blue Badges

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Can the Cabinet Member for Adults advise the current waiting period for the renewal of Blue Badges for disabled parking between the customer's application and the delivery of the new badge back to them?

Cllr Mattu advised that there were currently 9,750 blue badges in circulation but that the number of applications had increased significantly over the past two or three years. He explained that the service worked to a 12 week turnaround and, over the past 12 months, the number of applications where this target had not been met was 150. He noted that the delay can sometimes be caused by an applicant not taking up an offered appointment and also advised that only six complaints had been received in the past 12 months. He outlined a remedial action plan that, over the next six weeks, should ensure that all customers will receive a response to their application within the 12 week target.

Cllr Thompson asked what support could be provided to those residents whose badges expired before a replacement was issued.

Cllr Mattu assured Councillors that extra support would be provided to anybody in difficulty as a result of a delay on the part of the Council.

City Centre Road Network

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Could the Cabinet Member advise what is being done to alleviate the considerable difficulties that businesses are facing in the City Centre with regard to the new road network?

Cllr Bilson explained that consultation had been undertaken with local businesses, including personal visits by employees. He advised that changes had been made to the proposals in the light of consultation. He noted that the work was underway and, whilst there was necessary short term inconvenience, he was confident the changes would have long term benefits in the city centre.

Cllr Thompson queried whether the consultation had been sufficiently extensive.

Cllr Bilson noted that there had been some objections to the proposals, particularly in regard to some pedestrianisation, but that the overall benefits to public realm space were significant.

Grass Cutting

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Could the Cabinet Member for City Environment advise how much money has been saved on the reduction of grass cutting services across the city?

Cllr Steve Evans advised that the service changes had not yielded a saving but a contribution to offset reductions in government funding. He advised this totalled £200,000.

Section 106 Agreements

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Would the Cabinet Member for City Assets agree that it would be proper for local Councillors, community groups and other local stakeholders to be consulted over the proposed use of funds secured by means of agreements made under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990?

Cllr Bilson confirmed his assent and advised that it was done as a matter of good practice.

Cllr Thompson asked that all members of the Planning Committee be advised when this occurs.

Cllr Bilson confirmed he would issue guidance accordingly.

Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Would the Leader of the Council agree that it would be desirable for at least one woman to be appointed to the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership?

Cllr Lawrence confirmed that he was in agreement. He explained that 14 applications had been received for the business representation roles, of which three were women, one of whom was appointed but subsequently resigned. He advised that he had raised this issue with the Board, which it had confirmed that it was actively seeking to appoint women as part of its current recruitment.

Agency Staff and Consultants

Councillor Thompson asked the following question:

Could the Cabinet Member for Resources advise the Council on the costs of hiring external consultants and temporary agency staff in the last complete financial year, and on the cost so far in this financial year?

Cllr Johnson confirmed that the cost in 2014/15 was £13.994m, of which £3.634m was for schools. He further advised that the cost for the year to 9 July was £2.987m, noting that the per month spend had fallen. He explained that the top three areas of spend were schools, children in need/child protection, and looked-after children. Cllr Johnson advised that he hoped such costs would fall further in the coming year, as a recent recruitment drive had seen all vacant social worker posts filled, and the work of the Council's recruitment agency, Yoo Recruit, had proved successful.

Councillor enquiries on behalf of constituents

Councillor Photay asked the following question:

Due to the turnover of staff leaving the authority, there have been a number of incidents with Members' casework going missing or not being handed over. There will always be individuals who leave an organisation, however, could the Cabinet Member for Resources advise the Council what measures have been put in place to ensure that this doesn't happen again?

Cllr Johnson advised that a proposal had recently been agreed by the Council's directors and the Executive Team to provide a single point of contact for Councillor enquiries, employing the enhanced functionality provided by the new customer relationship management (CRM) system. He explained that a pilot would shortly be taking place in the People directorate.