

Democratic Services  
1<sup>st</sup> Floor, One Angel Square  
Northampton  
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MINUTES of the Business Meeting of the NORTHAMPTONSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held in public at County Hall, Northampton on 19 March 2020 at 10.30am.

PRESENT

Councillor Stephen Legg (Chairman)

|            |                          |            |                        |
|------------|--------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| Councillor | Richard Auger            | Councillor | Cecile Irving-Swift    |
| "          | Jane Birch               | "          | Graham Lawman          |
| "          | Elizabeth Bowen          | "          | John McGhee            |
| "          | Rebecca Breese           | "          | Ian Morris             |
| "          | Adam Brown               | "          | Suresh Patel           |
| "          | Pinder Chauhan           | "          | Victoria Perry         |
| "          | Jonathan Ekins           | "          | Jason Smithers         |
| "          | Matthew Golby            | "          | Christina Smith-Haynes |
| "          | Andre Gonzalez de Savage | "          | Chris Stanbra          |
| "          | Robert Gough             | "          | Danielle Stone         |
| "          | Mike Hallam              | "          | Malcolm Waters         |

Also in attendance (for all or part of the meeting)

Jenny Daniels, Democracy Officer (minutes)  
Anna Earnshaw, Managing Director of Northamptonshire Adult Social Services (NASS)  
Paul Hanson, Democratic Services Manager  
Barry Scarr, Executive Director for Finance  
Susan Zeiss, Monitoring Officer

And 1 member of the public.

09/20 Apologies received from Councillors for inability to attend the meeting:

Apologies were received from Councillors Fiona Baker, Wendy Brackenbury, Julie Brookfield, Robin Brown, Michael Clarke, Julie Davenport, Annabel de Capell-Brooke, Gareth Eales, Scott Edwards, Martin Griffiths, James Hakewill, Eileen Hales, Amy Howard, Dudley Hughes, Sylvia Hughes, Andrew Kilbride, Malcolm Longley, Arthur McCutcheon, Allan Matthews, Andy Mercer, Gill Mercer, Dennis Meredith, Sandra Naden-Horley, Steve Osborne, Bill Parker, Anjona Roy, Sam Rumens, Adil Sadygov, Bob Scott, Mick Scrimshaw, Judy Shephard, Winston Strachan, Michael Tye and Allen Walker.

10/20 To approve and sign the minutes of the Meeting held on Thursday 20 February 2020

**RESOLVED that: Council approved the minutes of the meeting held on 20 February 2020.**

### 11/20 Notification of requests by members of the public to address the meeting.

None received.

### 12/20 Declarations of Interest by Councillors:

There were none.

### 13/20 Chairman's Announcements

The Chairman advised that he had decided to postpone his Garden Party which was due to take place on Saturday 18 April. He would let councillors know the new date once it had been re-arranged.

In order to reduce the risks to everyone attending the current meeting, he proposed that Council postponed consideration of all non-urgent items of business, which were

- Annual Report by the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (agenda Item no: 8a)
- Local Government Reorganisation: Changes to the Schedule of Committee Meetings (agenda Item no: 8c)
- Appointment of new arrangements to the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (agenda Item no: 8e)
- Climate Change, Carbon Management and the Environment (agenda Item no: 8g)

The Principal Opposition Group had also advised him that they wished to withdraw both their motions from the agenda. He thanked them for their consideration at this current time.

### 14/20 Petitions

There were none.

### 15/20 Statement by the Leader of the Council

At the Chairman's invitation the Leader of the Council, Councillor Matt Golby addressed Council stating that the whole nation was facing unprecedented times and was rightly concerned for friends, neighbours, businesses and residents, especially those who might be vulnerable or elderly. He could confirm that the Council had been working with every partner and agency across the county with the support of Government to prepare and implement robust plans to manage the impact of Corona Virus. The Council would do whatever was needed to keep residents safe. The critical incident plan had been mobilised in the previous week and since then the Council had been putting in place comprehensive teams, plans and contingencies to achieve it.

There was a comprehensive joint COVID command and control structure in place between all partners and a single strategic command centre with all senior leaders overseeing the response. The Council's Emergency Planning Team had worked with services to support the response and the public health service had been at the forefront of system planning and decisions. It was important to make informed and sensible decisions in order to manage the situation.

There would be no quick fix and the Council was prioritising its efforts and repurposing staff. Key frontline services such as Adults and Children's social care would continue to function but staff would be moved to work closely with partners and the hospitals to ensure people were safe and in appropriate settings. This might mean moving people in the short term but their safety and wellbeing would be the first concern.

The Council had stood down some lower priority services to focus staff and services where they were needed and as soon as these were resurrected Council would be told. Staff who could work from home were now working from home unless they were in one of the critical or front line services. All staff would remain in contact and would be set clear tasks and rules about how they worked and what was needed from them.

Community and community spirit was one of the most vital resources in this situation and the Council supported efforts to harness this in a way that keeps people and volunteers safe. The Council had a dedicated community resilience lead within the Emergency Planning team to co-ordinate this.

The Council would be making arrangements to publish information online on behalf of all partners shortly and to which all volunteer and community groups could be directed for advice, guidance and to be safely connected to those in need and who residents could be certain were genuine in their offer of help. Once this was available all members would be told where to direct people to offer help and to receive information.

All staff and members were thanked in advance for their professionalism and support during these challenging times. By working together he was sure they could get safely through them.

**RESOLVED that: Council noted the statement by the Leader of the Council, which was supported by the Leaders of the Opposition Groups.**

16/20 Opposition Priority Business:

This item was deferred.

17/20 Business Items (including Budget & Policy Framework Items, Appointments & Annual Reports).

(a) Annual Report by the Standing Advisory Council for Religious Education (SACRE)

This was deferred.

(b) Council Pay Policy

At the Chairman's invitation the report (copies of which had been previously circulated) was proposed by Councillor Matt Golby.

The report was seconded by Councillor Adam Brown.

Councillors commented as follows:

- Some found the gender pay gap and the trends in it to be alarming and Council was asked what it was undertaking to address it. If Council staff were working and yet

were still poor and using food banks then Council should take responsibility for this situation and do something.

- Some commented that zero-hours contracts were very damaging as those on them were unable to get mortgages, tenancies, HP or credit. Council was asked how many people were employed by the Council on zero-hours contracts and what the Council was doing to assist them to get into full time employment.

Councillor Golby in reply stated the gender pay gap was an issue that everyone was concerned with. Members had regular meeting with the trade union representatives where trade union representatives raised concerns.

**RESOLVED that: Council**

- 1) Agreed to the Council's Pay Policy Statement for the financial year 2020/21 (Appendix 1 to the report); and**
- 2) Noted the Gender Pay Gap report for 2020/21 (Appendix 2 to the report).**

(c) Local Government Reorganisation: Changes to the Schedule of Committee Meetings

This item was deferred.

(d) Amendments to the Constitution

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Elizabeth Bowen proposed the report (copies of which had been previously circulated) stating the Code of Conduct had not been reviewed since 2012. It was therefore in urgent need of review and it had been undertaken with the commissioners. It had been undertaken in line with the Nolan principles which were the basis of ethical standards expected of public office holders.

In reference to the alteration to the report Councillor Bowen stated the Council's constitution set out how decisions were made including who had the authority to make them. The Chief Executive may take precedence over full Council and would take advice from the Monitoring Officer, Chairman of the Council and Leader of the Council. In the absence of the Chief Executive the decision could be taken by their deputy.

The report was seconded by Councillor Suresh Patel.

Council agreed to the alteration to the report.

Some councillors felt the decision should be discussed by the opposition groups.

In reply Councillor Bowen explained that it had already been discussed with the Leaders of the Opposition Groups.

**RESOLVED that: Council noted that the amendments proposed to the constitution below have the support of the Commissioners and agreed:**

- 1) The amendments to the constitution set out in sections 4 and 5 of the report;**
- 2) That the Monitoring Officer be given delegated authority to enact these amendments and any consequential minor amendments as may be required and to republish the Constitution accordingly; and**
- 3) The following alteration:**

to add the following words to Part 3, Section 3 after paragraph 2.5:

### **3. PROCEDURE FOR TAKING URGENT DECISIONS**

**3.1 The Council's Constitution sets out who in the Council has authority to make decisions and the procedures for making those decisions. Sometimes events will occur which require decisions to be taken urgently. The Council needs to be able to respond quickly where failure to do so would not be in the public interest. The following should be read alongside the Action in Designated Emergency Procedure Rules, but it is not necessary for the Council to have activated its Critical Incident Plan, nor to have declared an emergency, for the following powers to be exercised.**

**3.2 The procedure for taking urgent decisions, which includes the taking of urgent key decisions, should only be used where failure to take the decision quickly would, or would be likely to, harm the interests of the Council and the public, for example:**

- a) A service not being provided;**
- b) The Council breaking the law or financial rules;**
- c) The public being put at serious risk of harm;**
- d) The Council suffering financial loss;**
- e) Consultation deadlines not being met;**

**In the event of a major incident. Please note that this list is not exhaustive.**

**3.3 The following are not suitable reasons for the use of the procedure:**

- a) poor planning;**
- b) the possibility of embarrassment being caused to an officer or Councillor;**
- c) the possibility of adverse publicity being caused to the Council;**
- d) in order to circumvent the requirements of Financial Procedure Rules without good cause and justification.**

### **3.4 URGENT DECISIONS BY COMMITTEE**

**Where the agenda for the relevant committee has been published, an urgent item may be added to the agenda if it meets the urgency criteria set out in paragraphs above. The Chairman of the committee will require an explanation before authorisation is given. Every effort must be made to circulate the urgent report to Councillors at least 24 hours before the meeting. The urgent report will be made available for public inspection as soon as possible.**

### **3.5 CALLING AN ADDITIONAL MEETING**

**The issue may be of such significance that it may be more appropriate to call an additional meeting. The access to information procedure rules should be followed in such instances.**

### **3.6 URGENT DECISIONS BY THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**The Chief Executive may take a decision which is normally reserved to Council, a committee or another officer, where he/she believes that the decision is urgent, after first:**

- a) Taking into account the guidelines set out above; and**

- b) Where possible, seeking the views of the following in respect of the proposed decision:-
- i. The Chairman of the relevant committee with authority to take the decision;
  - ii. The Leader of the Council (or in the Leader's absence the Deputy Leader) and the leaders of all groups; and
  - iii. The Monitoring Officer.
- c) The Chief Executive will take into account any views he/she considers are relevant. The decision is the Chief Executive's alone.
- d) The decision together with the reasons why it is urgent must be recorded in writing. The record of urgent decisions will be held by Democratic Services and will be made available for inspection.
- e) Following the decision, a report will be submitted to the next available relevant meeting explaining:
- i. The decision,
  - ii. The reasons for it; and
  - iii. Why the decision was treated as a matter of urgency.
- f) In the absence of the Chief Executive, their responsibilities under this procedure may be exercised by their nominated deputy and all references to the Chief Executive under this procedure will also apply to that person.

The provisions of paragraph 2 above relating to the taking of key decisions shall not apply to urgent decisions taken by the Chief Executive.

(e) Appointment of new arrangements to the Anglian (Great Ouse) Regional Flood and Coastal Committee

This item was deferred.

(f) New Capital Scheme Approvals

At the Chairman's invitation Councillor Matt Golby proposed the report (copies of which had been previously circulated) stating it brought ownership of Chedworth House back into the Council's remit. As he understood it there would be a sum owed to Council as well from Olympus Care Services as part of the transfer.

The report was seconded by Councillor Jason Smithers.

**RESOLVED that: Council approves the inclusion of one new capital scheme:**

- Chedworth House - £300k

**in the Council's Capital Programme following Cabinet recommendation.**

(g) Climate Change, Carbon Management and the Environment

This item was deferred.

18/20 Questions, if any, to the Chairman of the Audit Committee relating to the work of the Audit Committee since the last ordinary meeting.

The Chairman informed Council that the Independent Chairman of the Audit Committee, Bill Jessop could not attend the meeting that day. He had provided an update (copies of which had been made available at the meeting) which the Chairman highlighted as follows:

- The Audit Committee had met 3 times since the last time he had presented to

- Council and the minutes for 2 of these meetings were included in the Council agenda papers.
- The Committee had continued to concentrate on its prime responsibilities of internal and external audit and the Council's Risk Management Systems.
- They had received a presentation regarding Risk at the February meeting.
- Risk Management had been a frustration for the Committee but he was pleased to report that progress had been made over the past 6 months. This progress he attributed to a change in approach by management and the continuing interest of the Chief Executive.
- The principal Corporate Risks were well understood and documented. (Pandemic was identified as the number one trigger for Critical Incident Risk). As is the nature of risk management the risks would change over time and the Committee would continue to monitor them. Further work was in hand to develop and embed risk management in the directorates.
- The Committee continued to receive regular reports from internal audit. They had discussed limited opinion reports on Debt Recovery, IT Governance, IT Disaster Recovery, IT Procurement and the Public Health 0-19 Service. The Committee had agreed some limited adjustments to the agreed internal audit plan for 2019/20 to balance priorities to available resource.
- The previous week Cabinet had agreed new policies on fraud, whistleblowing and anti-corruption and also investment to secure an appropriate level of disaster recovery for NCC's IT systems. These originated in discussions of internal audit reports at the Audit Committee.
- Officers had not always been good at meeting the commitments they had given particularly in response to internal and external audit reports and sometimes the reasons given had not been acceptable. The Committee had tried to improve on this by monitoring various action trackers. Good progress had been made but best practice was still not uniform.
- In November Commissioner Brian Roberts gave a presentation on a Finance Improvement Plan. The Committee had since discussed this with the Chief Finance Officer and would assess its effectiveness later in the year.
- KPMG had issued their audit certificate for 2017/18 and Ernst & Young (EY) could now start work on the accounts. KPMG had also said they would not be issuing a public interest report.
- EY had submitted a progress report to the meeting in February but were unable to attend. The Committee had not understood their proposed timetable that suggested their audit of the 2018/19 accounts would not be completed until the turn of the current year and the audit of the current financial year would not be completed until November 2021. The Committee would be discussing this with EY at the next meeting.
- He thanked officers who supported the Committee. The Committee was building a good relationship with the new Chief Finance Officer who made himself and other members of the leadership team available to the Committee whenever asked.

In answer to queries on the report the Chief Finance Officer stated:

- The Independent Chairman had not suggested there was no capacity to answer queries but that officers had not always been so good at answering queries.
- There was a consolidated action tracker to ensure everything that should be was undertaken.
- It was early days but the Committee looked forward to developing a good relationship with EY. Committee members had expressed concerns and EY

representatives would be attending the next meeting to answer queries.

**RESOLVED that: Council noted the information provided by the Independent Chairman of the Audit Committee and that questions would be answered following the meeting.**

### 19/20 Cabinet Business

At the Chairman's invitation the Leader of the Council proposed his report (copies of which were available at the meeting) highlighting the following:

- He thanked staff for their dedication and congratulated them in their response to the current situation.
- He was confident in what he had witnessed in public health, Emergency Planning and Central Government that all was being done that could. He confirmed the Council's website was constantly being updated and people could be referred to it for advice.
- He had been speaking to the Director for Education to ensure all support would be given to schools.

There were no supplementary questions to those submitted in writing. In answer to verbal questions the following was confirmed:

- The strategic command centre was set up in a prescribed way from Cobra. The Chief Executive represented the Council on it. There were also representatives undertaking various items such as assisting to move people in and out of hospital and a logistics group that got personal protective equipment (PPE) out to the community.
- Council were contacting staff daily and were reporting if staff became ill or if they were required to re-deploy staff. They were also providing Frequently Asked Questions that could be accessed by staff on all sorts of subjects.
- There was a standard approach whereby all services were RAG rated in terms of importance from 1 to 5. Every single service director had categorised their Service and it would be shown to the commissioners before putting the information on the website. They would record when a service was stood down.
- The Communications team had been given additional resource and were setting up direct communications with staff. They were also setting up a community resilience hubs where the County Council would provide a single website where people could register support they were offering or ask for support. From that hub they would co-ordinate everyone in terms of general contact. They were working with the army and voluntary sector groups to do this.
- Central Government had suggested that county councils in particular received information on every resident in the county who was considered vulnerable and the Council would contact them. They were also in contact with supermarkets to ensure supply was there that they could distribute.
- They had an emergency planning e-mail address that co-ordinated everything. This could be accessed via the outlook system.
- PPE had mainly been received in health. Everyone would be given a national number to contact should they not receive supplies of PPE. Every Care Quality Commission registered supplier should also receive PPE.
- The Council had set up skype access and increased their own remote access. They could have up to 3,000 staff at any one time on remote access. They were keeping public hubs and libraries open so that people could access information.



- The Council had 2,700 people working remotely with no reported performance issues. They had no resilience issues either.
- The Council y were talking to supermarkets and warehouses and would be working with them about how they could procure supplies and be able to pass it on to those who were vulnerable.
- The university had offered more rooms in the halls of residence for use for the homeless and the army had undertaken an exercise on which hotels were the best ones to use.
- The requirement to communicate was important but they did not wish to swamp the system with help. They were currently working through calls for help and working out how best to provide that support. Staff briefings would also be sent to members.
- They were asking members to send information to them and were working with HR so that they could mobilise people with relevant qualifications who had retired.
- They would expect items such as baby formula and nappies to be part of packages that went to new mothers.
- There was a specific planning function around homelessness. They were securing places such as night shelters and district and borough councils were identifying areas where people could become unwell.
- The Council was aware that food banks were not receiving donations and they were establishing links with those most at need.

**RESOLVED that: Council noted the answers provided to questions both verbally and in written form.**

#### 20/20 Scrutiny Business

At the Chairman's invitation the Deputy Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Chris Stanbra, proposed the report (copies of which had been previously circulated) stating the Committee had reduced the number of meetings in 2020/21 but should the need arise they could put in additional meetings.

The report was seconded by Councillor Victoria Perry.

**RESOLVED that: Council noted the report by the Chairman of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.**

#### 21/20 Motions Submitted by Councillors Under Rule 13.1

This item was deferred.

#### 22/20 Urgent Business

There was none.

**RESOLVED that: Under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that if the public were present it would be likely that exempt information under Part 3 of the Schedule 12A to the Act of the descriptions against each item would be disclosed to them.**

23/20 Exempt Business: LGSS

**RESOLVED: That Council agreed the recommendations as set out in the report, which was exempt from publication by virtue of paragraph 3 of part 1 of 12a of the Local Government Act 1972.**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.00 noon.