

Minutes of a meeting of the Council

At 6.00 pm on Thursday 25th January, 2024 in the Council Chamber, Corby Cube,
George Street, NN17 1QG

Present:-

Members

Councillor Barbara Jenney (Chair)	Councillor Lora Lawman
Councillor Jean Addison	Councillor Anne Lee
Councillor Tim Allebone	Councillor Paul Marks
Councillor Ross Armour	Councillor Dorothy Maxwell
Councillor Matt Binley	Councillor Zoe McGhee
Councillor David Brackenbury	Councillor Andy Mercer
Councillor Wendy Brackenbury	Councillor Gill Mercer
Councillor Scott Brown	Councillor Macaulay Nichol
Councillor Lyn Buckingham	Councillor Dr Anup Pandey
Councillor Robin Carter	Councillor Tom Partridge-Underwood
Councillor Melanie Coleman	Councillor Mark Pengelly
Councillor John Currall	Councillor Harriet Pentland
Councillor Alison Dalziel	Councillor Elliot Prentice
Councillor Dez Dell	Councillor Simon Rielly
Councillor Scott Edwards	Councillor Russell Roberts
Councillor Emily Fedorowycz	Councillor Mark Rowley
Councillor Martin Griffiths	Councillor Geoff Shacklock
Councillor Jim Hakewill	Councillor Jason Smithers
Councillor Clive Hallam	Councillor Sarah Tubbs
Councillor Kirk Harrison	Councillor Michael Tye
Councillor Larry Henson	Councillor Malcolm Ward
Councillor Helen Howell	Councillor Andrew Weatherill
Councillor David Howes	Councillor Keli Watts
Councillor Bert Jackson	Councillor Kevin Watt
Councillor Matt Keane	Councillor Lee Wilkes
Councillor Graham Lawman	

Officers

Adele Wylie (Deputy Chief Executive/Monitoring Officer)
Sanjit Sull (Assistant Director of Legal and Governance/Deputy Monitoring Officer)
Louise Delavaloire (Senior Lawyer – Governance and Litigation)
David Pope (Senior Committee Administrator)

293 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Valerie Anslow, Paul Bell, Charlie Best, Jennie Bone, Cedwien Brown, Leanne Buckingham, Lloyd Bunday, Jon-Paul Carr, William Colquhoun, Mark Dearing, Jonathan Ekins, Ken Harrington, Helen Harrison, Philip Irwin, Ian Jelley, King Lawal, Richard Levell, Peter McEwan, John

McGhee, Steven North, Jan O'Hara, Roger Powell, David Sims, Chris Smyth-Haynes, Joseph Smyth and Malcolm Waters.

294 Tributes to Councillor Michael Tebbutt

The Chair expressed her sincere condolences at the passing of Cllr Michael Tebbutt and extended condolences on behalf of everybody at the Council to Cllr Tebbutt's family and friends.

The Chair then invited the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jason Smithers to pay tribute to Cllr Tebbutt. Cllr Smithers spoke to reference Cllr Tebbutt's long and distinguished service as a councillor both at North Northamptonshire Council and its shadow authority, as well as the former Kettering Borough Councillor. Cllr Smithers noted that Cllr Tebbutt's memorial service was due to take place on 5th February 2024, at 2.00pm at St Giles Church, Desborough.

Cllr Smithers then opened the floor to receive tributes from fellow councillors, with Cllrs Jim Hakewill, Matt Keane, Russell Roberts, David Howes, Scott Edwards and David Brackenbury speaking warmly to acknowledge Cllr Tebbutt's contributions to local democracy as well as saluting him as a helpful, caring and enthusiastic gentleman who would be sorely missed.

The Chair stated that a charity ball would be held at Kettering Park Hotel on 11th May in aid of Prostate Cancer UK and in remembrance of Cllr Tebbutt and others. Further details would be available from Cllr Jan O'Hara.

A minute's silence in memory of Cllr Tebbutt was then observed by all those in attendance at the meeting.

295 Declarations of Interest

The Chair asked those members who wished to do so to declare any interests in respect of items on the agenda.

There were no declarations of interest received.

296 Chair's Announcements

The Chair spoke to reference a visit to the Wellingborough Magistrate's Court to view the innovative and pioneering work of the Youth Court Solutions project led by the Crisalys Foundation that focussed on preventing, reducing and mitigating youth trauma with an aim of reducing youth offending.

The Chair also congratulated Cllr Gill Mercer on her appointment to the Executive as Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing.

297 Monitoring Officer Designation - Interim appointment and Interim arrangements to cover Executive Director of Customer and Governance Duties

[Sanjit Sull left the Council Chamber for the duration of this item]

Consideration was given to a report recommending the appointment of Sanjit Sull as Interim Monitoring Officer with effect from 27th January 2024, pending the permanent appointment to the role.

A copy of the report is filed with the agenda for the meeting, marked as 'Item 3'.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Lora Lawman and seconded by Cllr Wendy Brackenbury.

Cllr Lawman noted that following the appointment of Adele Wylie as Chief Executive and Head of Paid Service, the Council was required to designate the role of Monitoring Officer under Section 5 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 to ensure compliance with statutory and legal obligations. Cllr Lawman noted that Sanjit Sull would bring a wealth of experience to the position, and it was her pleasure to propose Ms Sull for the role as Interim Monitoring Officer.

Cllr Wendy Brackenbury, in seconding the proposal, noted that Ms Sull was very well qualified to assume the role of Interim Monitoring Officer.

The Council's Monitoring Officer, Adele Wylie clarified that compressed working hours for the role would be kept under review to ensure that duties were discharged effectively.

Following conclusion of the debate, the motion was voted on, with 48 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

RESOLVED

That Council appointed Sanjit Sull as Interim Monitoring Officer with effect from 27th January 2024, pending the permanent appointment to the role.

Reasons for Recommendations: It is a requirement in law that the Council has a designated Monitoring Officer and the recommendations within this report ensure that the Council continues to comply with its statutory and legal obligations.

Alternative Options Considered: Under the Local Government & Housing Act 1988, Section 5, authorities are required to appoint one of its officers as its Monitoring Officer, to ensure legal and fair decision making; promote and maintain high standards of conduct; report any instances of maladministration; and review the Council's Constitution.

The Council could decide to appoint a suitably qualified interim/consultant to fulfil the Monitoring Officer role and cover the duties of the Executive Director of Customer and Governance, however, the recommended option will ensure stability, continuity and will be the most cost-effective solution.

298 Proposed Revisions to the Constitution - Audit and Governance Committee Terms of Reference

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval for required updates to the terms of reference for the Audit and Governance Committee to reflect current CIPFA guidance and local arrangements.

A copy of the report is filed with the agenda for the meeting, marked as 'Item 4'.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Andy Mercer and seconded by Cllr Andrew Weatherill.

Cllr Mercer noted that the proposed amendments has been considered by the Constitutional Working Group and recommended by the Democracy and Standards Committee.

Following conclusion of the debate, the motion was voted on, with 48 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

RESOLVED

That Council approved of the revised Terms of Reference for the Audit and Governance Committee.

Reason for Recommendation – The proposed changes are recommended to ensure the Audit and Governance Committee can effectively discharge its functions in compliance with professional standards and reflects local arrangements.

Alternative Options Considered - The option of presenting the revisions as part of the programmed review at a later date was rejected as this would disrupt the delivery of the work of the Audit and Governance Committee.

299 Local Government Association - Civility in public life - Debate Not Hate Campaign

Consideration was given to a report that sought to update and inform Council of the Local Government Association's "Debate Not Hate: The Impact of Abuse on Local Democracy" report and campaign.

A copy of the report is filed with the agenda for the meeting, marked as 'Item 5'.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by the Leader of the Council, Cllr Jason Smithers and seconded by the Leader of the Opposition, Cllr Matt Keane.

Cllr Smithers stated that he was proud to propose the report and thanked the Chair and members of the Democracy and Standards Committee for recommending it to Full Council. Cllr Smithers noted that elected members were passionate about North Northamptonshire and its residents and although members may hold differing views and perspectives, they were united in doing their best for the area and should be united in supporting the Debate Not Hate campaign.

Cllr Smithers referred to research carried out by LGA, the results of which detailed significant levels of public abuse and intimidation received by elected members whilst carrying out their roles. The LGA had subsequently produced a report and created the Debate Not Hate campaign to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encouraged healthy debate and offered support to those who had been the victim of abuse and intimidation. It was noted as being a great opportunity for the Council as one of the largest unitary authorities in the country to show leadership in signing the public statement supporting the Debate Not Hate campaign. Proactive commitments detailed within the report that the Council could take to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its members were highlighted to the meeting.

Cllr Matt Keane welcomed the report, noting the importance of having a wide range of views representing the electorate, with Council support for the campaign setting a good example in encouraging future candidates to stand for election. Cllr Keane called for the creation of a cross-party working group to examine ways the Council could fully support the campaign and champion local democracy.

The Chair invited further debate and Cllrs Andy Mercer, Zoe McGhee, Emily Fedorowycz, Jim Hakewill, Dorothy Maxwell, Lee Wilkes, Mark Pengelly, Lora Lawman and Helen Howell all spoke to welcome the report and provided examples of their own experiences with abuse and intimidation whilst carrying out their roles.

Following conclusion of the debate, the motion was voted on, with 47 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

RESOLVED

That the Council

- i) committed to and accepted the following:
 - a) To support the 'Debate not Hate' campaign and accept the Local Government Association recommendations in principle.
 - b) To work together, across the political groups to promote and uphold high standards of civil behaviour in public and political debate.
 - c) To establish a reporting mechanism to record and monitor incidents of harassment and abuse.
 - d) To work with officers to ensure that support is provided to councillors who are experiencing intimidation and abuse.
 - e) That the Democracy and Standards Committee will review this on an annual basis and will work with the Monitoring Officer to address and challenge ongoing issues and key concerns.
- ii) That the Leader of the Council signs the Debate Not Hate Public Statement on behalf of the Council.

Reasons for Recommendations - The 'Debate not Hate' campaign aims to raise public awareness of the role of councillors in local communities, encourage healthy debate and improve the response to and support those in public life facing abuse and intimidation.

Alternative Options Considered – To do nothing, however providing support to the campaign promotes high ethical standards in public life which is consistent with the Nolan principles and the Councillor Code of Conduct in accordance with the Localism Act 2011.

300 Request for Dispensation for Attendance

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval of request for a dispensation to a Councillor who was currently unable to attend any Council meetings due to illness.

A copy of the report is filed with the agenda for the meeting, marked as 'Item 6'.

The recommendations in the report were proposed by Cllr Scott Edwards and seconded by Cllr Mark Rowley.

Proposing the report, Cllr Scott Edwards spoke to wish Cllr Christina Smith-Haynes well for the future and a full recovery, a sentiment echoed by Cllr Jim Hakewill during debate.

Following conclusion of the debate, the motion was voted on, with 48 councillors in favour, 0 abstaining and 0 against.

RESOLVED

That Council granted a dispensation for Councillor Christina Smith-Haynes from attending meetings of the Council for a six-month period by reason of illness.

Reason for Recommendations – Pursuant to Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 where a Councillor fails to attend any meeting of the Council for six months, they cease to be a Member of the Council unless a dispensation has been granted by the Council.

Other Options Considered – Council could not approve the dispensation. This is not recommended as the reasons for it are considered reasonable and failure to grant would result in Councillor Christina Smith-Haynes ceasing to be a member of North Northamptonshire Council.

301 Close of Meeting

There being no further business to be transacted, the Chair thanked members, officers and the public viewing the meeting both in person and online for their attendance and closed the meeting.

Chair

Date

The meeting closed at 6.58 pm