

## **BOROUGH OF TELFORD & WREKIN**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Borough of Telford & Wrekin held on Thursday, 19 September, 2012 at 6.30 p.m. at the Civic Offices, Telford.**

#### **PRESENT:**

Councillors K.R. Guy (Mayor), S. Bentley, K.T. Blundell, F.M. Bould, S.P. Burrell, E.J. Carter, E.A. Clare, S. Davies, B.H. Duce, N.A. Dugmore, A.J. Eade, C.B.A. Elliott, A.R.H. England, N.A.M. England, R.C. Evans, I.T.W. Fletcher, V.A. Fletcher, G.M. Green, E.J. Greenaway, T.J. Hope, M.B. Hosken, M.G. Ion, A.S. Jhawar, R.T. Kiernan, A. Lawrence, A.A. Mackenzie, C.N. Mason, A.D. McClements, W.A.M. McClements, A.A. Meredith, C.P.R. Mollett, L.A. Murray, R.A. Overton, F.R. Picken, G.C.W. Reynolds, S.A.W. Reynolds, K.S. Sahota (Leader), J.M. Seymour, R.J. Sloan, C.F. Smith, A.J. Stanton B.J. Thompson, W.L. Tomlinson, C.R. Turley, P.R. Watling and D.R.W. White.

#### **29. MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of Council Meeting held on 12 July, 2012, be confirmed and signed by the Mayor.

#### **30. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors R.K. Austin, D.G. Davies, J. Loveridge, J.C. Minor, H. Rhodes, R.G. Scammell, M.J. Smith and K.L. Tomlinson,

#### **31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor A.J. Stanton declared a pecuniary interest in agenda item 13, the motion on changes to Council Tax benefits.

#### **32. LEADER'S REPORT & ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- a) Children and staff of Holmer Lake Primary School – Presentation of Certificate for the 'I Stay Safe' – Chatterbox Project

The Leader asked Councillor P.R. Watling, Cabinet Member: Children, Young People & Families to present a certificate of merit to children and staff of Holmer Lake Primary school in recognition of the excellent work done on the 'I Stay Safe – Chatterbox' project. Councillor Watling told the meeting that the project had been created by children and was for children. He also added that:

- Pupils had written and recorded jingles for Radio Beacon, which were aired 67 times reaching an audience of 500,000
- Pupils had hosted the Chatterbox consultation which involved 5 other primary schools and trialled the Chatterbox
- Head teacher Sian Deane and her head of PSHE Tanya Mitchell had written the Chatterbox curriculum enrichment, a set of accompanying lesson plans.
- The Chatterbox Toolkit had been dispatched to every Primary School in the Borough during anti-bullying week.
- The school had presented their work to the LSCB and Ofsted

- The I Stay Safe Project had been recognised by the Children's Commissioner as best practice
- The project had been acclaimed in a book, Cyberbullying and E-Safety
- The school had been invited to the national Annual Anti-bullying Conference in London to present the Chatterbox

Head Teacher Sian Deane gave members a short account of the children's 'journey' and thanked councillors for their support.

b) Leader's Report

The Leader paid special tribute to Telford's Paralympic gold medallists Mickey Bushell and Danielle Brown as well as all those from the Borough who had taken part in the Olympic and Paralympic games. He had been particularly impressed with the golden post box near Mickey Bushell's family home in Arleston and the council's golden bus which had been created in tribute to the Borough's paralympic champions.

Members were told of the council's 'Automotive Excellence' project. The council had contacted a large number of businesses, highlighting Telford as a strategic location with a large supply of affordable land ready for development. In addition, recruitment was being undertaken for the appointment of a Commercial Enterprise Manager. The Leader congratulated the Borough's students on the best ever GCSE results, Lord Silkin and BRJ schools had done particularly well.

### **33. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

(a) Mayoral Engagements

The Mayor drew members' attention to two royal visits which were happening in the near future. HRH the Duke of Gloucester was due to open Lightmoor Village Centre on the following day, whilst HRH the Prince of Wales was due to visit Enginuity, Ironbridge in the following week.

### **34. CABINET DECISIONS MADE SINCE THE LAST MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

Members received the report on the Cabinet decisions made since the last meeting of the Council on 12 July, 2012.

Councillor I.T.W. Fletcher, referring to the Planning of School Places report, asked whether any progress had been made on planning for secondary school places in Priorslee. Councillor P.R. Watling, Cabinet Member: Children, Young People & Families replied that this would be moved forward as soon as possible and that he would confirm this information as soon as practicable.

## **35. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CABINET**

### **26 July 2012 Cabinet**

#### **i) Financial Monitoring 2012/13**

Councillor W.A.M. McClements, Cabinet Member: Resources & Service Delivery, presented the report of the Head of Finance, Audit & Information Governance which sought approval for the changes to the capital programme outlined in the report.

**RESOLVED - That the changes to the capital programme shown in section 1 of the report be approved.**

#### **ii) Council Medium Term Plan 2012/13-2014/15**

The Leader of the Council presented the report of the Managing Director which sought approval for the council's medium term plan 2012/13-2014/15. The plan identified the high level strategic focus of the council over the next 3 years which included the following:

- The Council's Vision, Priorities and Values
- A 'Co-operative Council working with the Community' embedding co-operative ways of working into all that we do, a new relationship with the community, employees and partners.
- Medium term financial strategy – how the Council's budget would be balanced over the next 3 years based on available information and setting out the capital strategy.
- 'Putting Customers First' – treating customers as we would wish to be treated and developing ways to ensure that 'every contact counts'.
- Being a 'Business supporting, Business winning Council' – working with businesses to secure and create jobs in the Borough; a challenge for all of the organisation and the council's partners.

**RESOLVED- That the council's medium term plan 2012/13-2014/15 be approved**

## **36. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM BOARDS & COMMITTEES**

### **23 August 2012 Boundary Review Committee**

#### **i) Further Electoral Review of the Borough**

Councillor R.J. Sloan, Chairman of Boundary Review Committee, presented the report of the Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection which sought approval for the Boundary Review Committee to make a formal submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) for a council size of 54 councillors. A review was due to commence in October 2012, the last review had been completed in 2002.

Councillor Sloan told the meeting that Boundary Review Committee had done a considerable amount of work on this matter. The committee had looked at models

of 40 and 50 members before making their recommendation. He thanked the Electoral Services Manager for work done on modelling different council sizes. At the third meeting information had been provided from a councillor workload survey that had been persuasive in the decision to propose the retention of 54 councillors. Councillor A.J. Eade, leader of the main opposition group, confirmed that his group would be making a separate submission based on a significant reduction in numbers of councillors and a return to the committee system.

A number of councillors spoke in support of the recommendations, some of the reasons cited in support of the recommendation were:

- Increased councillor workloads on top of already heavy caseloads
- Transfer of public health from NHS in April 2013
- Demands of Welfare reform agenda
- Growing population of the Borough
- Ensuring that councillors could effectively serve those that elected them

A number of councillors spoke against the recommendations, some of the reasons cited were:

- Similar sized councils had reduced numbers of councillors
- The current model of 54 councillors was 10 years old and not suitable for a further 10 years in the future.

Councillor Sloan closed the debate with his response. He told the meeting that the introduction of a committee structure to replace the current leader and cabinet model had not been discussed by Boundary Review Committee at any of the three meetings. The Borough was a diverse area with an urban/rural mix and with areas of deprivation. Retaining 54 councillors was not maintaining a 'status quo', there would need to be significant redrawing of boundaries. There was a cost for providing effective democracy for the Borough's electors.

**RESOLVED: -**

- a) That the recommendation of Boundary Review Committee for a preferred council size of 54 be approved**
- b) That the Boundary Review Committee make the Council's submission to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) for a Council size of 54 councillors before the end of September**

**4 September 2012 Council Constitution Committee**

- i) Transparency & Public Accountability

The Leader of the council presented the report of the Assistant Director: Law, Democracy & Public Protection which sought approval for a number of proposals which would serve to increase transparency and public accountability.

The proposals included:

- Publication of additional information on councillors who trade with the council

- Publication of Member attendance figures at meetings of the Council and of a list of councillor membership on Outside Bodies (commencing from start of 2012 Civic Year).
- Introduction of a 15 Minute Public Question session at Full Council Meetings
- Filming/Recording of Cabinet and Full Council meetings by members of the public
- Use of Social Media (Twitter, Blogs) by members of the public during meetings of the Council
- Reducing the level for Publication of expenditure by the Council to £100

Members were generally very supportive of the recommendations. An amendment was moved and seconded to add to the recommendations the publication of attendance information for councillors serving on outside bodies. Following a debate it was agreed that this proposal should be referred to Council Constitution Committee for further consideration.

**RESOLVED: –**

- Publication on the Council's website of information on Councillors who trade with the Council, information to be collected as part of the annual related party transactions data collection exercise**
- Publication on the Council's Website of Councillor attendance figures for appointed meetings of the Council and a list of councillors' appointed to serve on Outside Bodies**
- Introduction of a 15 minute Public Question session at Full Council Meetings**
- Permitting Filming and/or Recording of Cabinet and Full Council meetings by members of the public**
- Permitting use of Social Media by members of the public during all meetings**
- Voluntary publication of Council expenditure over £100 reduced from the current level of £500**

**37. TREASURY MANAGEMENT – AMENDMENT TO TREASURY STRATEGY**

Councillor W.A.M. McClements, Cabinet Member: Resources & Service Delivery, presented the report of the Head of Finance, Audit & Information Governance which requested approval for the amendment of the Treasury Strategy to use the council's appointed treasury advisers recommended counterparty list as one of its criteria when selecting investment counterparties.

**RESOLVED – That the amendment of the Treasury Strategy to use the council's appointed treasury advisers recommended counterparty list as one of its criteria when selecting investment counterparties be approved**

### **38. APPOINTMENT OF PERSON FOR STANDARDS**

Councillor R.C. Evans, Chairman of Standards Committee, presented the report of the Monitoring Officer that sought approval for the appointment of Mr. Michael Tebbutt to the role of Independent person. The Monitoring Officer had undertaken a recruitment process to find a suitable candidate to act as the authority's Independent person in relation to councillor code of conduct complaints. The role was set out in section 28 of the Localism Act 2011 and the appointment was with immediate effect and for an initial period of 2 and a half years. The report also sought approval for the appointment of Mr. Christopher Humphries as a reserve for Mr. Tebbutt with immediate effect and for an initial period of two and a half years.

#### **RESOLVED :-**

- a) That Mr. Michael Tebbutt be appointed to the role of Independent person, as set out in section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, for an initial period of 2 and a half years effective immediately
- b) That Mr Christopher Humphries be appointed to the role of Independent person, as set out in section 28 of the Localism Act 2011, in the capacity of a reserve for Mr. Tebbutt for an initial period of 2 and a half years effective immediately

### **39. MINUTES OF BOARDS AND COMMITTEES**

Council noted the resolved minutes of Boards and Committees:

Audit Committee	26 June
Boundary Review Committee	21 June & 19 July
Plans Board	11 July & 1 August
Scrutiny Management Board	21 June

### **40. QUESTIONS**

The following Questions were asked in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 10:

- a) Councillor N.A.M. England:

“Can the cabinet member for Children, Young People & Families report on the recent Ofsted report with particular reference to the appointment of a dedicated Director of Children's Services?”

Councillor P.R. Watling, Cabinet Member: Children, Young People & Families responded that the report showed that children in the Borough were safe but that there was more to be done to ensure the highest quality service. There were a number of positive comments in the report, the council's co-operative approach, partnership working and commitment to safeguarding had been commended.

Councillor Watling had worked in partnership with the Director of Children's Services to secure a £25k improvement grant From the Regional Children's Improvement Board.

Councillor England asked what the scenario might have been if, as suggested by the main opposition group, no appointment had been made to the position of Director of Children's services.

Prior to discussion of the following item Councillor A.J. Stanton left the room.

#### **41. NOTICES OF MOTION**

- (a) Councillor W.A.M. McClements, in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 11, moved the following Motion:

This Council believes that the Coalition Government's cuts to Council Tax Benefits and their overall Welfare Reform agenda are a very real threat to over 10,000 of Telford and Wrekin's most vulnerable residents and condemns the Coalition Government's lack of a strategy for job creation and its increasing demonisation of those claiming welfare, many of whom are working people on low wages.

Telford and Wrekin Council notes that:

1. The Council Tax Benefit changes proposed by the Government will lead to at least 10,700 claimants in Telford & Wrekin being worse off – our families that can least afford these cuts.
2. The Council will be faced with a cut equivalent to £3.1 million in the first year as the Governments funding proposals are based on a 10% reduction in the 2011/2012 level of funding, makes no allowance for inflation and assumes that the number of claimants are falling because of the improving economy. With the existing cuts to its budget of over £40 million Telford & Wrekin Council has little alternative other than to design and administer a local scheme to reduce the support available to claimants.
3. These proposals affect the Fire and Police Authorities' funding as well as the Council's.
4. These plans are not about localism, they are a move to force councils to pass further central government cuts on to their local residents. They also transfer the risk and uncertainty of rising claimant numbers onto councils, placing them in a perilous and unsustainable financial position.
5. These proposals will have a greater impact on the residents of Telford & Wrekin, The Midlands and The Northern Industrial Regions, which have lower wages and higher unemployment.
6. The administration costs of these proposals will be considerable and the debt levels significant for all Councils. Council Tax Benefits could have been included in the proposed Universal Benefit scheme eliminating most of the administration costs and all of the debt likely to be incurred by Councils.

This Council opposes cuts to Council Tax benefits and calls on the Coalition government to change its Welfare Reform plans and recognise the unequal impact its proposals will have on the Industrial Regions and the poorest in our community

However, if the Government carries on with its plans we call for the cuts to be included in the Universal Credit and that If the Government insists on introducing its present proposals we call for a delay in its implementation to concur with the introduction of Universal Credit in October 2013.

The motion was seconded by Councillor K.S. Sahota

Councillor McClements, proposing the motion, told the meeting that the local benefit scheme administered by the Borough council would be underfunded due to the government's funding proposals. The changes to Council Tax benefits were an attack on the 10,700 residents of the Borough who would suffer the effects of funding reductions. The current benefit scheme was fit for purpose and should be retained; the proposed scheme would have most effect on the vulnerable.

Councillor K.S. Sahota, seconding the motion, thought it ironic that tax cuts were being introduced for the wealthiest in society whilst the poorest would be asked to pay more and to lose benefit. The government should adjust policy and acknowledge that the proposals would be costly to administer. Councillor E.J. Carter noted that no one wanted cuts but that in the current economic climate it was not possible to continue borrowing. Councillor C.B.A. Elliott told the meeting that spending cuts were wrong; cuts to Police budgets were unacceptable.

A number of Members felt that the proposals were an attack on the poor and that more should be done to eliminate tax evasion and avoidance. Councillor W.L. Tomlinson, Leader of the Liberal Democrat/Independent opposition group, condemned the welfare cuts completely. However, he could not support increased borrowing by government. Councillor M. G. Ion felt that the cuts had been made for ideological reasons and were wholly disproportionate. Councillor A.J. Eade, Leader of the main opposition group, told the meeting that Council Tax benefit had doubled since the late 1990's. Councillor D.R.W. White thought that it was cowardly that councils were being given the task of cutting people's benefits by central government.

Closing the debate, Councillor McClements noted that more debt than ever had been created and that economic growth was required. The locally administered system would affect many of the Borough's residents and would be expensive to administer.

A recorded vote was requested and the votes were as follows:

*For (29): Councillors: FM Bould, EA Clare, S Davies, BH Duce, CBA Elliott, ARH England, NAM England, RC Evans, GM Green, KR Guy, MG Ion, AS Jhavar, AA Mackenzie, CN Mason, AD McClements, WAM McClements, LA Murray, RA Overton, FR Picken, GCW Reynolds, S Reynolds, KS Sahota, RJ Sloan, CF Smith, BJ Thompson, WL Tomlinson, CR Turley, PR Watling, DRW White.*

Against (14): *S Bentley, SP Burrell, EJ Carter, NA Dugmore, AJ Eade, ITW Fletcher, VA Fletcher, EJ Greenaway, MB Hosken, RT Kiernan, A Lawrence, AA Meredith, CRP Mollett, JM Seymour*

Absent: (3) *KT Blundell, TJ Hope and AJ Stanton.*

**RESOLVED** – that the motion be approved

The meeting ended at 8.46 pm

**Mayor:** .....

**Date:** .....