

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF COUNCIL

13th December 2016

At a meeting of Rugby Borough Council held on 13th December 2016.

PRESENT:

The Mayor (Councillor Mrs Bragg), Councillors Mrs A'Barrow, Allen, Mrs Avis, Birkett, Butlin, Brown, Cade, Mrs Crane, Cranham, Douglas, Miss Dumbleton, Ms Edwards, Ellis, Mrs Garcia, Gillias, Leigh Hunt, Miss Lawrence, Lewis, Mahoney, Mistry, Mrs Nash, Mrs New, Mrs O'Rourke, Pacey-Day, Mrs Parker, Poole, Ms Robbins, Mrs Roberts, Roberts, Roodhouse, Mrs Roodhouse, Mrs Simpson-Vince, Sandison, Shera, Srivastava, Stokes, Helen Taylor, Mrs Timms, Ms Watson-Merret and Williams.

37. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence from the meeting was received from Councillor Keeling.

38. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2016 were approved and signed by the Mayor subject to the 4 abstentions from the Conservative Group being recorded relating to the Liberal Democrat amendment with regard to the Local Plan – Publication Draft Consultation Update.

39. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Item 5(e) of Part 1 – Questions Pursuant to Standing Order 10 – Councillor Douglas (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of his employment).

Item 6(a)(2) of Part 1 – Service Level Agreement Grant Funding for Community Associations (2017/18 and 2018/19) and one-off community grants (2017/18) – Councillor Ms Edwards (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of being a member of Brownsover Community Association and Secretary of Newbold Community Partnership).

Item 6(a)(2) of Part 1 – Service Level Agreement Grant Funding for Community Associations (2017/18 and 2018/19) and one-off community grants (2017/18) – Councillor Srivastava by virtue of his involvement with the Benn Partnership.

Item 6(a)(2) of Part 1 – Service Level Agreement Grant Funding for Community Associations (2017/18 and 2018/19) and one-off community

grants (2017/18) – Councillor Ms Robbins (non-pecuniary interest as defined by the Council's Code of Conduct for Councillors by virtue of her being Vice-Chairman of the Brownsover Community Association.

40. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor invited all Members to purchase tickets for her Charity Ball on 20th January 2017 at the Benn Hall. Entertainment would include performances by members of RATT, one of her charities for her mayoral year.

As this was the last meeting of Council before Christmas, the Mayor invited all Members of the Council to join her in the Parlour after the meeting for drinks and refreshments.

41. QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO STANDING ORDER 10

(a) Councillor Ellis asked the following question of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stokes -

Whilst acknowledging that Warwickshire Districts/Boroughs have only 2 voting members at the LEP Board it should be noted that an open invitation has been afforded to each of the other Districts/Boroughs to attend Board meetings. Given that the LEP is a vehicle for the distribution of significant funds across Coventry and Warwickshire why is it that the Leader of this Council has never attended and doesn't his absence place Rugby at a disadvantage when it comes to the influence it can wield ?

Councillor Stokes replied as follows:-

An invitation was extended to each local authority to attend as an 'observer'. The fact that the LEP are currently discussing extending the full membership to all local authorities is clear demonstration that the engagement and communication is working. Furthermore, Rugby engages with the LEP through the Joint Committee Meetings, Coventry & Warwickshire Leaders Meetings, District Leaders Meetings and more recently, the West Midlands Combined Authority.

For the last two years when asking the LEP to justify their annual fee to Rugby Borough Council, it has been confirmed that investment in the borough has increased.

Councillor Ellis then commented that, in his enhanced Leader's role and as the representative of the Borough, it was remiss of Councillor Stokes to not attend any meetings of LEP. Councillor Ellis asked, with the large quantities of money at LEP how much was going through.

Councillor Stokes referred Councillor Ellis to the minutes of the LEP.

(b) Councillor Ellis asked the following question of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stokes -

Has the Leader received or attended any hospitality at Brandon Stadium?

Councillor Stokes replied as follows:-

As with all councillors, any hospitality that I may accept would be recorded in accordance with the Constitution and is a matter of public record.

Councillor Ellis then asked Councillor Stokes if he had received any hospitality from Brandon Stadium and if this had been recorded in the Council's hospitality register.

Councillor Stokes reiterated his original response.

(c) Councillor Ellis asked the following question of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stokes -

Are there yet any sponsors signed for the Rugby Hall of Fame?

Councillor Stokes replied as follows:-

After discussions with the LEP earlier this year, the LEP introduced Rugby Borough Council to an expert in the field and has extensive experience in sourcing sponsorship in the game of Rugby.

Working as part of the extended team, including World Rugby and council officers, there is a strong team engaged and as stated at the last Council meeting, when sponsors are agreed and signed, Council will be notified.

Councillor Ellis asked once again if there were any sponsors for the Rugby Hall of Fame. Councillor Stokes referred him to his original response.

(d) Councillor Roodhouse asked the following question of the Leader of the Council, Councillor Stokes -

Would the Leader agree that this Council is facing a challenging time and if so, would he also agree that we should seek to engage with the citizens of this Borough and conduct a "Participatory Budgeting Exercise" by the end of January?

Councillor Stokes replied as follows:-

"Rugby Borough Council is an efficient and effective local authority and I have already been reported in local media and stated during employee briefings that like all local authorities, Rugby must make sure we remain in a sound financial position for the years ahead.

Earlier this year I spoke with officers regarding the 'Direct Democracy' model used in some Nordic countries after experiencing this first hand and being very impressed. Unfortunately, this model only tends to be effective and seen as 'fair' in communities where the majority of people attend to have their say.

However, I'd fully support an on-line activity to further engage the residents of the borough in January 2017, agreed by all groups. However, knowing Cllr Roodhouse's and the Liberal Democrats strong views on doing anything outside of the Overview & Scrutiny process and their refusal to attend recent Cabinet Working Parties, I am not sure how we would achieve this in such a short timescale."

Councillor Roodhouse then asked Councillor Stokes if, as Leader of the Council, he would implement online engagement with residents with immediate effect.

Councillor Stokes stated that he was willing to meet with all Group Leaders to decide questions to be included in on-line activities, to be published in January 2017.

(e) Councillor Douglas asked the following question of the Communities & Homes Portfolio Holder Councillor Leigh Hunt -

Can the portfolio holder say how many homes in Rugby are empty and what is the Council doing to get them back into use?

Councillor Leigh Hunt replied as follows:-

Reason	Number
The property has been empty between 6 months and 2 years.	220
Furnished 2 nd homes (Declared)	135
Property empty for over 2 years	81
(Exemption code)In residential care	43
(exemption code) in probate/ probate granted	32
Uninhabitable	24
(exemption code) Repossessed property	1
Total	536

"To give context to the issue of empty properties, many of them are empty because:

- They are subject to probate issues
- People are in residential care and a decision has not been made about the future of the property
- People want to keep their property empty, maintain it and pay the additional council tax premium

Most of the empty properties are maintained and do not present a problem to the wider community, which restricts the council's powers to deal with them. If

they are problematic, then we work with Planning Enforcement to take improvement action.

In recent months we have changed our approach and are moving away from the mass mailings in favour of a more structured and targeted approach.

We are now also working closely with the Private Sector Accommodation Officer to identify opportunities for using empty properties as part of the council's Private-Sector Leasing Scheme. We recently carried out a targeted mailshot to owners to establish their interest and will review its success going forward.

We are also looking at properties subject to probate and have in the last few weeks managed to contact a couple of executors, which is a new approach for the council. On both occasions our contact was welcomed and they would have been interested in potentially selling the properties to us but we were too late off the mark as both had plans. The Regeneration Officer in the Communities and Homes Team is discussing this with Council Tax to see how we can identify properties going forward.

Work is also in progress to identify empty properties that we can potentially purchase with a view to letting them either through the HRA or private-rented portfolio.”

Councillor Douglas then asked if the Portfolio Holder considered that efforts should be focused on reducing the number of longer term empty properties. Councillor Hunt agreed with Councillor Douglas and invited him to help with this matter.

42. REPORT OF CABINET – 31st OCTOBER 2016

RESOLVED THAT - the report be confirmed and adopted.

43. REPORT OF CABINET – 28th NOVEMBER 2016

RESOLVED THAT - the report, together with the additional report relating to the Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme, be confirmed and adopted.

44. CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

45. COMMON SEAL

It was moved by the Mayor, seconded by the Deputy Mayor and

RESOLVED THAT - the Common Seal be affixed to the various orders, deeds and documents to be made or entered into for carrying into effect the several decisions, matters and things approved by the Council and more particularly set out in the committee's reports adopted at this meeting.

Cllr Roodhouse then moved and Cllr Sandison seconded that the private report of Cabinet of 31st October 2016 be considered in public. The Mayor put the proposal to the vote and declared it carried. Item 1 of Part 2 of the agenda was then discussed in public.

46. REPORT OF CABINET - 31st OCTOBER 2016

Cllr Roodhouse moved and Cllr Douglas seconded that consideration of this report be deferred until the next meeting of Council to enable a more detailed, up to date report to be prepared.

Following discussion the Mayor put the proposition to the vote and declared it lost.

Following further discussion the Mayor put the recommendation to the vote and declared it carried with 13 abstentions.

RESOLVED THAT - the report be confirmed and adopted.

47. MOTION TO EXCLUDE THE PUBLIC UNDER SECTION 100(A)(4) OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

RESOLVED THAT - under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of information as defined in paragraph 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.

48. PRIVATE REPORT OF OFFICERS

Council considered the private report of the Head of Corporate Resources and Chief Financial Officer concerning Voluntary Redundancy Requests 2016/17.

RESOLVED THAT - the report be confirmed and adopted.

MAYOR