

## **NUNEATON AND BEDWORTH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

### **COUNCIL**

**30<sup>th</sup> June 2021**

An Extraordinary meeting of Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council was held on Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Due to government guidance during the COVID-19 pandemic, this meeting was held in person in the Council Chamber, but there was a limit on how many could attend, so those not attending had their apologies entered into the minutes.

### **Present**

The Mayor (Councillor R. Tromans)

Councillors B. Beetham, D. Brown, S. Croft, L. Cvetkovic, K Evans, C. Golby, J. Kennaugh, A. Sargeant, H. Walmsley, C. Watkins, K. Wilson

**Apologies** were received from Councillors J. Clarke, T. Cooper, L. Downs, P. Elliott, J. Gutteridge, B. Hammersley, S. Harbison, L. Hocking, K. Kondakor, A. Llewellyn-Nash, S. Markham, B. Pandher, R. Baxter-Payne, N. Phillips, M. Rudkin, J. Sargeant, J. Sheppard, T. Sheppard, J. Singh, R. Smith, M. Tromans, M Walsh

### CL12 **Declarations of Interests**

**RESOLVED** that the Declarations of Interests for this meeting are as set out in the schedule attached to these minutes, with some additions further to those sent out with the agenda and now attached.

### CL13 **Announcements**

Councillor Golby offered a money plant to the Mayor as a small gift. She explained that she had picked this up from the Co-Op windowsill as it was closing down, when the plant was not in a good condition, and nursed it back to being a healthy plant and now offered it back to the Council as a symbolic gift. She noted that like this emergency budget, the plant was rescued and is now flourishing. The Mayor accepted the plant and will put it in the parlour.

Councillor Croft noted his thanks to Councillor Beetham for his support and efforts in achieving a large reduction in charges for the new live streaming equipment in the Chamber, and for his knowledge and expertise in this area in supporting Officers in this upgrade and saving the Council and taxpayers several thousand pounds.

Councillor Evans advised Chamber that Council submitted its Innovation and Transformative bid to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2021, as part of the Levelling Up Fund (LUF) of £14.95m, which if successful, would go towards the erection of a physical activities hub which would replace the Leisure Centre in Bedworth and help kick start re-generation in the town. Councillor Evans wanted to bring this to the Council's attention and that it had the support of Sport England and would be a modern and inclusive facility.

CL14 **Public Participation**

**Question 1 - Public**

**Mr Sam Margrave asked the following question of Councillor K. Wilson, Leader of the Council, read out by the Mayor:**

“Looking across the whole borough you can see uncut grass, unemptied bins, and rats taking over our parks and playgrounds. Is this Labours legacy and; what are your plans outlined in this budget to sort this mess out now the Council is under new management?”

**Councillor Wilson replied:**

I'd like to thank Mr. Margrave for his question. His concerns about the state of our grounds maintenance across our Borough are shared by many residents and, indeed, many members of this Council.

Firstly, I can confirm that this is Labour's legacy. The current grounds maintenance contract was drafted, tendered and signed under the previous Labour administration. Whilst there are many things I would like to do after just 6 weeks in control – and there are many we have already done – completely re-writing the contract is simply just not possible.

To answer Mr. Margrave's second point about additional funding for Glendale I can confirm that the answer is none.

And there shouldn't need to be any extra funding for Glendale.

Glendale tendered for a contract and provided a price for how much it would cost to maintain Nuneaton and Bedworth's open spaces and we expect them to stick to their contractual promises. Additional money shouldn't be needed to rectify this problem – it is Glendale performing their contract according to specification.

According to the terms of the contract, Glendale will not be paid until a job has been completed. It is in their interests to complete a job so that they get paid for it. And in this instance, this is a case where we do want to hand over the money. The contract is simple – no performance then no payment.

Unlike the previous administration, as Leader I have insisted on a zero-tolerance approach to the issue of default notices. Whilst none were issued last year, we have already issued 5. Unless Glendale starts to operate to spec then more will be issued.

Furthermore, I have called in Glendale's Regional Manager, today as it happens, to emphasise that this new council and its residents expect and demand better. What arose from my discussions with Glendale today alongside Councillor Gutteridge, as the Portfolio Holder, is that they accept they are not performing to specification. There have been issues around Covid and the secure bubbles that they need to maintain operational performance. However, we did emphasise that this is not good enough, that they have tendered for a contract and we expect better. Indeed, I

emphasised to him the zero tolerance policy that I had asked officers to pursue, and I have insisted on a recovery plan for the grounds maintenance performance. They have given me an assurance that they will be back up to spec by July 31<sup>st</sup> and if they can bring it forward any further, they will do so. They have experienced some recruitment and retention problems, and speaking from experience outside this council, I do know there is an issue with some people and agencies being able to supply the necessary staff. They have taken on additional staff (six additional staff I believe), although I was unfortunately informed today that one person was taken on as agency and didn't turn up, so there is an issue with recruitment and retention and this is an issue I have asked them to look at as a long term solution to the problem.

Cllr Gutteridge, as the new Portfolio Holder, has been having daily meetings with our officers to enforce the contract. Enforcement of the contract is what is needed here, not more money.

Finally, I would also make a plea to the residents of this Borough. I know that you are angry and frustrated with the situation. But there have been isolated incidents of residents taking out their frustrations on Glendale staff. Please, don't do this. It is not their fault. The decision lies with people far above their pay grade. I can assure residents that we are having those conversations with the relevant Glendale managers, and we are determined to get this contract back into compliance.

This is an issue that we take extremely seriously Mr Mayor and it is something we have inherited as a new administration, and we are pulling out all the stops to get this contract back into compliance, and whilst we left on amicable terms, I did leave it that if necessary, I will get them back in for further conversations, and if further default notices are required, we will do so. But also, residents and Councillors alike, have reported issues through the customer services provisions at the Council, and this has indeed enabled us to issue those five default notices already because we have the cold hard facts and statistics on which to base those default notices, so we are a Council that is operating, using the facts available to us and having that information has enabled us to issue those notices, and if necessary we will issue more; we don't want to, but if we have to, we stand ready.

## **Question 2 – Member**

**Councillor Elliott asked the following question of the Leader, Councillor K. Wilson, read out by Councillor Watkins in her absence:**

“Having sat in a council meeting last Thursday, along with the Leader of the Council, listening to how the council intends to promote behaviour change away from private vehicle use, I would like to know how reducing car parking charges will help to achieve this goal and what incentives are being introduced to encourage use of buses, cycling or walking into the town centres.

Cycling and walking are particularly hazardous at present due to high volumes of traffic and increasingly large private vehicles, not to mention many residents having to travel along routes where air pollution levels far exceed government maximum levels; for example, Heath End Road and Midland Road, which recently recorded maximum nitrogen dioxide levels of 49.95 and 56.48, respectively.

Many Conservative Councillors sit on both the Borough and the County Council so can directly influence County as well as Borough policies, so my question is, how is reducing car parking charges anything other than a clear indication that the Conservative Councillors are paying nothing but lip service to the Air Quality Action plan and, if indeed, they intend to improve the air quality for our residents as they claim, will they set out clearly how they intend to incentivise use of buses, cycling, or walking into the town centres, not least because those residents who do rely on private vehicles due to mobility and other issues, may well now struggle to locate a car parking space and, consequently feel less inclined to visit our struggling town centres than they do now."

**Councillor Wilson replied:**

I thank Cllr Elliott for her question and her newfound interest in the air quality of our Borough. Also, it is pleasing to note that she has finally recognised that our towns are struggling when it was her colleagues in the Labour administration that caused so much harm to them.

Given that she, along with her colleagues on the Labour benches opposite, voted through the Borough Plan that contained 14,000 extra houses for Nuneaton, Bedworth and Bulkington, I must admit that I am slightly perplexed at her putting her head above the parapet in this way.

Labour did far more harm to the air quality of Nuneaton and Bedworth than our car parking offer ever could. Vastly increasing the total number of houses to be built in our Borough, including over 6000 in Weddington and St Nicolas alone, will increase the car usage on our roads significantly more.

I am perplexed, also, because there was not one peep out of Cllr Elliott when the previous Labour administration did a car-parking offer, which we still currently have at the moment, albeit a far more inferior package than what the new Conservative administration is proposing tonight, and Councillor Croft will elucidate why it was an inferior package compared to ours later on this evening.

On the Conservative benches we are proud to be standing behind our market traders and businesses across our towns and supporting them through Covid and into the economic recovery. And that is exactly what the budget recommendation before us tonight will do. Yet again, this is a prime example of Labour failing to support our businesses and markets and why they deserved to be kicked out by the electorate in May.

The reality is that in just 7 weeks, this new Conservative administration has done far more for our town economies than Labour did in 50 years!

Councillor Walmsley moved that standing order 4.13.4 be suspended for the Leader, Councillor Wilson, Shadow Leader, Councillor Watkins, and Councillor Croft (as the relevant Portfolio Holder). Councillor Wilson seconded this proposal.

RESOLVED: That Council procedure Rule 4.13.4 be suspended for the speeches made by Councillors Croft; Watkins & Wilson.

CL15 **Notice of Motion – General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme**

In accordance with Procedure Rule Part 4A, paragraph 3.1 (iv) of the Council's Constitution, the Head of Paid Service requested the calling of an Extraordinary Meeting following a requisition from Councillors: K. Wilson, C. Golby, H. Walmsley, J. Gutteridge, B. Pandher, D. Brown, S. Croft and K. Evans to consider the following motion:

“In order to allow the Manifesto commitments of the new Conservative Administration to be actioned with the greatest possible urgency, an Extraordinary Council meeting is requested to be convened on 30 June 2021 to allow a reviewed General Fund Revenue Budget and Capital Programme to be considered by, and voted upon, by Council following the report to Cabinet on 23 June 2021.

We request that the Cabinet Agenda Item 10 papers together with any recommendation(s) from Cabinet made on 23 June 2021 be appended to this requisition when the council is summoned.”

After much discussion around the budget proposals, the following verbal amendments were proposed by Councillor Croft:

- a) The notice period will start from 10<sup>th</sup> July, meaning that the 3 hours for £1 will come into effect from Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> August 2021, as the 21 days' notice needs to be given for the temporary changes to the Traffic Order, and not from Friday 6<sup>th</sup> August as printed in the report.
- b) Thanks be publicly expressed and noted to the Finance Team and Craig Pugh for all their hard work and to Simone Hines and Craig Pugh and the Finance Team, Brent Davis for turning this emergency budget around in six weeks at a particularly busy time of the year with year end and audit procedures, when they are short staffed and noted, their hard work over the last 16 months when they were working in crisis management mode.

