

COUNCIL

Virtual Meeting held on Thursday, 1st October, 2020 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor Andy Meakin in the Chair;

Councillors John Baird, Christian Chapman, Ciaran Brown, Samantha Deakin, Andy Gascoyne, Dale Grounds, Arnie Hankin, Andrew Harding, David Hennigan, Tom Hollis, Trevor Locke, Rachel Madden, Sarah Madigan, David Martin, Lauren Mitchell, Keir Morrison, Warren Nuttall, Matthew Relf, Kevin Rostance, Phil Rostance, Dave Shaw, John Smallridge, Helen-Ann Smith, David Walters, Lee Waters, Caroline Wilkinson, Daniel Williamson, John Wilmott and Jason Zadrozny.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Chris Baron, Kier Barsby, Jim Blagden and Melanie Darrington.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Carol Cooper-Smith, Ruth Dennis, Theresa Hodgkinson, Peter Hudson, Mike Joy, Paul Parkinson and Andy Slate.

C.38 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

Councillors Lauren Mitchell and Dave Shaw both declared Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests in relation to Agenda Item 10, Motion 2. Their interests arose from the fact that they were both currently employed by Framework Housing Association.

C.39 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 9 July 2020, as now submitted, be received and approved.

C.40 Announcements from the Chairman, Leader, Members of the Cabinet and the Head of Paid Service

No announcements were made.

C.41 Questions from the Public

No questions were received from the public.

C.42 Petitions

No petitions were received for consideration.

C.43 Report on Urgent Key Decisions

The Leader of the Council advised as follows:-

“In accordance with Rule 17.2 of the Access to Information Procedure Rules it is necessary for me to inform the Council when an executive decision has been taken pursuant to Rule 16 (Special Urgency Provisions.)

I can confirm to the Council that three such decisions have been taken by me as a matter of urgency since the last Council meeting in July 2020:

Towns Fund Accelerated Projects – Cabinet decision on 21 July 2020;

Reopening of the Leisure Centres post Covid – delegated decision taken by the Director of Place and Communities on 11 August 2020;

Amendment to Contract Term for a Housing Project at Davies Avenue – Cabinet decision on 15 September 2020;

The decisions were key and two contained exempt information but the full 28 days’ notice could not be given due to the need to proceed with the transactions without delay.

The Rule 16 Notice and the non-exempt elements of the decisions have been duly published.”

C.44 Interim Review of Polling Places

Council was requested to consider proposals for revised polling places following an interim review dealing with urgent polling place issues as recommended by the Polling Places Review Working Group.

RESOLVED that

- a) approval be given for the following changes to Sutton in Ashfield polling places:
 - Brand Court to replace Stanton Hill Boys Brigade;
 - The Skegby Scout and Guide Headquarters to replace The Beeches;
- b) should a polling place be unavailable in the run up to an election, the Returning Officer be granted delegated authority to select an appropriate alternative with formal retrospective approval being sought from Council following the election should this be a permanent proposed change;
- c) it be noted that the approved changes will take effect on the 2 October 2020;

- d) the Polling Places Review Working Group will continue under its current terms of reference to undertake work on additional polling places identified as being at risk.

C.45 Recommendations from the Cabinet and the Council's Committees

In accordance with the Council Procedure Rule 2(ix), Council considered the following recommendations:-

Minute No. CA.14

Cabinet – 21 July 2020

Affordable Housing Development - Sutton in Ashfield

RESOLVED

that approval be given to use Housing Revenue Account reserves to fund site clearances and the development of circa 9 new Council Homes with the project being duly added to the Capital Programme.

Minute No. CA.16

Cabinet – 21 July 2020

Draft Out-turn 2019/20 Accounts

RESOLVED

that the carry-forward of the £10.4m underspend on the Capital Programme to 2020/21, due to slippage (delays to schemes) included within the Programme, as outlined at Section 3 of the Cabinet report, be approved.

Minute No. CA.26

Cabinet – 15 September 2020

Hucknall Infill Sites - Affordable Housing Development

RESOLVED

that approval be given to use Housing Revenue Account reserves to fund site clearances and the development of circa 15 new Council Homes on the four named sites, with the project being duly added to the Capital Programme.

Minute No. CA.27

Cabinet – 15 September 2020

2020/21 Forecast Outturn for General Fund, Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and Capital Programme as at July 2020

RESOLVED

that the amendments and the addition of new schemes to the Capital Programme 2020/21 to 2024/25 and the funding of the Capital Programme as set out in Section 5 and Appendix 2 of the Cabinet report, be approved.

(During consideration of the recommendations, Councillor Christian Chapman left the meeting at 7.00pm.)

C.46 Updates from Members of the Cabinet on their Portfolio Activity

The following Members gave updates in respect of their portfolio activity:

Councillor Daniel Williamson – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Communications, Governance and Cross Portfolio Support

- appreciation for the Scrutiny and Democratic Services Team who continued to facilitate meetings and support Members;
- the busy Scrutiny Work Programme and the recent work of the Covid-19 Response and Recovery Panel;
- acknowledgement of the excellent response rate to the 2020 Electoral Canvass and the commitment of the Elections Team;
- excellent cross-party working by the Polling Places Review Working Group;
- the continued efficient and business-like approach of the Legal Team;
- the unstinting effort from the Risk and Emergency Planning Team in supporting the Council and its employees through the pandemic.

Councillor Rachel Madden – Portfolio Holder for Finance

- acknowledgement that the Council's commercial investment income is still on track notwithstanding the challenges of the pandemic;
- Local Enterprise Funding (LEP) and Sports England funding being secured for the new leisure centre in Kirkby;
- the forthcoming award of the new contract for leisure centre provision across Ashfield and its potential for saving money;
- excellent work by the Performance Team to recently secure a refund from Virgin in relation to telephony services.

Councillor Matthew Relf – Portfolio Holder for Place, Planning and Regeneration

- a Future High Street Fund announcement in Autumn 2020 with the potential for £12.4 million investment in town centres;
- the Discover Ashfield Group working tirelessly on the feasibility study for the Towns Fund bid including a programme of projects with a focus on employment and education (to be submitted in January 2021);
- £1.5 million already received from the Towns Fund this year to spend on capital projects;
- development of project for a small indoor market in Kirkby to encourage start-up businesses;
- ongoing work to purchase properties on Low Street at Sutton to develop and enhance retail opportunities;
- information regarding the Discover Ashfield Ambassador Programme;
- the Planning Team continuing to hit targets notwithstanding the difficulties resulting from the Covid-19 outbreak;
- the new Regeneration Team are up and running and have received around 100 enquiries this last month from businesses with an interest in Ashfield;

- acknowledgement that work on the Local Plan has stalled due to recent changes in planning legislation;
- the continued optimism and commitment of staff within the directorate was welcomed.

Councillor David Martin – Portfolio Holder for Streets, Parks and Town Centres

- the Council's continued efforts to support local high street businesses through the pandemic both financially and with Covid safety measures;
- the offer of 2 hours free parking and access to the pay by phone app to stimulate the local economy in town centres;
- submission of entry for the green flag awards for six parks with celebratory events on 15 October 2020 (Ada Lovelace House in Kirkby to be lit green to support the achievements);
- progress with upgrades to park facilities across the District;
- acknowledgment of the staff working within the Cemeteries Team for adapting swiftly to changing circumstances as a result of the outbreak;
- Environmental Charter to be consulted upon with a full roll out of the document in early 2021;
- Plans for scheduling the Spring Clean, Bag It and Skip into Summer campaigns for 2021.

Councillor Helen-Ann Smith – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Community Safety

- high volume of calls being experienced by the Anti-Social Behaviour Team and triage officers, with 1014 new case reports since August;
- enforcement action continues at pace;
- Community Protection Officers (CPOs) continuing to work hard dealing with unauthorised encampments, town patrols and responding to public open space incidences;
- the recent recruitment of 3 new CPOs and a Team Leader who were due to commence imminently following completion of standard police vetting procedures.

Councillor Samantha Deakin – Portfolio Holder for Customer Services and IT

- introduction of the Council's new improved website and an invitation to take a look at its enhanced and easily accessed features;
- confirmation that the Digital Transformation programme was continuing with multiple projects for improvement.

Councillor John Wilmott – Portfolio Holder for Regulatory Services

- the Environmental Health Team had assisted and provided advice to over 2,000 businesses during the Covid-19 outbreak;
- over 60 new registrations had been processed for food premises which had been remarkable considering the current climate;

- strict Covid secure measures are being implemented by food outlets including wearing masks, enhance cleaning routines and keeping customer details for the minimum 21 days;
- the Licensing Team had continued to administer rising numbers of licensing applications over the past few months;
- the exciting arrival of taxi firm Ola to the District, locating a new central hub at the Sherwood Business Park to operate an extensive taxi service for the East Midlands area.

Councillor Tom Hollis – Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Housing (also including update for the Health and Leisure portfolio)

- recent award of major new contract for the installation of new heating systems in Council-owned properties at a cost of around £25 million;
- the Council's leisure centres continuing to operate in a Covid-secure manner and feedback from customers had been very positive;
- progress regarding the new changing village at Hucknall leisure centre;
- design works for the new leisure centre at Kirkby are now completed and contractors should be commencing on site with hoardings etc. in the near future;
- Remembrance services and parades are all set to go ahead in November 2020 in accordance with social distancing safety measures.

Councillor Jason Zadrozny – Leader of the Council

- continued appreciation for all the Cabinet Members and their unstinting commitment to the District of Ashfield throughout the pandemic and lockdown restrictions;
- special thanks to the Corporate Communications Team for keeping Ashfield and its residents abreast of all issues throughout the pandemic and for managing to produce the quarterly publication of 'Ashfield Matters' during the summer.

C.47 Notice of Motion 1

The Council received a notice of motion moved by Councillor David Martin and seconded by Councillor Lee Waters as follows:-

“This Council welcomes the fact that Ashfield District Council has one of the most robust, vigorous Codes of Conduct governing Councillors in the country. It is our strong belief that any official elected to public office should be bound by a strict set of rules to ensure the public have confidence in their councillors ability to best represent the interests of all residents.

This Council further notes that this Council's Standards and Personnel Appeals Committee led our response to a consultation by the Local Government Association. This consultation was to develop a uniform Code of Conduct for every local authority in the country. Part of this Council's submission included the lack of penalties for those who break the code and the fact that social networking wasn't included in any Code of Conduct.

This Council notes that Councillors work to far higher standards than Members of Parliament.

This Council believes that the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament needs modernising and take into account the use of social media where the messages transmitted must be truthful. We further believe that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards the ability to apply sanctions.

We call for the bullying of officers, members of local authorities and the public to be taken seriously with the ability of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to apply sanctions.

All options for sanctions available for breaches of the Code of Conduct must include apology, censor and a period of disqualification. This includes all elected politicians including Parish and Town Councillors, District, Borough, and County Councillors and Members of Parliament.

That this Council writes to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards asking that a full review of the MP's Code of Conduct is undertaken, to bring into force a code that is at least equally as rigorous as a Councillor's Code of Conduct which will hold MPs to account for their behaviour both in Parliament and outside."

During consideration of the motion, an amendment was moved by Councillor Lauren Mitchell, seconded by Councillor Keir Morrison, to remove the first three paragraphs of the motion to re-read as follows:-

"This Council believes that the Code of Conduct for Members of Parliament needs modernising and take into account the use of social media where the messages transmitted must be truthful. We further believe that the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards the ability to apply sanctions.

We call for the bullying of officers, members of local authorities and the public to be taken seriously with the ability of the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to apply sanctions.

All options for sanctions available for breaches of the Code of Conduct must include apology, censor and a period of disqualification. This includes all elected politicians including Parish and Town Councillors, District, Borough, and County Councillors and Members of Parliament.

That this Council writes to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards asking that a full review of the MP's Code of Conduct is undertaken, to bring into force a code that is at least equally as rigorous as a Councillor's Code of Conduct which will hold MPs to account for their behaviour both in Parliament and outside."

Having been debated and put to the vote, the amendment to the motion duly fell.

The original motion was then put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

that the Council writes to the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and asks that a full review of the MP's Code of Conduct is undertaken, to bring into force a Code that is at least equally as rigorous as a Councillor's Code of Conduct which will hold MPs to account for their behaviour both in Parliament and outside.

(At this point in the proceedings and in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 30, it was moved by Councillor Jason Zadrozny and seconded by Councillor Helen-Ann Smith that Procedure Rules 10 (Duration of Meeting) and 23 (Conclusion of Proceedings) be suspended, for the duration of the meeting, to enable all matters on the agenda to be satisfactorily concluded. Having been put to the vote, the Council agreed with this course of action.)

C.48 Notice of Motion 2

The Council received a notice of motion moved by Councillor Tom Hollis and seconded by Councillor John Wilmott as follows:-

“Throughout the height of the pandemic Ashfield District Council, both members and officers worked day and night to help the homeless of this district.

This included offers of accommodation to every rough sleeper and those threatened with rough sleeping. Due to the Council's close working with Framework's street outreach initiative more people presented themselves to the authority therefore, this was a greatly elevated number. Councillors and officers even went that extra mile to ensure the properties were furnished and then delivered meals in order to assist those in need.

This is in complete contrast to the actions of the Conservative MPs who represent wards of Ashfield. Both MPs in January of this year voted in Parliament against restoring funding for local housing allowances and £100M a year for emergency accommodation.

Ashfield Independents put forward the motion to ask this council to write to both MPs, Lee Anderson and Mark Spencer asking them to work with this Authority to positively improve the quality of life for the homeless and to prevent loss of life in our community of Ashfield. Further, to use their position within Government to bring the national homeless strategy more in line with the experiences suffered by rough sleepers using Ashfield as an example.”

(Councillors Lauren Mitchell and Dave Shaw had both previously declared Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests in relation to this Notice of Motion. Their interests were such that they remained in the meeting and took part in the discussion and voting thereon.)

Having been fully considered, the motion was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

that the Council agrees to write to both MPs, Lee Anderson and Mark Spencer, asking them to work with the Authority to positively improve the

quality of life for the homeless and to prevent loss of life in the community of Ashfield and further, to use their position within Government to bring the national homeless strategy more in line with the experiences suffered by rough sleepers using Ashfield as an example.

C.49 Notice of Motion 3

The Council received a notice of motion moved by Councillor Jason Zadrozny and seconded by Councillor Dale Grounds as follows:-

“This Council notes the positive difference that Ashfield District Council made to so many lives during the COVID-19 Lockdown. We are incredibly proud of the efforts of all staff and volunteers of this authority.

This includes being the only Council in Nottinghamshire to have maintained a full waste collection service. In fact, this Council offered an enhanced service with the ‘Bag It’ and ‘Skip into Summer’ campaigns – the only Council in the country to have done this.

This Council also paid out nearly £20million in business grants in quick time, we answered over 40,000 enquiries from residents, dealing with tens of thousands of problems. We ensured that our Housing Tenants continued to receive an excellent service with all emergency checks done and the vast majority of housing repairs done. Whilst many, bigger Councils went into lockdown. Ashfield District Council went into overdrive.

This Council would like to place on record its thanks to each and every member of staff in the Ashfield District Council family. We note that in uncertain many of our staff put their lives at risk to continue to provide the services that residents desperately needed.

Never before has the importance of local Councils like Ashfield been demonstrated than during the current Coronavirus Pandemic. They worked alongside other key organisations to ensure that the most vulnerable received continued service. This Council welcomes the fact that preparatory work has already been started by the COVID-19 Response and Recovery Scrutiny Panel for a permanent memorial to all key workers.

This Council is bitterly disappointed that Nottinghamshire County Council have now started the process of scrapping Councils like Ashfield District Council. Our brave workers are being rewarded by the Conservatives by being told their jobs are under threat. This Council is hugely concerned about the lack of engagement from the County Council. They only engaged with Chief Executives of the seven authorities in the County at the last minute.

This Council notes that the Leaders of all 7 Boroughs and Districts in Nottinghamshire are against these proposals. Now is not the time for a massive reorganisation of local councils. Mass reorganisation at this time risks scarce resources being diverted away from the Covid recovery and other vital public services.

We therefore call for the Chief Executive and Leader of Ashfield District Council to write to:

- *The Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire County Council*
- *The Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council*
- *Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government*

To express that this Council is firmly against any proposals to scrap Ashfield District Council and the six other Boroughs and Districts in Nottinghamshire.”

Having been fully considered, the motion was put to the vote and it was

RESOLVED

that the Chief Executive and Leader of Ashfield District Council write to:

- the Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire Council
- the Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council
- Robert Jenrick, Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government,

to express that the Council is firmly against any proposals to scrap Ashfield District Council and the six other Boroughs and Districts in Nottinghamshire.

C.50 Questions received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13, the following question was asked by Councillor Dave Shaw:-

“Would the Leader please clarify the decision to extend the 2 hour parking scheme, how the decision was taken, for what reason and the benefits already achieved.”

The Leader of the Council, Councillor Jason Zadrozny, responded and advised that the Ashfield Independents had been making reductions to car parking charges since Christmas 2018 when 2-hour free parking was first introduced to 10% of parking spaces within the Council’s town centre car parks, over the festive season.

A decision was made following the COVID-19 outbreak in March 2020 to allow free 2-hour parking for 100% of car parking spaces within the Council’s town centre car parks, indefinitely, to endeavour to kick-start the economy and assist local businesses following the lockdown. Feedback from the business sector had been positive and many local businesses were thankful for the introduction of the initiative. Piggins Croft car park in Hucknall was also due to be completely resurfaced in the near future as part of a programme of improvements.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13.5, Councillor Shaw was invited to ask a supplementary question as follows:

“Should local government reorganisation become a reality, would free car parking charges continue within Ashfield?”

The Leader responded by commenting that should unitary status be established in Nottinghamshire, free parking would no doubt be abolished and prices would rise in line with city charging rates.

C.51 Questions received in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 13.2, in relation to Cabinet and Committee Meeting Minutes published since the last ordinary meeting of the Council

There were no questions submitted by Members.

The meeting closed at 9.24 pm

Chairman.