

City of Stoke-on-Trent

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Minutes of a meeting of the City Council held on Thursday, 18 October 2012 at the Civic Centre, Glebe Street, Stoke-on-Trent.

In Attendance:

THE LORD MAYOR Councillor Terry Crowe

Councillor Sheila Pitt (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Peter Hayward
Councillor Bagh Ali	Councillor Shazad Hussain
Councillor Muhammad Aumir	Councillor Gurmeet Singh Kallar
Councillor Kath Banks	Councillor Majid Khan
Councillor Jackie Barnes	Councillor Adrian Knapper
Councillor Paul Breeze	Councillor Andy Lilley
Councillor Jack Brereton	Councillor Mark Meredith
Councillor Janine Bridges	Councillor Shaun Pender
Councillor Abi Brown	Councillor Mohammed Pervez
Councillor Karen Clarke	Councillor Andy Platt
Councillor Randolph Conteh	Councillor Tom Reynolds
Councillor David Conway	Councillor Ruth Rosenau
Councillor Neil Day	Councillor Paul Shotton
Councillor Alan Dutton	Councillor Duncan Walker
Councillor Terence Follows	Councillor Lee Wanger
Councillor Matthew Fry	Councillor Glenys Ward
Councillor Joy Garner	Councillor Alastair Watson
Councillor Martin Garner	Councillor Amjid Wazir
Councillor Olwen Hamer	Councillor Debbie Wheeldon
Councillor Gwen Hassall	

Apologies submitted

Councillor Debra Gratton	Councillor Alison Wedgwood
Councillor Ann James	

77 MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING OF THE CITY COUNCIL HELD ON 6/9/12

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the previous City Council meeting held on 6 September 2012, be approved and adopted as a true and correct record.

78 TO WELCOME VISITORS (IF ANY)

The Lord Mayor welcomed members of the public and representatives of organisations to the Council meeting.

79 TO RECEIVE OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

The Lord Mayor reported that there were no official announcements to be brought before the Council.

80 TO TRANSACT BUSINESS OF A NON-CONTENTIOUS AND/OR URGENT NATURE SPECIALLY BROUGHT FORWARD BY THE LORD MAYOR OR CHAIRMAN

(a) Financial Update

The Leader of the Council reported on the extent of the future financial challenge facing Stoke-on-Trent, which he warned would mean that the City Council was likely to have to make £50million in savings in the next two years. He explained that it would be necessary to look at what services the City Council could afford to provide and he forewarned Members that some very tough decisions were likely to have to be made.

In his speech, the Leader made reference to the Government's proposals in relation to reducing the Early Intervention Grant (EIG), which was used to run children's centres, and it's expectation that the City Council would provide free education to some two thousand disadvantaged two year olds in the most deprived areas of the City. He also highlighted the potential reduction in income that could result from the changes to the business rates arrangements and the possible cut to the new homes bonus, and he commented on the implications for Stoke-on-Trent of the changes being made to benefits, which he feared would result in an unfair burden on the low paid in the City.

The positive steps that had been taken by the City Council, since the launch of the Mandate for Change in 2011, were outlined and the Leader stressed the importance of continuing with that commitment, because without it extra private sector investment would not follow and the City would never reach its potential. He advised Members of work being undertaken by

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officers to identify areas where cuts could be found and he reported that he had already written to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Eric Pickles MP), asking him to restore, at the very least, the EIG. He also confirmed his intention to lobby the Government for an improved settlement grant.

The Leaders of the other two political Groups on the Council, Councillor Conway and Councillor Brown, both responded on behalf of their Members. In so doing they made reference to the City Council's previous and existing commitments and the financial consequences associated.

(b) Date of Next Meeting

The Lord Mayor noted that the date of next meeting of the City Council had been moved from Thursday 6 December 2012 to Thursday 20 December 2012 at 5.30pm.

81 DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members disclosed interests, as indicated, in accordance with the provisions of the City Council's Constitution on the issues listed below:

Name	Item	Interest	Nature
Lord Mayor, Councillors Banks, Bridges, J.Garner, M. Garner, Hassall, Kallar, Lilley, Walker, Wheeldon and Wilcox.	Para. 82	Personal	Member of a Community Hall Association.
Councillor Hayward	Para. 82	Personal	Occasionally carried out work for Members of Smallthorne Community Hall
Councillors Brereton and Lilley	Para. 82	Personal	Signatory to the Petition

82 REPORT OF PETITIONS RECEIVED

The City Council received details of a petition against the withdrawal of subsidies for Community Halls, which had been received since the last full City Council meeting.

The Lead Petitioner, Neil Hawkins, addressed the City Council on behalf of the 3,122 signatories to the petition.

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Councillor Conteh moved and Councillor Conway seconded:- *'That the petition against the withdrawal of subsidies for Community Halls be referred to the City Renewal Overview and Scrutiny Committee for further consideration.'*

Following a debate on the motion, Councillor Conteh moved that a recorded vote be taken and this was supported by more than 18 members present and voting at the meeting.

On being put to the vote, the outcome was as follows:-

For the motion:- Councillors Barnes, Breeze, Brereton, Brown, Conteh, Follows, Fry, Conway, Haywood, Wanger and Ward.

Against the motion:- Councillors Ali, Aumir, Banks, Bridges, Clarke, Crowe, Day, Dutton, J. Garner, M. Garner, Hamer, Hassall, Hussain, Kallar, Khan, Knapper, Lilley, Meredith, Pender, Pervez, Pitt, Platt, Reynolds, Rosenau, Shotton, Walker, Watson, Wazir, Wheeldon and Wilcox.

The motion did not therefore receive the support of the Council.

Councillor Hassall then moved and Councillor Reynolds seconded:- *'That the report be noted.'*

On being put to the vote it was:-

RESOLVED – That the minutes be noted.

83 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The City Council received details of seven public questions submitted under Council Procedure Rule 8 and the respective responses provided by the Leader of the Council and Cabinet Members, as set out below:-

Question 1: Submitted by Angela Maxfield of Bradeley, Stoke-on-Trent,

- Who decides what criteria is set for the allocation of Reception places?
- Why is the criteria set different for Nursery than Reception?
- The measuring system Capita One used for the allocation of class admissions, is it calibrated and validated every year?
- If so, where is the calibration certificate and can parents have access to it?

Response provided by the Cabinet Member for Education (Councillor Dutton):-

All schools must have published admission arrangements which explain how children will be admitted and the criteria that will be applied. The arrangements are determined by the Admissions Authority, which for Community and Voluntary Controlled schools is the city council, other schools have their own admissions authority. The Department for Education sets out what the admission arrangements must include in the Schools Admissions Code

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There is no requirement for nursery and reception admission arrangements to be exactly the same, the statutory requirements do not apply to the nursery admissions. However, efforts have been made by the city council in recent years to bring the two policies closer together; for example by recognising catchments for nursery places from September 2013 to encourage more local applicants to secure the places.

The measuring system used by the city council through the Capita One system is used by many authorities and its routefinder has been found to be suitably accurate and reliable to provide the necessary consistency for such measurements. The system is subject to regular quality checks via the Capita user networks.

The routefinder system has not generated accuracy concerns in terms of its suitability for this admissions function and so such certification has not been necessary.

Question 2: Submitted by Ian Norris of Tunstall, Stoke-on-Trent, addressed to the Cabinet Member for Green Enterprises and Clean City (Councillor Platt):-

On 10th February 2010 Cabinet Members agreed to award of a Contract to Vital Earth Derby Ltd from 1st April 2010 to 31 March 2020 with a 3 year break clause. It was the Cabinets aim to provide an In-Vessel composting facility within the City following the feasibility report by Ancer Spa published March 2010, in time to meet the break clause.

What work has taken place since February 2010?

What reports have Councillors requested/received on the progress to meet the break clause?

Does the Council Still intend to use the break clause, or has it been agreed to use Vital Earth until 2020? When and who agreed any decision?

If the Council does intend to use the Break Clause, what alternative is in place?

Response provided by the Cabinet Member for Green Enterprises and Clean City (Councillor Platt):-

The City Council has established a task and finish group to review Options for Energy from Waste which includes but is not limited to the treatment of the City's Organic Waste. The report is currently in 'draft' form.

In June 2012, a decision was made by officers to vary the contract in consultation with the Cabinet, under delegated authority.

The Authority has agreed within the scope of variations, to vary the Break Date. A revised break date of 1st November 2014 including a rolling break at 6 monthly intervals thereafter has been approved.

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The Deed of Variation now enables the City Council to secure alternative treatment arrangements within the conurbation. The procurement of alternative arrangements is subject to a future cabinet report.

Question 3: Submitted by Mike Barnes of Dresden, Stoke-on-Trent, addressed to the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Resources (Councillor Hamer):-

In 2011, at the time the country was suffering through riots and looting, Stoke-on-Trent City Council's internal audit team produced a report regarding Business Continuity Management (BCM) - the council's plans to function during times of incident or emergency.

The report findings included "unsound", "failing in its statutory duty to ensure an appropriate level of preparedness" and "the City Council is no longer prepared to be able to continue to deliver all of its critical services in the event of an incident".

Were any elected members made aware of the failure in its statutory function or involved in any actions to improve the councils policy? If so, who, when, why and what? And what democratically accountable processes cover the BCMs? Who made the decision not to report the failure to all elected members?

Response provided by the Cabinet Member for Transformation and Resources (Councillor Hamer):-

The work of Internal Audit is reported on a quarterly basis to the Audit Committee. Whilst these reports generally provide the information in a summary format they also highlight those areas which have been assigned a negative opinion. Individual reports are the responsibility of the service manager who may share the outcome of the audit with the relevant portfolio holder. The findings regarding Business Continuity Management (BCM) were reported to the November 2011 Audit Committee Meeting and are referred to in detail on page 44 of the Report pack; the Cabinet member for Transformation was made aware of the report at the time. The agenda and reports are available publically 5 working days before the Committee meets. The follow up audit recognised the improvements that had been made and assigned the area a Good opinion. This was reported in the Annual report to Audit Committee in July this year.

Business Continuity Management arrangements are a regular agenda item of the Civil Contingencies Board. The Board, which meets on a quarterly basis, includes Directors, senior officers and elected members. Minutes of the Board are agreed at the next scheduled meeting and are circulated to all Board Members. The Terms of Reference of the Board recognise Business Continuity Management as a Statutory Duty of Local Authorities. Officers responsible for implementing the recommendations arising from internal audit reports work closely with Board members to address the weaknesses and recommendations within the report action plan.

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Under the Civil Contingency Act 2004 and as a Category One responder the City Council works with partners and the Civil Contingencies Unit as part of the Staffordshire Resilience Forum and Business Continuity Plans are tested on an annual basis.

Information regarding the outcome of the audit has been reported in line with the Audit Committee's terms of reference, we are continuing to look at ways of providing more information regarding the results of Internal Audit's work to members in a concise and informative format. Several options are currently under review to utilise the most appropriate means.

(In a supplementary question, Mr Barnes made reference to the circumstances in which access was gained to a 2011 report which indicated that the emergency plans were unlawful and he asked the Cabinet Member who, in her view, was misleading the public – the Deputy Leader of the Council or the Audit Manager. In response the Cabinet Member confirmed that she was not aware of anyone misleading the public and she confirmed that improvements had been made and recommendations had been implemented. The Cabinet Member commented that the City Council had successfully hosted a multi-agency Civil Contingencies Unit at the Civic Centre to monitor the Olympic Torch event and the Tour of Britain. She concluded by confirming that all Civic Contingency Plans had been updated and would be audited in the next twelve months.)

Question 4: Submitted by Eve Johnson of Dresden, Stoke-on-Trent, addressed to the Leader (Councillor Pervez):-

Since the City Council entered into a contract with Vanguard - using "lean systems thinking" and Decats, how many City Council or HRA staff have been seconded in relation to the exercise in each financial year.

Please included the estimated total days of secondment and an estimated cost to each relevant account.

Response provided by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Pervez):-

The City Council have not entered into a contract with Vanguard and DECATS. DECATS was a separate exercise undertaken with PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to provide a strategic diagnostic piece of work on Delivering Efficient Corporate and Transactional Services.

Therefore, no staff have been seconded in relation to an exercise involving both companies. Where staff are redesigning services they have remained in their current roles whilst adapting new ways of working which the whole service will use.

Question 5: Submitted by Eve Johnson of Dresden, Stoke-on-Trent, addressed to the Leader (Councillor Pervez):-

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In the last five years how much has Stoke-on-Trent City Council or the HRA, written off each year. Please include this financial year to date.

Response provided by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Pervez):-

From financial year 1993/94 to 31 March 2012 the City Council had raised £1,280,000,000 of council tax debt. Our cumulative collection rate continues to be 98%. In respect of NNDR £1,150,000,000 had been raised with a collection rate of 98%. From 2001/02 to 31 March 2012 £569,000,000 of housing rent debt was raised with a 99% collection rate.

The City Council has historically not formally written-off irrecoverable debt on a regular basis, although provision has been made in the accounts on a prudent and appropriate basis to cover the cost of bad and doubtful debt. The revised Corporate Debt Recovery Policy will ensure that in future all potential write offs are considered more frequently.

During the last five years there has been no formal write off of any debt greater than £25,000 by Elected Members.

In accordance with the City Council's financial regulations approved delegations and agreed limits, the Section 151 Officer has written off individual debts under £25k during the past 5 years. The table below summarises the value of debt written off for each year (NB General Fund includes council tax, NNDR and sundry debt).

Year	General Fund	HRA	Total
	£'000	£'000	£'000
2007/08	1,112	-	1,112
2008/09	54	-	54
2009/10	4,793	218	5,011
2010/11	1,397	174	1,571
2011/12	3,954	273	4,227

In the interests of greater transparency, the Section 151 Officer presented a report to Cabinet on 27 September 2012 which outlined the level of irrecoverable debt under £25,000 which would be written off under delegation in 2012/13. These amounts were as follows:

- £4.526m relating to the General Fund
- £0.632m relating to the Housing Revenue Account

For the first time Cabinet also formally approved the write off of debts over £25,000 against the relevant bad debt provision. These amounted to £2.350m and were all related to the General Fund.

Question 6: Submitted by Gabrielle Hoban of Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent, addressed to the Leader (Councillor Pervez):-

What is the point of the public raising supplementary questions in full council meetings when responses are not made in public?

Response provided by the Leader of the Council (Councillor Pervez):-

Our 'Your Question Time' facility has always made provision for individuals to ask a supplementary question which directly relates to a question that they have submitted, or a response received, in accordance with Rule 8 of our Council Procedure Rules.

Questioners are not obliged to ask a supplementary question. Their purpose should be to explain any points in the initial reply of a Cabinet Member, or to seek further information that can be provided in response to the original question. I consider this to be a valuable feature of the 'Your Question Time' process, as it provides a further opportunity to ensure that communication with us is meaningful.

In the majority of cases supplementary questions are directly answered by the Cabinet Members to whom the question has been put. However, on occasions supplementary questions are used to introduce new material, or they require a detailed technical response, and in these circumstances it is often more appropriate for the Cabinet Member to provide a written response after the meeting rather than unduly delay proceedings in what is a time limited slot at the Council meeting.

(In a supplementary question Ms Hoban asked why, when the Leader had said it was sometimes more appropriate to provide a written response to supplementary questions, was still awaiting responses from two Cabinet Members. The Leader of the Council confirmed that he considered that unacceptable and asked Ms Hoban to forward the details to him so that he could make sure that responses were provided.)

Question 7: Submitted by Mike Barnes of Dresden, Stoke-on-Trent, addressed to the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Inward Investment, Culture, Sport and Leisure (Councillor Meredith):-

Last year, as reported in the Sentinel, Friday, December 23, 2011, whilst closing two other swimming pools the City Council announced £500,000 of taxpayer money and another potential £500,000 from the private sector or grants to improve the swimming facilities at the previously condemned Dimensions Leisure Centre.

Since that time no other announcements have been made on the progress of this publicly announced investment.

What progress has been made with the improvements and how much of the £500,000 has been invest so far?

Response provided by the Cabinet Member for Economic Development, Inward Investment, Culture, Sport and Leisure (Councillor Meredith):-

In 2010/11 the Council identified that it would make a future commitment in budget year 2014/15 of £500,000 towards the development of a new 25m swimming pool at Dimensions Leisure Centre. It is currently estimated that the development would cost in the region of £4million. An opportunity will potentially arise in the next 12 months to secure up to a maximum of £1m from the Sport England Lottery Iconic Fund, however, this will not be sufficient to deliver the scheme and it is important to note that there will also be a high level of interest nationally in bidding for this funding. Discussions are also underway with the Amateur Swimming Association to establish the level of support for this scheme however, it is unlikely that the ASA will be able to provide a large funding investment for the development. On this basis, clearly a large funding gap still exists. In light of these challenges a contingency plan is also being developed through the Councils invest to save process. This would see a range of additional facilities created at Dimensions which would greatly improve the facilities long term sustainability whilst enhancing the opportunity to increase participation levels at the site. It would also require a reduced level of investment and on-going revenue liabilities compared to the provision of a new pool and is thus potentially more deliverable given the current financial climate.

It should be further noted that in September 2011 the Council took over the operation of the 25m pool at New Horizons Sport and Leisure Centre, at that time the facility was not utilised to its full potential and work has been underway since to enhance the centres programme of use. This process will ensure that the centre can effectively serve as a key hub for the provision of swimming and other aquatic sports in the north of the city. Whilst in the long term a new 25m pool at Dimensions remains a desirable development, this strategy will help to ensure that residents and visitors to the north of the city are able to access a traditional swimming pool along with a full range of services and activities.

(In a supplementary question, Mr Barnes asked if Dimensions Leisure Centre was on the asset review list. The Cabinet Member explained that he was unable to answer that question at the meeting.)

84 APPOINTMENT OF REPRESENTATIVES TO SERVE ON SCHOOL GOVERNING BODIES IN THE CITY OF STOKE-ON-TRENT

On the motion of Councillor J. Garner, seconded by Councillor Hamer, it was:-

RESOLVED – That the following be appointed as City Council representatives to serve on the governing bodies of the schools indicated:-

SCHOOL	NAME
Burnwood Nursery	Mr N Dawson, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent.
Glebe Primary	Mrs T Healey, Fenton, Stoke-on-Trent.

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Goldenhill Primary	Mr P Isaacs, Goldenhill, Stoke-on-Trent
Moorpark Junior	Mr H Irvine, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent
Newstead Primary	Mr G Tinsley, Burslem, Stoke-on-Trent
St Wilfred's Catholic Primary	Mrs P Bailie, Chell, Stoke-on-Trent

85 MINUTES OF CABINET MEETINGS

Councillor Shotton moved, and Councillor Meredith seconded, that the minutes of meetings of the Cabinet, as submitted, be approved.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of Cabinet Meetings be noted.

86 MINUTES OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

Councillor Conway moved, and Councillor Banks seconded, that the minutes of Committee meetings, as submitted, be noted.

RESOLVED – That the minutes be noted.

COUNCILLOR TERRY CROWE

LORD MAYOR