

Minutes of the Council Meeting of Spelthorne Borough Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Knowle Green, Staines-upon-Thames on Thursday 24 April 2014

Present:

Councillors:

Ayers F.	Forsbrey G.E.	Patel D.
Ayub A.	Francis M.P.C.	Patterson A.C.
Beardsmore I.J.	Frazer C.M.	Pinkerton J.M.
Broom P.A.	Friday A.E.	Saliagopoulos D.
Budd S.E.W.	Gohil D.	Sexton J.
Davis C.A.	Harman A.C. (The Mayor)	Smith-Ainsley R.A.
Dunn R.D.	Harvey I.T.E	Strong C.V.
Dunn S.A.	Leighton V.J.	Taylor S.D.
Evans T.J.M.	Madams M.J.	Watts R.L. (Leader)
Forbes-Forsyth P.C. (Deputy Leader)	Mitchell A.J.	Webb S. (Deputy Mayor)

Councillor A.C. Harman, The Mayor, in the Chair

Apologies:

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.A. Bannister, N. Gething, D.L. Grant, M.W. Rough and R.W. Sider and Murray Litvak and Miss Sue Faulkner, the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Members' Code of Conduct Committee.

83/14 Signing of the Community Covenant with the Armed Forces

The Mayor welcomed representatives of the military, public bodies, businesses, the voluntary and faith sectors who were attending this meeting to sign the Community Covenant and to show their support for this very important and public commitment.

The Mayor explained that the Armed Forces Community Covenant was a voluntary statement of mutual support between a civilian community and its local Armed Forces community. It was intended to complement the national Armed Forces Covenant, which outlined the moral obligation between the Nation, the Government and the Armed Forces.

The purpose of this Community Covenant was to encourage support for the Armed Forces community, working and residing in the Borough of Spelthorne and to recognise and remember the sacrifices made by members of the Armed Forces community, particularly those who had given the most. This included in-Service and ex-Service personnel, their families, widows and widowers in the Borough.

For Spelthorne Borough Council and partner organisations, the Community Covenant presented an opportunity to bring their knowledge, experience and expertise to bear on the provision of help and advice to members of the Armed Forces community.

For the Armed Forces community, the Community Covenant encouraged the integration of Service life into civilian life and encouraged members of the Armed Forces community to help their local community.

The Mayor said it gave him great pleasure to be able to sign this document which first of all recognised not only the sacrifices and service given by members of our community in the Armed Forces, but also promised on behalf of the Community to remember that service and to ensure that the Borough did whatever it could to support and integrate members of the Armed Forces, be they cadets embarking on a career, those who were currently serving, those who had been recently discharged or those who were long-standing veterans.

The Mayor invited Councillor Robert Watts, the Leader of the Council, followed by Captain Neal Archer of 135 Geo Squadron, Royal Engineers and finally County Councillor Sally Marks, the Vice-Chairman of the County Council to say a few words.

At the conclusion of the speeches, the Mayor, Councillor A.C. Harman was the first to sign the Community Covenant, followed by the Chief Executive, Roberto Tambini and the Leader of the Council, Councillor R.L. Watts.

The following signatories present were invited to sign the Community Covenant in turn:

Capt. Neal Archer, 135 Geo Sqn, Royal Engineers for the Armed Forces
Councillor Spencer Taylor, Spelthorne Borough Council Member
County Councillor Sally Marks, Vice Chairman of Surrey County Council
County Councillor Richard Walsh, Chairman of the Spelthorne Local Committee

Derrick Budd, Flight Lieutenant RAFVR (T) Officer Commanding for Air Cadets Staines

Kamila Michalska, Cadet Corporal for 195 Staines Army Cadet Force
Sub Lieutenant Lucy Seex RNR for Staines and Egham Sea Cadets

James Gazzard, Branch Chairman for Sunbury Royal British Legion

Keith Ovens, Immediate Past County Chairman for Royal British Legion Surrey

Debra Jane Lock, Staines & Ashford Divisnl Secretary for Soldiers' & Sailors' Families Assocn.

Bill Sykes for War Pensions

Mary C Haarer for Royal Air Force Benevolent Association

Canon Peter Bruinvels for Army Benevolent Fund Surrey (The Soldiers Charity)

Inspector Ian St. John, Spelthorne Neighbourhood Inspector for Surrey Police

Anna Burridge, Area Director (South) for A2Dominion Housing Association

Phil White, General Manager of the Jockey Club for Kempton Park

Dr Sabine Lohmann, Chair of Spelthorne Business Forum

Paul Thompson, Trustee and Director for Runnymede and Spelthorne Citizens Advice Bureau

John Griffiths MBE, Head of Operational Support for SE Coast Ambulance Service

Suzanne Rankin, Chief Nurse for Ashford and St Peter's Hospital

Barry Muggeridge, Chairman, for Ashford Pride

Reverend John Miller, for Churches Together in Staines and Laleham

Stuart Duguid, Chair of the Spelthorne Branch of UNISON

84/14 Minutes

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 17 February 2014 were approved as a correct record subject to typographical amendments to the Budget speech by the Leader of the Spelthorne Independent Party, as appended to these minutes.

85/14 Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

86/14 Announcements from the Mayor

The Mayor invited all those who had supported his charities during his term of office to attend a Civic Reception at the Orangery, Shepperton Studios on 1 May 2014.

87/14 Announcements from the Leader

The Leader of the Council announced that the Council would be holding a Community Flood meeting on Thursday 5 June at Spelthorne Leisure Centre, Knowle Green for anyone affected by the flooding who would like to know more about, or comment on the causes of, and response to, the flooding and the long-term implications.

The meeting would consist of two parts:

5pm to 7pm market place

7pm to 9pm presentation and questions and answers session.

During the course of the evening, members of the public would be able to speak to people from key organisations such as the Environment Agency, Surrey Fire and Rescue, and Thames Water.

Spelthorne Borough Council was the first in Surrey to make the decision to hold such a meeting and he hoped that other Surrey authorities would follow the same model.

88/14 Announcements from the Chief Executive

There were none.

89/14 Questions from members of the public

There were none.

90/14 Pensions Policy Statements

The Council considered the recommendation of the Cabinet on the Pensions Policy Statements following the introduction of the new Local Government Pensions Scheme on 1 April 2014 which required all scheme employers to publish new policy statements in relation to discretionary elements.

Resolved that the Pensions Policy Statement and Flexible Retirement Policy set out at Appendix 2 and 3 of the report of the Assistant Chief Executive dated 25 March 2014 are agreed with effect from 1 April 2014.

91/14 Reports from the Leader of the Council

The Leader of the Council, Councillor R. L. Watts, presented the reports of the Cabinet meetings held on 25 March 2014 and 15 April 2014, which outlined the various matters the Cabinet had decided since the last Council meeting.

92/14 Report from the Chairman of the Audit Committee

The Chairman of the Audit Committee, Councillor D. Gohil, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

93/14 Report from the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor P.A. Broom, presented her report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

94/14 Report from the Chairman of the Planning Committee

The Chairman of the Planning Committee, Councillor R.A. Smith-Ainsley, presented his report which outlined the matters the Committee had decided since the last Council meeting.

95/14 Motions

Under Standing Order 17.3, a Notice of Motion had been received concerning the 441 bus service.

Councillor C.M. Frazer moved and Councillor S.D. Taylor seconded the following Motion:

“This Council requests Abellio to restore forthwith, and in full, the 441 bus service to Stanwell.”

During the debate Councillor Frazer, as proposer of the Motion, agreed to amend the wording to change Stanwell to Stanwell Moor.

The Motion was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

96/14 Questions on Ward Issues

There were none.

97/14 General Questions

Under Standing Order 14, Councillor D. Saliagopoulos, asked the following general question:

"Within the budget papers is the expenditure on the recent campaign for dog fouling. I have noticed a vast improvement in the street scene and indeed along the River area (which adjoins my Ward). Would the Leader agree that this has been money well spent? Residents have told us that this has been a real issue in the Borough. Do we have any statistics as yet on the success of this scheme although I do appreciate it may be a bit early. Certainly my residents have told me that they really appreciate this scheme and also the fact that the Council has listened. Is that the Leader's and Cabinet Member's general understanding too? "

Response by the Leader of the Council, Councillor R.L. Watts:

"Thank you for your question, Councillor Saliagopoulos.

Myself and Councillor Sexton agree that this has been a very successful scheme and represents money well spent. There are new dog fouling signs in all the Council's parks, children's play areas and six movable banners sited in various prominent locations. Signs have also been put up in some well-used open spaces. Over one thousand signs have been put on lamp columns throughout Spelthorne by staff, councillors and residents, and they continue to put these up as and when requested. There has been a positive response from residents and 117 communications from the public since the commencement of the campaign including complaints, support and information about dog owners who potentially do not clear up after their dogs. A number of these have been sent warning letters about the consequences of not clearing up after their dogs. As yet no inspections or reports have provided sufficient information to enable a Fixed Penalty Notice to be issued."

Under Standing Order 14, Councillor Mrs S.A. Dunn asked the following general question:

"Neighbourhood Watch has provided the ability to reduce crime and improve safety and security for residents. Why has this Council approved the removal of the funding for the co-ordinator for this crucial service?"

Response by the Portfolio Holder for Community Safety, Young People, Leisure and Culture, Councillor P. Forbes-Forsyth:

“Thank you for your question, Councillor Mrs. Dunn.

The Council made funding available for Spelthorne Neighbourhood Watch to retain the co-ordinator’s post. The Council also wanted to make the post a permanent position instead of a 12- month annual contract.

To our surprise, we were advised by Neighbourhood Watch that, following a meeting of their steering group, they no longer wanted funding from the Council.

We made enquiries of them to ensure that this was the case and they confirmed that they intended to operate with volunteers in the future. Efforts were made on several occasions to discuss this matter and to establish if there was a way forward, but we were informed that “the decision was final”.

Consequently the Council has not budgeted to provide Neighbourhood Watch with any financial assistance this year.

It is worth noting that up until this year, Spelthorne was the only Surrey authority providing such a level of financial support for a paid post to a Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

The Council sincerely hopes that it can continue to work with Neighbourhood Watch and, where possible, support projects and collaborate together on community safety initiatives.”

Councillor Mrs S.A. Dunn asked a supplementary question as follows:
“If Neighbourhood Watch does ask the Council for funding, would the Council listen to their request and put provision back into the Budget?”

Councillor Forbes-Forsyth responded as follows:
“The Council has worked tirelessly to build links with Neighbourhood Watch. They are a valuable resource and we do all we can to work with them. So the answer to your question is yes.”

98/14 Appointments of Representative Trustees

(a) Ashford Relief in Need Charity

It was moved by Councillor R.L. Watts and seconded by Councillor P. Forbes-Forsyth and

RESOLVED that the appointment of Mrs Brenda Ann Bartlett as a Council representative to the Ashford Relief in Need Charities be extended until October 2014.

(b) Staines Parochial Charity

(i) It was moved by Councillor R.L. Watts and seconded by Councillor P. Forbes-Forsyth and

RESOLVED that Mrs Elizabeth Mackendar-Moore be re-appointed as a Council representative to the Staines Parochial Charity until December 2017.

- (ii) It was moved by Councillor F. Ayers and seconded by Councillor A.C. Patterson that Mrs Christine Bannister be re-appointed as a Council representative to the Staines Parochial Charity until April 2018.

It was moved by Councillor C.A. Davis and seconded by Councillor P.A. Broom that Councillor M.P.C. Francis be appointed as a Council representative to the Staines Parochial Charity until April 2018.

RESOLVED that Councillor M.P.C. Francis be appointed as a Council representative to the Staines Parochial Charity for a four year term until April 2018.

(c) Margaret Pope's Educational Charity

It was moved by Councillor R.L. Watts and seconded by Councillor P. Forbes-Forsyth and

RESOLVED that Mr Derek Bartlett be appointed as a Council representative to the Margaret Pope's Educational Charity for a three year term until April 2017.

99/14 Urgent Business

There were no urgent items.

Appendix B

The Budget Speech of the Leader of Spelthorne Independent Party, Councillor Frank Ayers

Thank you Mr Mayor and I would also like to thank Councillor Watts for making available the budget book yesterday afternoon, although if he thinks that just over 24 hours is sufficient to take into account all the contents, well that quite surprises me.

Anyway Mr Mayor before I respond to the budget I wish to have it recorded in the minutes that as the Leader of the main opposition party I requested from Councillor Watts prior sight of the budget statement presented this evening so I had sufficient time to give due consideration to the contents and comment fully. Regrettably Council Watts declined my request on personal grounds, stating and I quote 'As you have clearly commented on your latest web announcement that you feel I am incompetent I have no intention of sharing my budget with you.'

My apologies Mr Mayor, I just wanted to get that on the record.

I will now move on to the budget statement. I would like to say what a good sensible budget we have before us this evening. That is what I would like to say. Unfortunately I cannot. This is the second budget presented by Councillor Watts. Many will recall that last year there were a number of errors and omissions within the budget and when Councillor Watts was asked to explain the reasons he had no answers. One such example was the £100,000 previously identified as savings that disappeared completely, without on the night any explanation why that had happened. Of course we now know why that happened, the appointment of an assistant to the Cabinet to the cost of almost £20,000 per annum and the engagement of consultants to deliver improvement plans for Laleham Park at a substantial cost to the Council. That expenditure together equates to almost all the £100,000, previously identified savings and there was no mention of that expenditure in last year's budget.

Now this year we again have a budget which like a string vest is full of holes. We all know it's not what the budget says but it's what it doesn't say. Where the detailed reasons for the proposed use of £450,000 spend from general reserves as outlined in appendix 1 in the green book to fund a number of projects relating to the regeneration of Staines-upon-Thames town centre? What are those projects? What is being proposed? Who and how will it be taken forward? Will most of the £450,000 be paid to consultants? I suspect that the lack of information is one of two reasons. Either they do not know what, how or where exactly projects will be in Staines or like a number of items in the budget, the devil will be in the detail. Why agree to put funding of £100,000 towards the cost of a pilot enforcement scheme in partnership with the Surrey Police and the crime commissioner? I understand there is one other authority taking part in this pilot scheme. Surely it would have been much more sensible to see if that pilot scheme worked before committing any funding, therefore saving £100,000.

I am however pleased to note that in 2.4 of the green book, so I did manage to read some of it in the short time I had it, the Council recognises the impact that the flooding has had on a considerable number of homes and businesses in the Borough and some provision is being made to give some form of financial support all be it within the parameters and funding set out by the government.

If businesses whose premises experienced at least one day flooding can expect at least 3 months business rate relief, I would like to have seen the Council take this a stage further and give those residents whose homes have been flooded 6 months Council tax rate relief. For a great many it will take at least that amount of time to get their homes back to where they were before the flooding. How will we pay for it some people will say? Well we can review and put on hold the £450,000 proposed spend on the Staines regeneration projects. I'm sure our residents would appreciate such action, which if you really wanted to have a sensible regeneration programme, then £450,000 would hardly be sufficient especially when you take into account or even into consideration the revenue budget provision figure of £287,000 just for resurfacing work for the Elmsleigh car park. That really highlights that the £450,000 for regeneration will be woefully inadequate to achieve any satisfactory results. I believe our residents whose homes were flooded would have appreciated such a positive decision being taken giving them 6 months rate relief on their council tax.

Mr Mayor, this recommendation this evening is to approve a 1.94 percent Council tax increase. I suggest this increase would not be necessary if the Council tax grant of 1 percent on offer from central government had been accepted. Some will argue that if the Council tax grant of 1 percent had been accepted there would be a budget shortfall of approximately £64,000. I believe that by dispensing with the unnecessary Cabinet assistant post and tighter control of spending we could have made up that shortfall. Therefore no Council tax increase would have been needed for 2014-15. I am sure our residents, many whose incomes have not been keeping up with inflation, would have appreciated Spelthorne Borough Council freezing their element of the Council tax for 2014-15 however small that amount may be.

Mr Mayor, the Spelthorne Independent Party cannot support a budget, driven by a party that is losing the trust of its residents and cannot be trusted with the public purse. The budget has left us with more questions than answers and does not offer those residents and businesses who have been subject to flooding, the support that they deserve. Therefore we will be opposing the recommendation put before us this evening.

Thank you Mr Mayor.