

DARTFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL

MINUTES of the proceedings of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council held on Monday 7 October 2019.

PRESENT:

The Mayor

Councillor R S L Perfitt

The Deputy Mayor

Councillor R M Currans

Councillor Mrs A D Allen, MBE

Councillor D E Hunnisett

Councillor I D Armitt JP

Councillor R A S Jones

Councillor A E D Barham

Councillor J A Kite, MBE

Councillor E H Ben Moussa

Councillor A R Lloyd

Councillor S H Brown

Councillor C S McLean

Councillor J Burrell

Councillor D J Mote

Councillor D Butler

Councillor D T Nicklen

Councillor S P Butterfill

Councillor A J Oakley-Dow

Councillor L A Canham

Councillor V Oguntope

Councillor P Cutler

Councillor T Oliver

Councillor M J Davis

Councillor Mrs J A Ozog

Councillor L H K Edie

Councillor M I Peters

Councillor B Garden

Councillor D J Reynolds

Councillor A Gaskin

Councillor L J Reynolds

Councillor R Gosine

Councillor Mrs R F Storey

Councillor S N Gosine

Councillor D Swinerd

Councillor K J Grehan

Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow

Councillor D A Hammock

Councillor R J Wells

Councillor P M Harman

ABSENT:

Councillor T A Maddison

Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE

Councillor C J Shippam

43. PRAYERS: REVEREND HELEN REEVES

The Mayor's Chaplain led the Council in prayer.

44. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Maddison, Sandhu and Shippam.

45. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interests.

46. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the General Assembly of the Council held on 15 July 2019 be confirmed as an accurate record.

47. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced that he had attended a number of functions in recent weeks including an event at Castle Hill Community Centre organised by the Kent Telugu Community on 5th October where he had been presented with a trophy which was now on display in the Mayor's Parlour.

48. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

- **Public Consultation on Urgent Care Services**

The Leader of the Council advised Members that a consultation document from the Dartford, Gravesham and Swanley Clinical Commissioning Group on options for improving NHS urgent care services across the CCG area had been placed in their pigeonholes. He encouraged Members to respond to the public consultation on these important services.

- **Festival of Light**

The Leader reminded Members that the Festival of Light would take place in Dartford on 18th October and said that this was a wonderful celebration of colour and lights which was particularly enjoyed by many children and encouraged Members to attend. He thanked Gurvinder Sandher, Artistic Director of Cohesion Plus and the Kent Equality Cohesion Council for their work in organising the event.

- **Forthcoming Councillor's Weddings**

The Leader of the Council congratulated Councillor Richard Wells on his forthcoming marriage to Katie on 19th October and Councillor David Butler on his marriage to Kallum on 26th October. He and Members of the Council wished both couples every future happiness.

49. QUESTIONS FROM POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS

The following questions were submitted by the Shadow Leader of the Council:

Question 1

Residents have conveyed their deep concerns on how the situation of a no deal Brexit would impact on their lives. Dartford Borough Council have been

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given £150,000 to spend if this eventuality occurs. In order for the council to be transparent and provide reassurance, how will this be used?

Question 2

What are DBC's contingency plans for a no deal Brexit?

Question 3

As many councils celebrate the 31st Black History Month with events, monuments and educational opportunities etc, will DBC take this opportunity next year to also celebrate Black History month and celebrate the BAME residents who also put Dartford on the map such as Adam Gemili?

In accordance with Standing Order 14 the questions and answers, including any supplementary questions and answers, are recorded in a book kept for this purpose in the Members' Area.

50. MOTIONS

Councillor K J Grehan moved the following motion of which she had given notice in accordance with Standing Order 10:

'That this Council notes:

- That analysis of the 2018 Local Election results by the Fawcett Society found that only 34% of councillors in England are women, up 1% since 2017;
- Of the seats that were up for election in 2018, 38% went to women, up just 3 percentage points on 2014 when these seats were last contested;
- That across England, Labour has improved its representation since seats were last up for grabs, with 45% women compared with 40% in 2014, Liberal Democrat representation up from 34% to 36% whilst the Conservative Party saw a fall from 31% to 29% in the share of its councillors who are female;
- That Dartford Borough Council currently consists of 15 women (35.7%) and 27 men (64.3%);
- That the role of a councillor should be open to all, regardless of their background, and that introducing a parental leave policy is a step towards encouraging a wider range of people to become councillors, and is also a step to encourage existing councillors who may want to start a family to remain as councillors;

- That parental leave must apply to parents regardless of their gender, and that it should also cover adoption leave to support those parents who choose to adopt; and
- That a parental leave policy will give certainty to councillors and councils alike when a councillor needs to take time off after the birth or adoption of a child, and the lack of parental leave would not be a deterrent to someone becoming a councillor.

That this Council resolves:

- To adopt the parental leave policy drafted by the LGA Labour Group's Women's Taskforce to give all councillors an entitlement to parental leave after giving birth or adopting; and
- To ensure that councillors with children and other caring commitments are supported as appropriate.'

In introducing the report Councillor Grehan stressed the importance of parental leave in encouraging more people to put themselves forward to be Councillors. At present only 37% of the Councillors in Dartford were women and the average age of Councillors across the country was 60. She said that Labour had worked hard to encourage more women to serve as Councillors and the LGA Labour Group's Women's Taskforce had developed a policy on parental leave that would provide assurance and certainties for those people contemplating parenthood or adoption. She said that whilst this could be considered by the Independent Remuneration Panel the Council could act decisively and without delay to adopt the policy now as 24 other local authorities had already done.

The motion was seconded by Councillor V Oguntope.

Councillor J A Kite MBE moved, that in accordance with Standing Order 10(6)(a) the motion should stand referred to the independent Remuneration Panel for consideration as part of its ongoing review of the Scheme of Members Allowances and other support. He stressed that it was the Council's practice that any change in remuneration would undergo a well-defined and orderly process of consideration and that it was not the Council's practice to agree such matters on an ad hoc basis which would result in chaotic and incoherent decision making. If the Council were to determine this issue it would send a bad message to the Independent Remuneration Panel and undermine the Panel's work. For these reasons he was proposing that this matter should be referred to the Panel which could then consider the matter and recommend accordingly when it reported back to the GAC in December.

Councillor S Gosine raised a point of order. He said that the Independent Remuneration Panel was purely an advisory panel and could not make policy,

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which was the remit of the General Assembly of the Council so he questioned whether this matter fell within the Panel's terms of reference. He also recalled that the last GAC meeting had created a new allowance for the Chairman of the Strategic Housing Board and that there seemed to be an inconsistency of approach.

The Strategic Director (Internal Services) advised that although the Independent Remuneration Panel primarily dealt with establishing the types and levels of allowances for Councillors it also had a clear wider remit in terms of recommending on other aspects of Member support and gathering evidence on 'the various roles and responsibilities of elected Members and the commitment of time and other resources involved' and 'the need to attract and retain elected Members of the highest calibre who are representative of the local population, particularly in terms of race, age and gender'. Both of the current recommendations contained in the motion were within the remit of the IRP. The point of order was therefore refuted.

The motion to refer the matter to the Independent Remuneration Panel was seconded by Councillor S Brown, put to the vote and carried.

RESOLVED:

That the above motion proposed by Councillor K J Grehan and seconded by Councillor V Oguntope stands referred, without further discussion, to the Independent Remuneration Panel for consideration.

Councillor J A Kite MBE moved the following motion of which he had given notice in accordance with Standing Order 10:

'That this Council recognises the serious impact of climate change and accepts that rising global temperatures presents a clear and present threat to our world. We are facing a climate emergency.

The Council further recognises that all governments (national, regional and local) have a duty to act but feels that progress in Dartford should not be constrained by the actions of the slowest. Our town and its people have a part to play in securing a sustainable future and this Council must not only be a force for change in itself, but must inspire and encourage change in others.

It welcomes the Government's commitment to meet the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change target to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050 but feels that, locally, we should aspire to act faster, and go further, to embed multiple actions across our community and local economy. Some measures may be quicker to yield results than others but the Council aspires

to see the effects of climate change tackled earlier than either the 2050 national target or the 2030 date proposed by some.

It commits to pursuing measures that are deliverable, measurable and practical. It will inspire and promote efforts - small and large – to address climate change throughout our local community. It recognises that the interests of the environment are served not by empty promises or by setting one legitimate interest against another but by securing collaboration and a genuine commitment to change throughout the Borough and amongst our residents, neighbourhoods, businesses and wider partners. It will co-operate with other authorities at every tier.

Dartford knows more than most about the particular challenges posed by rising traffic volumes and the impact on local air quality. We commit to increase our efforts to work with highways partners to reduce car use, resolve traffic issues in pollution hotspots and create workable, popular solutions within residential communities to prioritise pedestrians, cyclists and calmer, safer traffic.

It commits to make enlightened choices in our own supply chain and encourage other organisations to do the same with the aim of safeguarding resources and reducing pollution.

It notes the successful inauguration of the Leader’s cross-party Working Group on Climate Change and commits to developing this group to include informed and representative local voices.

Finally, this Council sets itself the goal of making a contribution to tackling climate change to match any comparable local authority’.

In introducing the motion Councillor Kite said that climate change represented a clear and present threat and elsewhere thinking was clouded by politics, entrenched and impractical positions and by the differing views of scientists as to target dates for reducing carbon emissions to zero, with some arguing for a target of 2050 and others 2030. It was important for the Council to take a lead and there were some things that could be achieved with the support of local people, businesses and contractors more quickly than these target dates whilst other measures would take longer. It was important to take people and the economy on a journey to embrace these issues and to keep moving forward, encouraging and educating people to change behaviours with an aim of going as far and as fast as possible and doing the things that were practical, measurable and deliverable. He contrasted this constructive approach to that taken by the Extinction Rebellion group and quoted from a letter that he had received from them demanding that the Council should baseline the Council’s carbon and ecological footprint in line with its Climate Emergency declaration, commit to sourcing its electricity supply from a 100% renewable provider and insist that its pension fund divested from any fossil fuel investments. It had warned that if the Council did not comply with their

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demands within 3 weeks it would seek to disrupt the Council's business. He expressed his anger that a non-elected campaign group should seek to dictate action to a democratically elected and responsible Council in this manner and assured them that the Council's business would not be disrupted by their activity and would carry on regardless. He described his own 'switch-on' moment when, after undertaking some research whilst on holiday, he reached the conclusion that action needed to be taken. He had called the Shadow Leader to discuss this and found that they had been in total agreement and that the Labour Group had also been looking at this. There were subsequently positive discussions between all three group leaders. There was the opportunity to take forward measures that were practical, measureable and deliverable and to work with those with legitimate interests to deliver a better environment not only through the delivery of council services but by using the enormous power that the Council had to influence others and to reach out to the communities. Whilst recognising other target dates he wanted to move as fast as possible and to make Dartford the leading authority in Kent on dealing with climate change. This was not about T-shirts, placards and causing disruption to people going about their legitimate business, which merely divided and angered people rather than bringing them together behind this. In Dartford the political groups were committed to working together to do what needed to be done and he commended the other group leaders for their support and Councillor Edie who had worked closely with him in developing the motion.

The motion was seconded by the Deputy Shadow Leader, Councillor L H K Edie, who said that the effects of climate change were already being seen worldwide with rising global temperatures causing extreme weather patterns, crop failures and plant and animal extinctions. The last few years summers had been some of the hottest on record and Kent was likely to suffer severe impacts and it was important for Dartford to come together to do what it could to deal with climate change.

The Leader of the Swanscombe and Greenhithe Residents' Association fully supported working in partnership to deal with this issue and wanted to do so in practical ways that could start to have an impact. Starting small but gathering momentum and having a growing impact across communities.

The motion was put to the vote and carried unanimously.

RESOLVED:

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to play in securing a sustainable future and this Council must not only be a force for change in itself, but must inspire and encourage change in others.

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51. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

52. COUNCIL IN COMMITTEE

It was moved by Councillor R S L Perfitt, seconded by Councillor J A Kite and

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RESOLVED:

That in accordance with Standing Order 11(13) the General Assembly of the Council go into Committee and the rules of Procedures for Committees do apply.

THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL, COUNCILLOR J A KITE MBE, IN THE CHAIR

53. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other committees.

54. CAPITAL PROGRAMME INCLUDING PRUDENTIAL INDICATORS - OUTTURN 2018/2019

The Council considered a report on the final pre-audit figures for the 2018/19 Capital Programme, the capital resources that were used to fund it and those resources which remained available to fund future investments and approved the carry forward of capital budgets into the 2019/20 financial year.

RESOLVED:

That the capital budget set out in Appendix C to the report be carried forward into the 2019/20 financial year thereby increasing the total capital budget to £30.771M.

55. CRIME AND DISORDER (OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY) COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2018-19

The Council considered the work carried out by the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee during 2018/19 which was described in its annual report. The Chairman of the Committee thanked the Members of the committee and officers for their input during the year and also thanked the Democratic Services Officer, David Hook, for his support for the committee's work. He commended the report to the committee.

Councillor Davis reminded Members of the importance of the Committee's work in tackling crime and disorder in the Borough and highlighted that violent crime had increased with three violent crimes occurring every day.

RESOLVED:

That the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Committee Annual Report 2018-19 be noted.

56. RE-CONVENING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL

It was moved by Councillor J A Kite, seconded by Councillor S Brown and

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with Standing Order 11(14) the General Assembly of the Council now re-convene.

THE MAYOR, COUNCILLOR R S L PERFITT, IN THE CHAIR

57. RESERVED MINUTES

The Mayor announced that one Cabinet minute had been reserved for debate in accordance with Standing Order 16(14)(1)(a).

- **Minute 39 – Review of Charging Periods for Highfield Road Car Parks – (Cabinet – 5 September 2019)**

The Shadow Leader explained that although he had reserved this minute for debate Councillor Jones wished to speak on the issue as a local Member.

Councillor Jones said that a number of Members had registered concerns about parking in the vicinity of Highfield Road at the Cabinet Advisory Panel meeting on 2nd September. Since the introduction of the pay and display arrangements in the Highfield Road car park it was now little used and residents could not afford to pay £5 per day to park there. Much of the road opposite was covered by yellow lines and a number of residents had also spent money to introduce dropped curbs. All of these factors meant that there were serious problems for residents of Highfield Road and neighbouring streets who needed on-street parking and considerable frustration as a result. Whilst he recognised that there had been problems with abandoned vehicles in the car park before the introduction of charges he felt that the CAP meeting had recommended that spaces should be made available in the car park free of charge for local residents but that the Cabinet had instead decided to look at the introduction of a Resident's Parking Scheme with an annual charge for permits.

The Leader of the Council explained that the CAP had an important advisory role and that the CAP's had been set up to ensure that all Members had an input to Cabinet decision making. He understood the situation in Highfield Road and the Council had quite rightly reviewed the position in light of resident's views and the current demand on the car park following the introduction of pay and display charges. As a result the Council was considering the introduction of a resident's parking scheme which would include reserving a number of spaces in the car park for residents who wished to buy a permit. This would be on the same basis as other residents' parking schemes in the borough for which there was a £50 annual charge. The Council paid to operate and maintain car parks in the borough and it was important that this was done on a cost neutral basis and that residents using the car parks contributed towards these costs. It would not be right for the Council to provide these facilities to the owner occupiers opposite the car park on a free basis as there could be no preferential arrangements given that a charge was levied where other Residents' Permit schemes operated in the Borough. The Cabinet had had regard to the views of the CAP and considered the various options available before making its decision.

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The meeting closed at 8.13 pm

MAYOR