

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 15 July 2019.

PRESENT:

The Mayor

Councillor R S L Perfitt

Councillor Mrs A D Allen, MBE
Councillor I D Armitt JP
Councillor A E D Barham
Councillor E H Ben Moussa
Councillor S H Brown
Councillor J Burrell
Councillor D Butler
Councillor S P Butterfill
Councillor P Cutler
Councillor M J Davis
Councillor L H K Edie
Councillor B Garden
Councillor R Gosine
Councillor S N Gosine
Councillor K J Grehan
Councillor D A Hammock
Councillor P M Harman
Councillor D E Hunnisett
Councillor R A S Jones

Councillor J A Kite, MBE
Councillor A R Lloyd
Councillor T A Maddison
Councillor C S McLean
Councillor D J Mote
Councillor D T Nicklen
Councillor A J Oakley-Dow
Councillor V Oguntope
Councillor T Oliver
Councillor Mrs J A Ozog
Councillor M I Peters
Councillor D J Reynolds
Councillor L J Reynolds
Councillor C J Shippam
Councillor Mrs R F Storey
Councillor D Swinerd
Councillor Mrs P A Thurlow
Councillor R J Wells

ABSENT:

Councillor L A Canham
Councillor R M Currans
Councillor A Gaskin
Councillor A S Sandhu, MBE

27. PRAYERS: REVEREND HELEN REEVES

The Mayor's Chaplain led the Council in prayers.

28. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Canham, Currans and Gaskin.

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

29. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Mote declared a prejudicial interest in respect of agenda item 13, Members' Allowances-Update (minute 40) as he would be the recipient of a proposed new Special Responsibility Allowance, and took no part in the debate or voting on that item. There were no other declarations of interests.

30. MINUTES

Councillor Maddison reminded Members that when he welcomed the election of the new Mayor, Councillor Perfitt, at the Annual Council meeting he had also presented him with a card along with a donation cheque on behalf of the new Labour Group on the Council to start his charity appeal for his chosen charity, 'Ellenor' and felt that this should have been recorded in the minutes. It was agreed that the minutes should be amended to reflect this.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Annual Council meeting held on 22nd May 2019, as amended to record the donation to the Mayor's charity appeal by the Labour Group, were confirmed as an accurate record.

31. MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor announced that he had enjoyed the first two months of his Mayoralty and in particular his visits to schools and meeting older people. He had also attended the Dartford Festival at the weekend and felt certain that the Leader of the Council would have more to say on the success of that event.

32. LEADER'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Leader of the Council made the following announcements:

- **Dartford Festival 2019**

The Leader of the Council said that the Council continued to organise amazing events and that the Dartford festival was the pinnacle of these activities. The event was a raging success and the two acts on the Saturday evening had been particularly good. It was important that the Council gave something special back to local residents and once again the Council had delivered. He thanked Councillor Patsy Thurlow, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Arts and Culture, Adrian Gowan, Lewis Kirnon and their teams for all their hard work in organising the festival and making it so successful.

- **New Council**

The Leader of the Council noted that this was the first substantive Council meeting since the local elections in May. He welcomed new Councillors to the meeting and commented on the positive approach of the Labour Group so far, which he hoped would carry on and that the political groups would continue to work together productively in the future. He commented that it was important

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for the Council to fulfil the promises made during campaigning and that the Council had delivered all but one of the pledges made by his Group in their 2011 and 2015 manifestos, the only one that it had been unable to deliver in each case being the result of the approach taken by Tesco. This was now being addressed.

- **Play Places**

The Leader of the Council announced that the Council was actively looking at opportunities to establish new accessible play places. The Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Arts and Culture and the Lead Member for Open Spaces and Heritage were already working on the delivery of new play places and green spaces and this would be an important area of work for the Council.

- **Leaders' Advisory Group on Road Safety**

The Leader of the Council reminded Members that towards the end of the last Administration he had established a Leaders' Advisory Group on Road Safety and that he wanted to formally restart this work. He highlighted the good work already carried out by the Group and said that Kent County Council had recently made encouraging noises regarding the introduction of 20 mph zones and had given their support to go ahead. He intended to organise meetings of the Group during the Autumn to progress this important area of work.

- **Road Safety Mirrors in Fleetdown**

The Leader of the Council advised Members that new road safety mirrors had been successfully sited at a hazardous point in Fleetdown following a serious accident and represented a small but important success.

- **Climate Change**

The Leader of the Council said that during his recent holiday he had made the time to read extensively about climate change and he had been prompted to call the Shadow Leader of the Council to discuss this and ways that the Council could address these issues and that he had been receptive and supportive. The Leader of the Council said that climate change was one of the issues that affected everyone's lives and he felt that the Council should take a leadership role. There had been leadership at national and county level but the Council dealt directly with the local community and had an important role to play. He said that whilst there might be honourable disagreements over approach and timeframes there was a clear need to do something and that the Council needed to take its responsibility to future generations seriously. He cited examples of projects already delivered by the Council in an environmentally friendly manner, the development of Princes Park stadium which had won awards for 'green architecture', the work to refurbish Central Park and at Hesketh Park, and new play spaces in Greenhithe and elsewhere. He recognised that it was impossible to change everything

overnight but he wanted the Council to take a lead and be an exemplar; to take a lead in Kent and to be recognised as being at the forefront of activity to tackle climate change. He announced that he intended to establish a cross party working group to tackle this issue. He wanted to take a robust approach which delivered results but in doing so it was important to focus on what the Council could deliver and also to recognise the limitations on what it could do in order to establish realistic but challenging targets and deliverables. He informed Members that he had already shared his vision for the initiative with the Shadow Leader and that his Group looked forward to working closely across the Council on this issue. He felt that this was a good opportunity for the political groups to show mutual trust and to work together and that it was important to engage with the local community and to get it on-side. He recognised that Dartford had particular challenges around air quality and traffic congestion which needed careful management and the Council should not rely on others to address these issues. It was important to find solutions and recognise the need to break the cycle. The first step, however, was to engage with the community. He said that he was starting this work with hope and the promise to endeavour and that by working together the Council could make a real difference and that the Council worked best when it worked together towards a common goal.

The Shadow Leader of the Council thanked the Leader of the Council for his kind words and re-iterated that his group was committed to working as a community and that climate change affected everybody and the futures of their children and grandchildren. It was important to work together and to get this work underway. He noted that Gravesham had set targets for climate change by 2030 and said that the Council should be competitive and set a more challenging target and demonstrate that Dartford was the most progressive council in Kent.

33. QUESTIONS FROM POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS

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

Question 1

‘With the summer holidays beginning the end of the month, what support is the council providing to the almost 7000 children growing up in poverty, to maintain a nourished diet through this holiday period which can add up to between £30 and £40 a week for parents already struggling financially?’

Question 2

‘Although the council already has some preventative mechanisms in place for rough sleepers and support networks to accessing services. Would the Council consider applying for such a grant in aide of going that one step further by providing emergency accommodation 24/7 rather than just for the extra cold nights?’

CHAIRMAN'S INITIALS

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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.

34. MOTIONS

No motions were submitted under Standing Order 10.

35. URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

36. COUNCIL IN COMMITTEE

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

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

37. REFERENCES FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (IF ANY)

There were no references from other committees.

38. WORK PLAN FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE COUNCIL 2019/20

The General Assembly of the Council considered its proposed Work Plan for 2019-20.

RESOLVED:

That the Work Plan, attached at Appendix A to the report, be approved as the General Assembly of the Council's Work Plan for the 2019-20 Municipal Year.

39. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19

The Leader of the Council made some introductory comments about the importance of the work carried out by the Council's scrutiny committees in general in holding the Cabinet and himself to account and providing balance to the work of the Cabinet. The work carried out by the Scrutiny Committee during 2018-19 was described in its annual report and it was important that all political groups supported this work to get value from the process. Councillor Davis, who had been the Vice-Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee during 2018-19, thanked Members for their support and recorded his thanks to David

Hook, Democratic Services Officer, for his work with the committee and for preparing the Annual report.

RESOLVED:

That the Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2018-19 be noted.

40. MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES - UPDATE

The Leader of the Council introduced a report which updated Members on the current level of Members' Allowances and the work being carried out by the Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) to review the Scheme of Members' Allowances with a view to making recommendations on a revised Scheme to the General Assembly of the Council in December 2019. Members were also asked to approve a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) for the Chairman of the newly created Strategic Housing Board at a level commensurate with that paid to the Chairman of the Development Control Board.

Members asked for details on how the Independent Remuneration Panel was appointed and the Leader of the Council explained that the panel was appointed by the Council following a process of public advertisement and interviews conducted by the leaders of the political groups who then recommended the appointments to the Council. The IRP was required to review the Scheme of Members Allowances every 4 years and to submit their recommendations to the Council, although ultimately it was the Council which determined the levels of allowances and the purposes for which they were paid. Members also asked for clarification on how it had been determined that the new allowance for the Chairman of the Strategic Housing Board should be commensurate with that paid to the Chairman of the Development Control Board given that the latter was a statutory quasi-judicial body meeting monthly whereas the new Strategic Housing Board was an advisory body meeting quarterly. The Leader of the Council explained that this reflected the importance of housing and the work that the new Board was being tasked with. He explained that formerly there had been a Cabinet Member with responsibility for housing who had been paid a higher allowance so that the proposal actually delivered a reduction in the overall level of allowances. He confirmed that the new allowance would also be reviewed by the IRP as part of its current review.

RESOLVED:

1. That the progress of the Independent Remuneration Panel in undertaking its review of the Scheme of Members' Allowances be noted;
2. That the current levels of allowances be noted; and
3. That a new Special Responsibility Allowance for the Chairman of the Strategic Housing Board be agreed in line with the current Special Responsibility Allowance paid to the Chairman of the Development Control Board.

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

It was moved by Councillor J A Kite, seconded by Councillor C J Shippam 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

42. RESERVED MINUTES

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

- **Minute 108 – Award of Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing Contract 2019-2024 – (Cabinet – 24 January 2019)**

The Shadow Leader explained that he had reserved this minute for debate because of concerns around the performance of the contract. He noted that the new contract had taken effect on 1st July and that a new contractor, Urbaser, had taken over from Amey. Despite the transitional arrangements outlined to Cabinet on 24th January to ensure that high performance was maintained during the changeover period this was not the experience of his Group and their constituents. There had been many complaints from residents about missed collections and waste not being collected on time. Another Member said that constituents in her ward were being poorly served and not just in terms of waste collection but also on street cleansing and asked for assurance that there would be an improvement in future. Another Member quoted an incident where constituents had waited for 4 weeks to have their waste collected and described problems with the online facility to report missed collections and when trying to call the Council. A Member said that he had also had complaints from constituents but recognised that this was a particularly complex contract and the new contractor should be given the time to bed-in and address the issues. He also praised the efforts of the Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Waste and Recycling in dealing with residents and for providing leadership during the changeover period.

The Leader of the Council reminded Members that the report to Cabinet was now 6 months old and that the changeover period related to a whole raft of negotiations and reconfigurations necessary to move to a new contract. The transition to the new contract was very complicated as the contract related to the weekly collection of over 40,000 bins and concerned arrangements to transfer the fleet of vehicles, equipment and staff to the new contractor. This had generally gone well. However despite the best efforts of Members and Officers he accepted that the service delivered by Amey in the last weeks of the contract had not been impressive and had resulted in rectification notices being issued. He had asked to be copied in to every email to the Council

which related to service issues and during the last weeks of the contract it seemed obvious that Amey had not demonstrated levels of service that the Council wished to see. Despite commitments to carry out all collections by the handover date, and offering staff overtime to work over the final weekend, the collection performance was not acceptable. As a result refuse was not collected from significant numbers of roads.

For this reason, Urbaser, had inherited a considerable backlog and had worked very hard to clear this whilst trying to embed their own improved systems and processes. The number of complaints about in-week missed bins had fallen markedly since 1st July and the backlog was being cleared. Urbaser's performance monitoring systems and processes were far better than Amey's and the approach demonstrated by Urbaser was a breath of fresh air. During their first weeks of operating the contract Urbaser had achieved a 99% accuracy rate in terms of its contracted collections. It was now a matter of the Council rebuilding to regain the trust and faith of residents which would only be possible by ensuring that service performance attained high levels and that this was maintained. He also explained that any additional cost of work carried out by Urbaser to undertake work inherited from Amey could be deducted from the final payment made to Amey under the previous contract. He also encouraged Members to keep up to date with progress by monitoring the Cleaner Dartford twitter feed which had been specifically provided to offer a daily update. He told Members that whilst the feed was not monitored or intended to accept individual service issues, which should continue to be reported via the Council's website to ensure that they were added to the contractors list of rectifications, the Twitter service provided an update for that day's service levels.

The meeting closed at 8.27 pm

MAYOR

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