



MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 16th MARCH 2021

PRESENT: Councillor R Claymore (Mayor), Councillors M Oates, M Bailey, D Box, P Brindley, J Chesworth, R Bilcliff, T Clements, D Cook, M Cook, C Cooke, S Doyle, A Farrell, J Faulkner, R Ford, S Goodall, M J Greatorex, T Jay, R Kingstone, K Norchi, J Oates, S People, Dr S People, B Price, R Pritchard, S Pritchard, R Rogers, P Standen, M Summers and P Thurgood

The following officers were present: Andrew Barratt (Chief Executive), Anica Goodwin (Executive Director Organisation), Rebecca Neill (Head of Audit & Governance and Monitoring Officer), Zoe Wolicki (Assistant Director People), Tracey Pointon (Legal Admin & Democratic Services Manager), Jodie Small (Legal, Democratic and Corporate Support Assistant) and Adam Deakin (Technical Infrastructure Engineer)

53 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence

54 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF A PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 23rd February 2021 were approved and signed as a correct record.

(Moved by Councillor J Oates and seconded by Councillor Dr. S People)

55 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

56 TO RECEIVE ANY ANNOUNCEMENTS FROM THE MAYOR, LEADER, MEMBERS OF THE CABINET OR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Councillor Dr Simon people made the following announcement -

“Thank you Madam Mayor and I had given notice of a request to speak. I appreciate your inclusion of me in this particular item.

The reason I wanted to speak tonight as I indicated to you in advance was to mark the fact that this is the last Council meeting for Councillor John Faulkner who had originally planned to step down last year and at a meeting in the March when we had to announce the special Covid measures we had said to him it looks like you're going to have to stick around a while because they're going to cancel the elections. So in a very unusual way he has completed his term with a total of 23 years of service as he did an all-out election in which he was returned and therefore did Two years then he's done this extra year as well, as well as all his service in between so whilst he wasn't the biggest fan of Boris Johnson before it's probably fair to say he didn't appreciate the extra year but nonetheless he served the Council loyally and well for a further year.

Councillor Faulkner is one of those Councillors who is widely respected because of his knowledge as he is proud to tell us he is a member of the CA rather than the FCA because the chartered accountants of Scotland were formed before the chartered accountants of England and he bears that tradition well. His extreme care and thoughtfulness on matters financial have taken the positive comments from many sides, of course he has also been accused of being political because he's got beliefs but at the end of the day he's respected and I remember former UKIP Councillor Madge saying to me how much he enjoyed John speaking because he felt like he always learnt such a great deal. He's also been a major player in recent years on the Audit & Governance Committee as one of the few Councillors who can generally say they understood all the financial regulations and is widely respected by the Officers Over the years for the expertise which he brings to those meetings.

He is of course also a former Deputy Leader of the Council and Leader of the opposition after Labour lost control and Councillor Seekings stood down so is a very long and hard working experienced Councillor and he has been a tremendous friend over the years.

I would also like to say because it's very important and you know this Madam Mayor as well as any of us, it's very important when you share that vocation with your other half and John would be the first to say that Pam was the better half and I know that one thing that will be a sadness to him tonight is that he is not able to share that greater amount of free time that he will have with the woman he loved and whom we all very much miss. She was absolutely committed to her views and opinions which she shared in politics with John and I know if she was able to be here tonight in presence she would say how proud of him she was and he's done a really hard job and he's done it really well.

So I won't go on longer than that Madam Mayor because these things are best kept to the focal point. John Faulkner will be standing down in May he's been a great servant to this Council he will fully deserve the honour of Alderman that he will be entitled once he's retired, all I would like to say on behalf of all the Councillor's I've known over the years that knew him, thank you John for your tremendous service to the Borough, to the people and to the Council. Thank you Madam Mayor."

Councillor J Oates made the following announcement -

“Yes thank you madam Mayor I think it be remiss of me not to take this opportunity to say a Thank you to Councillor Faulkner

As you know I've been here since 2000 I have had many years sitting opposite Councillor Faulkner and we've exchanged blows on a number of different issues over the years and we have disagreed on economics and we have disagreed on policies but the one thing we have both enjoyed and it's something that John has brought throughout my time at the Borough Council and that is an attention to detail and a level of memory and that a lot of others simply do not have or cannot attain and quite often I remember Councillor Faulkner back in my early days presenting me was an election leaflet I have delivered only a year before and saying when are you going to do something about this or quoting something I have said in the Tamworth times back then all the Tamworth Herald now and that politics within the chamber there will certainly be void when and Councillor Faulkner finishes in a few weeks' time.

I'm not going to go on any longer Madam Mayor I think there are plenty of examples that we can all think off where John has excelled as a Councillor both in debate and in terms of being a representative of the Community so I just wanted to put it on record my thanks to Councillor Faulkner for 23 Long years on the Council and the relentless attention to detail and the effort that he has put in so Thank you very much Madam Mayor.”

Councillor S Peaple people made the following announcement -

“Thank you very Madam Mayor I will keep this brief.

John has been a tremendous support to the people of Bolehall and I had the honour to share that ward with him. I'm going to miss him tremendously. As a fellow Councillor in Bolehall he's always been there for people, he's always good humoured, knowledgeable, Frank but always polite and a real example of what a Councillor should be. Thank you John for all the support you have given me personally. We will miss you tremendously.”

Councillor P standen by the following announcement -

“Thank you Madam Mayor I will also try and be brief.

John is a gentleman in the true sense of the word, he has greatly impressed me by his lack of selfishness he stood down as Deputy Leader of the Labour group when he could've easily carried on to encourage others into the position. His service to the people of this town has been exemplary and just one example is when we had the charges for the green bin debate at the Town Hall, John turned up there and spoke extremely passionately at that debate one day before his wife's funeral, no one would've blamed him if he hadn't turned up to that meeting. He put the needs of the Town above his own and that's the type of person he is, a true gentleman who puts others first. He's really going to be missed by this Council. Can I wish him the best of luck for the future and John don't be a stranger all the best. Thank you Madam Mayor.”

Councillor D cook made the following announcement -

“Thank you Madam Mayor I think it would be remiss of me to speak at this point

John will recall he was the Leader of the opposition when I was Leader of the Council many years ago, as Councillor Standen has just said he referred to John as a gentleman I can absolutely attest to John being a gentleman because I remember having many conversations in Marmion House just me and John over a cup of tea or coffee and whatever we discussed stayed between us we trusted each other in those roles, obviously we threw bricks at each other in the Council Chamber because that’s what is expected. Councillor People mentioned John’s wife, unfortunately I only had the pleasure of meeting John’s wife once where he charmingly introduced me to his wife as the Leader of the Vampires which gave us all great amusement and a memory I will always treasure. I personally would like to thank John for his 23 years whether we agree in politics or not that’s Public service and I would like to say from myself Thank you John.”

Councillor S Doyle made the following announcement -

“Thank you Madam Mayor I will keep this brief I would just like to basically agree with everything that’s been said about John tonight he has been a gentleman and it’s been a pleasure to deal with him on the Committees when I’ve been there as a Portfolio member and I wish him all the best. Thank you.”

Councillor J Faulkner finished off the announcements by Thanking everyone for the kind words that people had given and also the commentary regarding his late wife Pam.

57 QUESTION TIME:

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL NO.1

Under Procedure Rule No 11, Councillor S Pritchard will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor J Oates, the following question:-

“At the recent State of the Borough Debate a statement was made that the previous Labour run Council had left the Castle Grounds tiered borders barren.

During the debate it was questioned as to whether the tiered borders had in fact been left barren, due to poor management and control.

We, the Borough, were informed that the Chief Executive would be receiving a letter to ask if the tiered borders in the Castle Grounds had in fact been left barren by the previous Labour administration.

Can I ask, is there is any information available to provide evidence of the last labour Council taking the decision to leave the Castle Grounds borders barren, and the reasons behind that decision?”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“Thank you Madam Mayor, I have a recollection of a proposal for the flower beds to be grassed over but at present I cannot put my hand on any evidence of this. I’m aware that prior to the 2004/2005 budget the only flower beds that were planted within Tamworth were those within the Castle grounds, it was at this stage that Alderman John Garner pushed for a Neighbourhood in Bloom agenda and in 2006 he successfully drove a campaign for us to enter Britain in bloom the key driver for this was too was to raise pride in our place, Civic pride in Tamworth. This was supported by other initiatives such as Councillor Pritchard’s Grot Spot cameras which saw cross party support that and targeted historic litter problems in Tamworth and bearing in mind Madam Mayor this was pre camera phones and each Councillor was issued with a disposable camera so we could target those grot spots and raise that sense of pride in our Town.”

Councillor S Pritchard asked the following supplementary question-

“I refer back to the State Of Tamworth Debate a comment was made by a Labour Councillor saying that the Town had planters that were damaged, looking shabby with weeds. During my previous 10 years as a serving Councillor I recall the opposition reporting at council meetings issues around the Borough identified as problems can I ask if any labour councillors have recently submitted to council officers or Street scene any reports of issues that requiring attention or are we back to the days of trying to score political points in public meetings at the expense of our town and its reputation.”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“I don’t have any knowledge of any specific issues that have been raised, however, I do know that over the last 12 months we have not planted and supported bloom in the way we normally do due to the pandemic, so as a result last year traffic islands and bridge planters were not used. This year we are replanting the islands and we are also replacing hanging baskets but we are not doing the bridge planters - it’s about managing budgets as we come out of the pandemic. So there isn’t a bloom competition this year however, we will be bringing flowers back to the whole of the borough where we can. In terms of raising specific issues I would suggest that any councillors who do come across problems or gaps in their areas or find a spot that requires Street scenes attention they report that in the appropriate way.”

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL NO.2

Under Procedure Rule No 11, Councillor P Standen will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor J Oates, the following question:-

“Since 2018 I have been asking questions at council regarding the threat of development on our borders. Can the Leader of the Council update me and other members regarding this issue of building on our borders and the potential impact on Tamworth and its people and what communications he and his predecessor have had with government ministers and other local authorities since September 2019 when I last requested an update?”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“Works have recently commenced on the Arkle Farm Development and the potential highway impacts of this development on Tamworth are well documented. However, the monitor and manage has now been agreed to ensure the impacts are mitigated at each stage of the development. It was acknowledged at the public enquiry that the development would generate the need for an indoor sports facility in Tamworth and that Tamworth Borough Council would be able seek a CIL contribution for the development this exact amount is still to be agreed. North Warwickshire Borough Council is still considering the application at Robey’s Lane to the East of Tamworth it is our understanding that their Planning committee require a joint meeting between their members TBC members and officers before a decision can be made on this, we are still waiting for information to be received. In terms of inclusion of sites in Local Plans both Lichfield District Council and North Warwickshire Borough Council have proposed housing allocations close to Tamworth borders. NWBC plan has been through the examination in public and is going through main modification stage. The plan contains Robey’s Lane as a site for housing allocation and a larger site to the East of Polesworth. It is likely that the allocated site in Polesworth would have some impact on Tamworth’s infrastructure although the actual nature and magnitude of that impact is still unknown and will be until a detailed application is submitted.

LDC will shortly be consulting on their pre submission version of their plan although the date is unclear at this stage. Members previously raised concerns about housing allocations in Fazeley for which no transport infrastructure evidence has been provided. This required evidence is one of the outstanding pieces that will be made available as soon as it is received and this will allow TBC the opportunity to raise concerns and comments. Overall the impacts of all existing and consenting major developments on our border have had or will have some sort of mitigation through a CIL or section 106 contribution. It’s worth noting that housing is only one element in the NWBC local plan examination and the Inspector as requested further employment allocation be made and this is to allow for the provision of a strategic freight interchange. It is currently understood that this is being considered as part of the main modification procedure the wider impacts of that are still to be identified. In terms of what I’ve done I have already reached out to Leaders of neighbouring districts and Borough councils to try and set up a regular discussion where we can pick up the issues of infrastructure the pressures on Tamworth and the opportunities particularly with the conservatives Levelling up Fund and the proposed prosperity fund coming up in the future. It is important that we have these discussions so that those funding pots can be used to benefit Tamworth and the surrounding area.”

Councillor P Standen asked the following supplementary question-

“Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that any development on our borders that would add additional burdens on our town’s infrastructures and if they cannot prevent excessive problems at pinch points such as the A5 M42 junction in either Tamworth or North Warwickshire then they should not be allowed?”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“The key thing on our main argument for objecting to development on our borders has always been the pressures on our infrastructure. I have just mentioned the strategic freight interchange that will have an impact on our motorway network and Tamworth’s access to it. We have seen development taking place at the Ashby road which are putting pressure on our pinch points and I’m not talking about Arkle farm I’m talking further up and it is important we get investment for our infrastructure as if we don’t these development’s simply aren’t sustainable.”

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL NO.3

Under Procedure Rule No 11, Councillor P Standen will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor J Oates, the following question:-

“During the State of Tamworth debate last week one of the topics raise by me and other councillors was the importance of open space and how this had been highlighted by the periods of lockdown during the pandemic. Can the Leader of the Council advice what plans there are to improve access to open space in Wilnecote?”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“As mentioned recently I’ve enjoyed the open spaces in Tamworth a part of my daily allowance of exercise and this as included my recent discovery of Wilnecote Nature Reserve it was an area I’d not visited before the pandemic. It is a great local asset and in my view yes it is worthy and in need of investment as are other areas of open space in Tamworth.

It must be remembered that works around Local Nature Reserves involves Tamworth Borough Council, Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Wild Life Trust and Wild about Tamworth, just a few. So in terms of enhancing those areas it’s not just falling into the lap of the Borough Council.

At this moment I do not have details of planned investment but would remind members but would remind members that in the next couple of months we will be replacing out Indoor and outdoor Sports Strategy and that at the same time we will be replacing our Open Space Assessment and I’m looking forward to seeing the results of that and resourcing investment into those open spaces.”

Councillor P Standen asked the following supplementary question-

“Does the Leader of the Council agree with me that access to open space all year round is of benefit to the people of Wilnecote and provide provision of a permanent hard material rather than the current gravel dirt paths within the Kettlebrook Lake reserve would in encourage use in inclement weather.”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“The challenge that local nature reserves bring is the interpretation that they are nature reserves and therefore should be left and I disagree with I think they should be maintained in terms of the plant growth in there so we can encourage

native species to flourish and don't get covered by other plants and taken over by brambles albeit nature's way. I also have mixed feelings about paving local nature reserves. I've walked through Wilnecote nature reserve and when I've walked through a couple of weeks ago it was fantastic because it was frozen there was frost on the ground and it was a nice firm surface. I walked through it a few days later when it has warmed up and I was up to my knees in mud. So I do think we need to strike a balance whether that be hard paving or another type of surface so that we can enjoy a different offers that those open space provides for us. One of those other types of offers is Kettlebrook nature reserve and Belgrave lakes and there is an informal footpath round one of the lakes and you can actually do a figure of 8 circuit round if you wanted to. Unfortunately, because it's informal and hasn't has any surfacing on the trees have overgrown it. We do need to make investment to those surfaces but I also think we should be measured in our approach let get the open space assessment done, lets welcome back Wild about Tamworth and the Staffordshire Wild Life Trust who furloughed most of their staff last year and didn't do any of the work that they normally do and let's take stock of where we are and set out a proper investment programme into our open spaces so that we preserve the nature reserve element but also have the opportunity for the public to enjoy them."

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL NO.4

Under Procedure Rule No 11, Councillor Dr S People will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor J Oates, the following question:-

"At the State of Tamworth Debate, the idea was proposed, by a Conservative councillor, that as Leader of the Council you should create more Cabinet posts or Deputy Cabinet posts as this would be a worthwhile investment of taxpayer's cash. As managers at Tamworth Borough Council have had to go through a rigorous process to justify all vacancies in order to cut costs, how would you justify spending more money on Conservative councillors? We have a well-established agreement that Councillor's allowances rise or fall in line with those of staff remuneration, which this year will mean 0% as the government have chosen not to reward the staff for their excellent work during the pandemic – is this just a disguised pay increase for some Tory councillors?"

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

"Last week's State of The Borough debate saw 23/30 councillors sharing their thoughts and opinions, some related to tbc services, some community offer, some referred to the pressures on people and businesses in Tamworth, and some the services and support of other elements of the public sector. Every single suggestion had its own merits.

The speech you refer to was one of the contributions from a councillor and I would suggest that if you would like to further discuss any individual suggestions from the SoTB debate I would recommend speaking to the individual on a one to one basis."

Councillor Dr S People asked the following supplementary question-

“Can I ask him whether in between the need to follow through on his promises on becoming Leader He will give thought to ensuring that posts that need to be filled are filled before additional allowances are paid out to Councillors because in my experience the need for experienced officers is actually greater than the need for additional Councillor allowances because we can all contribute in many ways without those additional allowances a I wonder what is thoughts are?”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“I am not aware of any plans to increase pay for Councillors or any Special Responsibilities in terms of treading a tight rope the conservative group is led on the understanding that we are a broad church and we are not afraid to consider other people’s views opinions and input whether that is within the group and outside the group I am quite happy to listen to anyone’s suggestions how we can do things better I may not agree with them they may not come to any fruition but we are here to listen and represent and that’s what I intend to continue to do.”

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL NO.5

Under Procedure Rule No 11, Councillor Dr S Peple will ask the Leader of the Council, Councillor J Oates, the following question:-

“The Skills Advisory Panel of the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP, stated that Tamworth was the work location most at risk in the UK from automation, with 56% of jobs at risk. The Stoke and Staffordshire LEP therefore made Tamworth one of its four pilot areas for improving skills and employability and Rawlett pupils have received some valuable benefit. Does the Leader of the Council agree that it is therefore paramount that the Council supports the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP’s drive to re-skill / upskill the local workforce?”

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

“We’ve discussed and mentioned skills and aspiration on many occasions over the years. The skills and aspirations of our residents are key to how Tamworth’s economy recovers from the pandemic but also the challenge that Cllr Peple as raised in terms of automation and the potential impact of AI. Now our workforce needs to evolve to future proof itself and make the most of the opportunities of a changing job market. It is important that this council is able to influence and support a variety of partners who seek to reskill upskill or adapt the local workforce and future work force this does include the Stoke and Staffordshire LEP and the excellent work that they are doing in Tamworth at the moment.”

Councillor Dr S Peple asked the following supplementary question-

“I understand that the Rawlett pupils did extremely well and would therefore like to ask the Leader to join me in congratulating them and the staff on what was achieved and look forward to seeing that spread throughout the town because one of the things that seems to me to be most important in LEP’s and which I raised when I was Tamworth representative in the West Midlands was this idea

that many LEPs have targets for how many graduate jobs they are going to create they don't then say and how do we create the people to put from here so there tends to be this idea that you bring in talented people and I think we've all said before and I would like to ask the Leader to confirm his commitment that we want to not only raise skills by bringing in skilled people but want to raise the skills and aspirations of our people so they can benefit from the jobs that are available as other jobs cease to be."

Councillor J Oates gave the following reply:-

"Firstly, yes I would like to share Cllr People's congratulations of the success and the achievements the Rawlett's pupils had who were involved in this project. In terms of raising skills and aspirations

Cllr People and I have commented a number of times how LEPs tick off their performance indicators as it were and we need to make sure that we are measuring the right things and I do share the opinion about bringing in skilled people as a way of increasing skill levels but also we need to upskill our home grown talent and get them into a situation where they can make the most of the opportunities that are coming up. The council is committed to this, we are supporting Staffordshire County Council in terms of the apprenticeship support and the entrepreneur in young people opportunities that are being supported by our additional restrictions grant funding, we are also hosting a Skills Officer on behalf of the GBSLEP which supports Southern Staffordshire Employment Skills Board and that has a particular focus on future skills. And as we are all aware the Future High Street Fund as a pivotal project with the college, I'd also draw member's attention to the other opportunities that are being thrust upon us we know HS2 has received royal assent and have an apprenticeship centre at the Belfry and have identified a massive skills gap in terms of civil engineering and project management. We need to promote these opportunities for the people of Tamworth to make the best of what's out there and get them on the ladder to high skilled high paid careers going forward."

58 GENDER PAY GAP REPORT 2020

The report of the Leader of the Council to brief Elected Members on Tamworth Borough Council's position with respect to the Gender Pay Gap as at 31st March 2020.

RESOLVED: That Council

Endorsed the gender pay gap data based on the snap-shot date of 31st March 2020 and in doing so comply with The Equality Act 2010 (Gender Pay Gap Information) Regulations 2017.

(Moved by Councillor J Oates and seconded by Councillor Dr.S Peuple

59 APPOINTMENT OF THE MONITORING OFFICER

The report of the Chief Executive Officer to seek Council approval to appoint to the statutory post of Monitoring Officer in accordance with the Council's Constitution and local government legislation.

RESOLVED: That Council

Approved the temporary appointment of Lorraine Fowkes (Director Legal and Governance) (Monitoring Officer) South Staffs Council with effect from 5th April 2021 for a period a temporary period of 3 months.

(Moved by Councillor J Oates and seconded by Councillor R Bilcliff)

The Mayor