

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 01 APRIL 2009

Attendance:

The Mayor (Councillor Kimber) (P) (in the Chair);

The Deputy Mayor (Councillor Mrs Searle);

Councillors Allen, Mrs Bailey (P), Ms Ballard (P), Beavis (P), Bradley (P), Burgess (P), Carr (P), Carter (P), Champion, Chegwyn (P), Mrs Cully (P), Cully (P), Dickson (P), Edgar (P), Edwards (P), Mrs Forder (P), Forder (P), Foster-Reed (P), Geddes, Gill (P), Hicks (P), Hook (P), Langdon (P), Mrs Mudie, Murphy (P), Philpott (P), Mrs Salter (P), Salter (P), Smith (P), Ward, Miss West (P) and Wright (P).

Also in attendance: Honorary Alderman O'Neill.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting were submitted on behalf of the Deputy Mayor and Councillors Allen, Champion, Geddes, Mrs Mudie and Ward and Honorary Aldermen Hayward, Lucas and Rushton.

MINUTES

COUNCIL RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Ordinary and Extraordinary meetings of the Council held on 4 and 23 February and 9 March 2009 be confirmed and signed.

MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS

(A) TORONTO PLACE FIRE (22 MARCH 2009)

The Mayor referred to the large fire at the industrial estate in Toronto Place on Sunday, 22 March. The Council's Emergency Team were very much involved with this incident and supported the emergency services throughout the day.

In this light the Mayor on behalf of the Council wished to thank Ian Smith, Stevyn Ricketts, Shelagh Smithson, Julie-Ann Gale, Jess Wilson, Samantha Higham, Sally Stanton and Mark Wise for all their hard work and to send the Council's thanks for all they did on the day.

(B) SUMMER PASSPORT

The Mayor advised that on the agenda for tonight's meeting there was mention of the Summer Passport. This he acknowledged is an excellent scheme that was a great success last year and those members who attended

the recent presentation will know that it is to be extended this year across the Borough.

In the circumstances the Mayor on behalf of the Council wished to thank Jamie O'Reilly, Sam Mitchell and Carly Northcott for all they had done in devising and running this scheme for the young people of the Borough.

**(C) CHAIRMAN'S URGENT ITEM
REVISED COUNCIL DWELLING RENTS 2009/10**

The Mayor reported that he had a Chairman's urgent item on the above matter. He recommended that the Council take this item as the last item on the agenda.

COUNCIL RESOLVED; That the Chairman's urgent item on 'Revised Council Dwelling Rents 2009/10' be taken as the last item on the agenda.

(D) GOSPORTEERS

The Mayor received a cheque for £4,500 from a Gosporters' delegation towards his Mayoral Charities. The Mayor thanked the Gosporters for their hard work over the past year and reported that the Gosporters were always looking for able volunteers to help them with their charitable work.

PART II MINUTES

COUNCIL RESOLVED: That the following Part II Minutes be received:

Policy and Organisation Board: 11 March 2009 (Minute Nos. 69 – 76).

Community and Environment Board: 2 March 2009 (Minute Nos. 65 – 70).

Housing Board: 4 March 2009 (Minute Nos. 45 – 49).

**ANNUAL REPORT ON THE WORK OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE FOR THE MUNICIPAL YEAR 2008/09**

NOTE: Councillor Edgar declared a personal interest in this item; in that any decisions he made on this item would not affect any decision he made as a Hampshire County Councillor. Councillor Edgar accordingly remained in the Council Chamber.

Councillor Forder, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, introduced this report. He advised that at its meeting on 18 March 2009 the Committee had considered this item and agreed its referral to this Council meeting. Paragraph 6.04 of the Council's Constitution provided that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must report annually to full Council on their

working and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.

The Committee had completed the following reports:

- New Councillor Induction (Standards & Governance Committee)
- Cycle Lanes (Community & Environment Board)
- Noise Monitoring (Community & Environment Board)
- Services for the Elderly (Council)

The following information had been received and debated:

- Performance Information
- Community Strategy Action Plan
- Disability Equality Scheme
- Race Equality Annual Report
- Progress Report on the Gosport Community Strategy

Two training sessions had been organised for all Councillors (including those who were not Committee members):

- Role of the Committee in a Fourth Option Council; what Overview and Scrutiny entails and how success might be achieved (Linda Edwards/Ian Lycett)
- 'Effective Questioning' (Simon Baddeley, Birmingham University)

A watching brief was being kept with regard to developments concerning the Sustainable Communities Act, 2007 and Calls for Action and Local Petitions (Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007). The committee had also committed itself to review the out-turn budget on an annual basis, commencing in July 2009.

COUNCIL RESOLVED: That the Annual Report be received.

CONFERENCE ON LONELINESS AND ISOLATION AMONGST THE ELDERLY

Councillor Forder, Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, introduced this report. He reported that at its meeting on 18 March 2009 the Committee had considered this item and agreed a number of recommendations to this Council meeting.

The report referred to a Report of the Services for the Elderly Working Group. Councillor Forder wished to pay particular thanks to Mr Frank Dunn, Age Concern, Gosport for his invaluable advice. The Working Group came up with a number of conclusions, one of which was that there is much evidence to suggest that loneliness and isolation are major and growing problems. There is a widespread suspicion and considerable anecdotal evidence to suggest that the problem is more widespread than is generally recognised.

The recommendation of the Working Group was therefore that the Council explore the possibility of organising and hosting a conference on loneliness and isolation among the elderly. Local churches, scout groups, schools, charities and other voluntary bodies would be invited to the conference. It is anticipated that the conference would work together with participants exchanging information about good practice and generating strategies that could help in addressing the issues and considering ways in which they could contribute to alleviating the problems.

The Council considered the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 18 March 2009.

COUNCIL RESOLVED: That approval be given to:

- a) **the organising and hosting of a conference on loneliness and isolation amongst the elderly;**
- b) **the establishment of a Steering Group to consider the organisation and aims of the conference; and**
- c) **the following nominations to sit on the Steering Group – Councillors Allen, Dickson, Mrs Forder and Forder.**

CHAIRMAN'S URGENT ITEM – REVISED COUNCIL DWELLING RENTS 2009/10

By reason of special circumstances, the Mayor determined that this item be considered at this meeting notwithstanding the fact that the item had not been available for public inspection in accordance with the provisions of Section 100B(4)(a) of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985.

The special circumstances were created by the Council having to respond to a consultation by the Department of Communities and Local Government which involved consideration of rent levels as at today's date.

The above report related to a matter which was decided by Council on 4 February this year. However since that date there had been such a change in circumstances that it would be in the best interests of the Council for the matter to be reconsidered. The Mayor confirmed that the Leader and the Borough Solicitor had been consulted.

In such circumstances the Mayor moved that the Housing Services and the Financial Services Manager be allowed to present the report and answer any questions from members upon it.

COUNCIL RESOLVED: That the Housing Services Manager and Financial Services Manager be allowed to present the Revised Council Dwelling Rents 2009/10 report and answer any questions from Members upon it.

The Housing Services Manager reported that on 4 February 2009, Full Council had approved the following increases with effect from 6 April 2009:

- (a) The average weekly Council dwelling rents to increase by 6.8%
- (b) Garage, carports and parking lot rents to increase by 5.00%.

Since the Full Council meeting on 4 February 2009 there had been a significant change in circumstances following the Housing Minister's announcement on Friday, 6 March 2009. A letter was sent by the DCLG on 11 March 2009 with the intention of providing Councils with an indication of how the new guideline rent increase for 2009 – 10 would be implemented and how it would be treated in the subsidy system. This was followed by the issue of the HRA amending determination consultation paper which was received on 26 March 2009.

The paper stated:

“The original average increase in guideline rent published for December 2009 – 10 was 6.2%. This comprised a general increase in guideline for all councils and an element due to convergence to formula rents. The new guideline rent increase for 2009 – 10 is 3.1%...It is intended that those councils that accept our offer and reduce their actual rent increases will be compensated on the following basis:-

It the Council's 2009 – 10 average actual rent increase is less than or equal to the lower of 3.1%:-

- average guideline rent in 2008-09; or
- actual average rent in 2008-09

then we will give each council the increase in subsidy that a change in the national average guideline increase of 3.1% would result in for that council.”

The impact on the HRA of implementing the reduced rent increase was a loss in revenue of approximately £340,000. Using the current consultation determination this would be partially offset by a reduction in subsidy payable of approximately £320,000. This indicated a net loss to the HRA of £20,000. The DCLG had indicated that it expected authorities would have the resources necessary to cover additional costs that fall upon the HRA. The DCLG also refer to additional one-off costs that fall on the General Fund with particular regard to the administration of housing benefit arising from the proposed changes. DCLG had asked for an indication of such costs with the potential to reimburse authorities where they consider this to be an unreasonable additional burden. All other sections of the Housing Revenue Account Subsidy Determination 2009 – 10 would remain as set by the DCLG in December 2008.

It is expected that the DCLG would issue the final amending determination in May 2009 (after the close of the consultation period).

COUNCIL RESOLVED: That approval be given to:

- (a) the average weekly Council dwelling rents increasing by 3.1% with effect from 1 April 2009;**
- (b) officers responding to the DCLG consultation by 10am on 24 April 2009 indicating this Council's intention to reduce the rental increase for its tenants down to 3.1% (from the original approved increase of 6.8%) from the 1 April 2009; and**
- (c) that if, subsequently, the actual Housing Revenue Account determination is unfavourable for this authority, that the Full Council accepts that rents will need to be increased in order to maintain the sustainability of the Housing Revenue Account.**

VOTE OF THANKS

The Council unanimously thanked the Mayor for the way he had chaired Council meetings throughout the Municipal Year.

The meeting ended at 7.00pm