

Cannock Chase Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Council

Held via Remote Access

On Wednesday 21 April 2021 at 6:00 p.m.

Part 1

PRESENT: Councillors:

Dudson, A. (Chairman)
Witton, P.T. (Vice-Chairman)

Adamson, G. (Leader)	Layton, A.
Alcott, G.	Lyons, Miss O.
Allen, F.W.C.	Martin, Mrs. C.E.
Boucker, A.S.	Mitchell, Mrs. C.
Buttery, M.S.	Molineux, G.N.
Cartwright, Mrs.S.M.	Muckley, A.M.
Crabtree, S.K.	Newbury, J.A.A.
Davis, Mrs. M.A.	Pearson, A.R.
Dunnett, Ms. A.J.	Preece, J.P.T.L.
Fisher, P.A.	Smith, C.D.
Fitzgerald, Mrs. A.A.	Startin, P.D.
Freeman, Miss M.A.	Stretton, Mrs. P.Z., M.B.E.
Hewitt, P.M.	Sutherland, M.
Hughes, R.J.	Sutton, Mrs. H.M.
Johnson, J.P.	Thompson, Mrs. S.L.
Johnson, T.B.	Todd, Mrs. D.M.
Jones, B.	Wilkinson, Ms. C.L.
Jones, Mrs. V.	Woodhead, P.E.
Kraujalis, J.T.	

Prior to the commencement of the formal business of the meeting, the Chairman reported on the extremely sad news of the death of HRH Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh on Friday 9 April at Windsor Castle, with Her Majesty The Queen at his side.

The Council had joined the rest of the Country in an eight-day period of mourning, and the Union Flag at the front of the Civic Centre was flown at half-mast as a mark of respect.

The Council's thoughts were with Her Majesty The Queen, and the rest of the Royal Family at this sad time.

All Members then joined the Chairman in a minutes silence to show their respects and to remember a remarkable national figure.

93. Apologies

Apologies were submitted for Councillor C. Bennett.

94. Declarations of Interests of Members in Contracts and Other Matters and Restriction on Voting by Members

No other Declarations of Interests were made in addition to those already confirmed by Members in the Register of Members' Interests.

(Councillor Mrs. D.M. Todd joined the meeting at the start of this item.)

95. Minutes

Resolved:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2021, and the Extraordinary meeting held on 11 March 2021, be approved as a correct record.

(Councillor R.J. Hughes lost connection to the meeting during this item and did not return.)

96. Questions Received from the Public under Council Procedure Rule 4B(c)

- (i) The following question was submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 4B(c) by member of the public, Sarah Findlay:

"The government pledged to phase out peat usage by local authorities by 2015 and private gardeners by 2020 can we have assurance that council parks and gardens are no longer using any products containing peat?"

Councillor Mrs. C. Mitchell, Culture and Sport Portfolio Leader, provided the following response:

"I welcome this question from Ms. Findlay, and in order to respond, I have spoken to the Council's Parks and Open Spaces Manager who is responsible for designing and procuring the Council's floral displays which adorn our parks, open spaces, highways and town centres. and which represent the biggest use of peat-based composts along with the refurbishment of tree and shrub beds in the District.

Progress has been made in reducing peat use, and since 2011, the Council has reduced its usage in respect of its winter bedding displays by 50%. Winter bedding displays are those that are planted in November and flower in May/June the following year.

In addition, the summer bedding planted in June is now produced in a 30% peat free compost in accordance with the latest research by the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service (ADAS). Similarly, we use hanging baskets with a water irrigation system to reduce the levels of peat used.

The other areas of peat use, such as mulching of shrub beds and improving soil conditions when replanting, has been completely removed by using waste bark chippings from the Council's tree operations and the use of peat free soil conditioners composted in each of the staffed parks.

It is fair to say that although there are some alternative composts which do not contain peat and that have been trialled as part of the ADAS 5-year trials, they are not yet produced widely, meaning that at this time it is not possible to completely phase out the use of peat.

However, as these peat free composts become more widely available, the Council will switch over to nurseryman/plant growers who adopt these peat free alternatives as part of their business. This would then allow the Council to be 100% peat free as opposed to currently been 80% peat free."

97. Chairman's Announcements and Correspondence

(i) Member Retirements

As Members were aware, this was the last full Council meeting prior to the May elections and Annual Council meeting.

Three serving Members retiring from their positions this year, and so the opportunity was being taken to acknowledge their service to the Council, as this would be their last meeting.

Firstly, Councillors Carl Bennett and Maureen Freeman, who both had 9 years' service as Ward Councillors for Cannock Chase Council.

Councillor Bennett was appointed as a Cabinet Member and held this position from May 2013 until May 2020 and had also sat on several Council Committees.

Councillor Maureen Freeman was Vice-Chairman of the Council and subsequently became Chairman of the Council in May 2015 holding office for 12 months. She also sat on many Council Committees.

Councillors Bennett and Freeman had been a credit to the Council and the residents of the District. They would be missed in the Chamber, and on behalf of all Members and Council Officers, they were sent the Council's best wishes.

It would be remiss not to give a special mention to the third Member who was retiring. Councillor Gordon Alcott was stepping down from the Council after 51 continuous years' service with the Council. This was sure to be a record for the Authority for many years to come, if not an unbeaten record.

Councillor Alcott was usually the person you would go to, to find out the history of the Authority or a Councillor; he would recite stories of memorable moments and achievements. It was fair to say however, that it was not quite so easy to find someone who could provide the same level of information about Councillor Alcott, as he has survived many of his colleagues.

Councillor Alcott was a retired ambulance-man, and first elected as a Councillor on Cannock Urban District Council in 1970 representing St. Aidans and St. Chads Wards, before becoming a Cannock Chase District Councillor in 1973 representing the Cannock North Ward when Cannock and Rugeley Urban Councils merged.

Councillor Alcott had most likely sat on every Council Committee there had ever been, on occasions being Chairman or Vice-Chairman of a Committee, as well as representing the Council on many Outside Bodies. Councillor Alcott was also a long serving Governor of what was Blake Comprehensive School, now Staffordshire University Academy.

He held office of Vice-Chairman of the Council and was Chairman of the Council on three occasions in 1979-80, 1987-88 and 2010-11. Councillor Alcott was also Leader of the Council for a time in the early 1990s and had been a Cabinet Member since 2011 and Deputy Leader of the Council since 2015.

Councillor Alcott had worked tirelessly for the Council, seeing many important projects come to fruition, for example, working alongside people like Ethel Powell and others to secure the building of Cannock Hospital.

Without question, Councillor Alcott's dedication to the Authority and the residents of Cannock Chase was exemplary, and he would be a great loss to the Council, not just for his devotion but also his knowledge. Councillor Alcott would be greatly missed, and on behalf of all Members and Officers, he was thanked sincerely for his service and hard work to the District of Cannock Chase and sent him the Council's very best wishes.

Several other Members then spoke to share their memories and pass on best wishes for the future and thanks to Councillors Alcott, Bennett, and Freeman.

98. Leader's Announcements and Correspondence

(i) Covid-19 Update

The Covid-19 case rate for Cannock Chase was now only 7 per 100,000 residents, which was a massive drop from the 400 plus figures that the District had late last year.

The Leader again thanked the wonderful NHS staff, key workers and amazing volunteers who had worked so hard to keep people safe and well throughout the pandemic. He noted that this was not the time for everyone to lower their guards, but to abide by the guidelines.

(ii) Building of New Council Housing

The Council was proceeding with its new housing developments. The scheme at the Hawks Green Depot site was well advanced, and the plans for the environmentally friendly homes on the former Aelfgar site in Rugeley had been granted planning consent. The proposals for the new site in Chadsmoor were going out to consultation soon. After many years of being unable to build new council houses, the Council was doing its best to try to meet at least some of the local need for social housing.

(iii) McArthurGlen Designer Outlet

The new Designer Village had now opened and was proving very successful and popular. It had brought massive investment into the District, created hundreds of new jobs for local people, and was putting Cannock Chase on the national retail map. Phase 2 of the scheme was also looked forward to.

(iv) New Cannock Chase Cemetery and Crematorium

Significant progress continued to be made on the new cemetery despite the pandemic, shortage of materials and the unfortunate circumstances resulting in the original contractor going into administration. The civil, landscaping and building works were on track to be completed by the end of this month, with the opening planned for some time between 17 May (when hopefully Stage 2 of the Government's roadmap to recovery would be confirmed and restrictions eased further), and the end of May. The time between completion and opening would allow all safe processes and procedures to be put in place and tested.

The new crematorium opened on 19 April.

Leisure and Culture Services

As Members would know, this had been a difficult time for the Council's culture and leisure operator, Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles (IHL). The Council had supported and worked with IHL through this challenging time to ensure that the District's residents would continue to have the opportunity to enjoy the fantastic leisure and cultural facilities. Most of the facilities were now re-opening safely again with both leisure centres opening on 12 April, together with 5's at Bradbury Lane and Cannock Park Golf course, which was fully booked within 40 minutes of re-opening on 29 March. The Prince of Wales Theatre box office was due to re-open on 17 May in anticipation of the full easing of restrictions in June, and the Museum was set to re-open on 20 May.

Part of the Council's support to IHL had involved entering into contracts for the installation of a new boiler at Rugeley Leisure Centre and repairs to the pool that unfortunately occurred during lockdown. Transferring these contracts to the Council had been a complicated legal process, but it was pleasing to announce that a pre-start meeting with the contractor had been held this afternoon for the boiler works that were due to start on site on 17 May, and Officers are working toward a start date of 28 May for the pool refurbishment works and would be able to confirm this shortly.

It was also pleasing to announce that works (circa £800,000) on extending the Artificial Grass Pitch at Rugeley Leisure Centre were also due to start on 17 May and all three projects, the boiler, the pool, and the pitch should be completed by the Summer.

99. Questions Received under Council Procedure Rule 8

(i) The following question was submitted in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 8 by Councillor B. Jones, Community Safety and Partnerships Shadow Portfolio Leader:

"The Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee receives a yearly Special Responsibility Allowance of £1,918.81.

The current Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Carl Bennett, has not attended any Community Scrutiny Committee meetings this financial year, and therefore has been unable to Chair any of them.

As the Vice-Chairman of the Community Scrutiny Committee, I have had the privilege of Chairing all three committee meetings held this financial year, a role which I have thoroughly enjoyed. I wish to make clear that in the absence of the Chair I see this as my absolute responsibility and my question is not about me undertaking this function.

However, as this is Cannock Chase Taxpayers money, could Councillor Carl Bennett please confirm whether he has received the Special Responsibility Allowance for this financial year and if so, does he intend to repay it?"

The Chairman advised that due to Councillor Bennett having given apologies for today's meeting, a written response to the question would be provided to Councillor B. Jones.

100. Recommendations Referred from Cabinet, Committees, etc.

Consideration was given to the following recommendations to Council, made by Cabinet at its meetings held on 4 March and 1 April 2021, in respect of:

(i) Local Development Scheme 2021-24 (Minute No. 92, 04/03/21)

"That Council be recommended to approve the revised Local Development Scheme 2021-24, as set out at Appendix 1 of the 4 March 2021 Cabinet report, in order that it can be brought into effect on 21 April 2021."

Resolved:

That the revised Local Development Scheme 2021-24, as set out in Appendix 1 of the 4 March 2021 Cabinet report, be approved in order that it can be brought into effect on 21 April 2021.

(ii) 3 Year Delivery Plans 2021-24 (Draft Minute No. 104, 01/04/21)

"That Council be recommended to approve the 3 Year Delivery Plans for 2021-24 as set out in Appendices 1 to 3 of the 1 April 2021 Cabinet report."

Resolved:

That the 3 Year Delivery Plans for 2021-24, as set out in Appendices 1 to 3 of the 1 April 2021 Cabinet report, be approved.

(Councillor P.E. Woodhead requested that his name be recorded as having voted against this recommendation.)

(iii) Proposed Changes to Scrutiny Committees to Align with the Corporate Plan 2021-24 (Draft Minute No. 105, 01/04/21).

"That Council be recommended to dissolve the existing four Scrutiny Committees, and with effect from the start of the 2021-22 municipal year, establish three new Scrutiny Committees for:

- Economic Recovery
- Health & Wellbeing, and
- Financially Resilient Council"

Resolved:

That the existing four Scrutiny Committees be dissolved, and with effect from the start of the 2021-22 municipal year, three new Scrutiny Committees be established for:

- Economic Recovery
- Health & Wellbeing, and
- Financially Resilient Council.

101. Feedback from the Stage 3 Complaints Review Working Group

Councillor A.M. Muckley provided feedback from the Stage 3 Complaints Review Working Group held on 11 March, noting that had been a cross-party Group with involvement from Officers. A good variety of opinions and views had been put forward about Members' involvement in stage 3 of the Council's complaints process, and it was decided that this approach had very little value overall as most stage 3 complainants would go to the Local Government Ombudsman anyway.

The working group recommended that stage 3 complaints be removed from the remit of the Appeals and Complaints Panel but suggested that Members could perhaps be involved at stage 2 instead to help complainants feel they were getting a holistic and independent service.

Concerns were raised about the time taken to prepare for and take part in the stage 3 panel meetings, the level of Officer and Member resource required, and the increasingly adversarial nature of such meetings. A lack of training for Members on how to deal with final stage complaints had also been identified. It was noted that no other councils in Staffordshire had these panels in place, and it had been difficult to find examples from elsewhere.

It was therefore the view of the working group that stage 3 panels should end, but anyone still currently going through the process could ask for their complaint to be referred to a panel if they had been advised this was an option.

The working group had also requested to meet again to discuss Members' involvement at stage 2 of the complaints process.

The recommendation to remove stage 3 from the Appeals and Complaints Panel's terms of reference had been submitted to the Constitution Working Group for consideration, and they agreed with the proposal.

Other Members of the Stage 3 working group then spoke in support of what was discussed at the meeting on 11 March and the recommendations proposed, particularly the need to ensure fairness of proceedings for all involved, and the need for training, where relevant.

102. Motions Received under Council Procedure Rule 6

None received.

103. Comments and Questions on Part 1 Minutes of Cabinet, Committees, Sub-Committees and Panels under Rule 9

None received.

104. Review of Hackney Carriage / Private Hire Driver, Vehicle & Operator Licensing Policy and National Register of Taxi Licence Revocations and Refusals (NR3)

Consideration was given to the Report of the Head of Economic Prosperity (Item 12.1 – 12.90 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The Hackney Carriage / Private Hire Driver, Vehicle & Operator Licensing Policy, as included at Appendix 1 of the report, be approved, and adopted.
- (B) The Head of Economic Prosperity be authorised to determine the mechanisms for implementation of all driver training requirements within the Policy.
- (C) The Head of Economic Prosperity be authorised to make any amendments to the Policy required due to changes in legislation or government guidance and minor variations to the Policy in the interests of service improvement.
- (D) The National Register of Taxi Licence Revocations and Refusals (NR3) Policy, as included at Appendix 7 of the report, be approved, and adopted.

105. Constitution Amendments

Consideration was given to the Report of the Monitoring Officer (Item 13.1 – 13.16 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The proposed amendments to the Constitution, as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.
- (B) The revised terms of reference for the Scrutiny Committees, and the amendment to the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules, as detailed in Appendix 2 of the report, be approved.

106. Calendar of Meetings 2021-22

Consideration was given to the Report of the Interim Managing Director (Item 14.1 – 14.11 of the Official Minutes of the Council).

Resolved:

That:

- (A) The Calendar of Meetings 2021-22, as included at Appendix 1 of the report, be approved.
- (B) The Managing Director, in consultation with the Chairman of the Council, relevant Chairmen of Committees and / or Leader of the Council, as appropriate, be authorised to amend the Calendar of Meetings, through convening additional meetings, or the postponement / cancellation of meetings, if required.

107. Comments and Questions on Part 2 Minutes of Cabinet, Committees, Sub-Committees and Panels under Rule 9

None received.

The meeting closed at 7:28 p.m.

CHAIRMAN