

MINUTES

COUNCIL

THURSDAY, 22 JANUARY 2015

2.00 PM



PRESENT

Councillor Reginald Howard Chairman

Councillor Bob Adams
Councillor Mark Ashberry
Councillor Ray Auger
Councillor Harrish Bisnauthsing
Councillor Pam Bosworth
Councillor Robert Broughton
Councillor Teri Bryant
Councillor Paul Carpenter
Councillor Mrs Frances Cartwright
Councillor Ibis Channell
Councillor George Chivers
Councillor Kelham Cooke
Councillor Nick Craft
Councillor Alan Davidson
Councillor Phil Dilks
Councillor Mrs Rosemary Kaberry-Brown
Councillor Vic Kerr
Councillor Michael King
Councillor Dr Peter Moseley
Councillor David Nalson
Councillor Mrs. Linda Neal
Councillor John Nicholson

Councillor Helen Powell
Councillor Nick Robins
Councillor Graddon Rowlands
Councillor Bob Russell
Councillor Bob Sampson
Councillor Susan Sandall
Councillor Bob Sandall
Councillor Ian Selby
Councillor Mrs Judy Smith
Councillor John Smith
Councillor Jacky Smith
Councillor Peter Stephens
Councillor Judy Stevens
Councillor Adam Stokes
Councillor Mike Taylor
Councillor Mrs Jean Taylor
Councillor Jeff Thompson
Councillor Frank Turner
Councillor Bruce Wells
Councillor Paul Wood
Councillor Rosemary H Woolley
Councillor Raymond Wootten

OFFICERS

Chief Executive (Beverly Agass)
Strategic Directors (Tracey Blackwell,
Daren Turner)

OFFICERS

Executive Manager, Corporate (Lucy
Youles)
Principal Democracy Officer (Jo Toomey)

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47. PUBLIC OPEN FORUM

Question 1

To: Councillor Mrs Linda Neal, Leader of the Council
From: Mr. A. Baxter, Deeping St. James

You will remember that I asked a question back in September 2013 regarding the possible response to the Lincolnshire County Council library consultation. Despite requests from some Councillors in this chamber, I do not think the District Council responded publicly to the County Council consultation.

Over the next two weeks, the County Council Executive will once again be considering the future of our libraries. Market Deeping Town Council, Deeping St James Parish Council and the recently formed Friends of Deeping Library have all stated consistently and unambiguously that they wish to see the Deepings retain a properly funded and professionally staffed library. A petition of over 8,000 signatories, most of whom were local residents, said very much the same thing.

For the record, could you please state clearly and unambiguously whether or not it is your view as Leader of the District Council and as an individual Councillor that it would be in everyone's best interest for the Deepings Library to have properly paid staff and adequate funding, and that this would be best achieved either by the County Council reclassifying the Deepings Library as a 'Tier 2' facility or failing that by including the Deepings Library in the County's proposed procurement process so that potential private sector partners have the option to work with all concerned to maintain a proper library for the Deepings.

Response (transcript)

Thank you, Mr Chairman, thank you Mr Baxter for the question and in response to your question I don't think that my personal view will have any influence on the ultimate outcome. It is a decision that the County Council will make but thank you for the question anyway. And firstly I would like to advise that I spoke personally to both the Leader of the County Council and to the Portfolio Holder at the time of the original consultation on separate occasions assuring them of our concerns for the library provision going forward and particularly for those that are in our district. A response was also submitted by the Council during the consultation period. I have a copy of that response for your information. I realise that there is considerable strength of feeling regarding future library provision in the Deepings and I would like to see the best possible provision of library services not only in the Deepings but also across the whole district. I am sure this would also be the wish of the County Council who deliver the services were finances to allow. There is a very active local voice on this issue and I would urge them to continue to have strong and positive dialogue with the decision-makers at Lincolnshire County Council to derive the best possible

outcome for the local community and to secure support for future provision. If this council can help in any way to look to facilitate the discussion, we would be pleased to do so. Ultimately it is a decision for the members of the County Council and it is a decision that they will no doubt consider very carefully in these very financially challenging times.

Supplementary Question (transcript)

Thank you for those words. I hadn't realised that you'd responded to the original consultation and in answer to your offer that is for anything that you can do, yes, there is. Clearly at this point, this is real D-Day for the Deepings Library and the voice of the Leader of the District Council on behalf of the District Council to clearly and unambiguously state that you would rather have a professionally staffed and adequately funded library would make all the difference. We have tried as a community in the Deepings to get the County Council to adjust their proposals in light of the large population using the Deepings library but so far despite the two consultations, the public meetings, the public protests, the petitions, the County Council's position remains exactly the same as it was on the day of the first mention of the potential closure of the libraries.

Will you please write or phone or e-mail the Leader and the Portfolio Holder at Lincolnshire County Council saying that you clearly and unambiguously as a Council support the Deepings Library in its current state. Clearly and unambiguously say that the Deepings needs a professionally staffed and adequately funded library.

Response (transcript)

Yes I will.

Members noted that the final deadline by which submissions relating to library provision had to be made to Lincolnshire County Council was Monday 26 January 2015.

Question 2

To: Councillor Phil Dilks
From: Mr. A. Baxter, Deeping St. James

In recent months I have asked SKDC cabinet members some questions about openness, transparency and democracy in Lincolnshire and particularly here in South Kesteven.

In light of their answers and in the interest of balance, may I ask you, on the public record, as one of my elected District Councillors, how you and other backbench Members and opposition Councillors feel about state of democracy in South Kesteven and whether it could be enhanced by more dialogue and

debate among Councillors in this chamber?

Response (transcript)

Thank you Mr Chairman, thank you Councillor Baxter for your question. Clearly I speak as an individual, not speaking for other backbenchers, I speak from my experience as an opposition Councillor on this Council for the past three and a half years. As I say, thank you for the question. In the relatively short time I have been elected to this Council, you and others will have been aware that I have become increasingly disturbed by what I would call the democratic deficit on this Council. I congratulate you, Councillor Baxter, for your persistence in coming back to ask these questions despite being rebuffed, returning again to expose what I believe is the nonsense that passes as democracy in this Chamber. I think it could be improved, perhaps in the ways you suggest.

Particularly I thank you for exposing the bizarre anomaly that allows you as a member of the public to come here and ask a question on the record of any Councillor and expect an answer and yet questions on the public record from elected Members of this Council are never answered in the Council Chamber and are not even given or referred to the Member to which they are asked and being questioned, but they are given a title 'Questions Without Discussion' and referred to a policy development group hopefully to be considered within a few weeks or a few months, but they never come back, those questions, to this Council with a reply. I've never seen one, if you have, please do correct me, so no I don't think it's very healthy.

On openness, you ask about openness, you talk about openness, when I was first elected colleagues will remember we discussed the aims and values of this Council and I suggested in my innocence that we might like to include the sentence that this Council strives to be an open Council but I was shouted down. I was told I was grandstanding and it was voted against. It was voted against, of course, electronically, and that again is in my view pretty undemocratic and not open and not transparent.

Some years ago when I wanted to show residents of Deeping St James how their local members could vote in a particular issue, I brought a minibus full of them to this Council Chamber and asked them to watch a particular vote and they put their hands up and people then made their mind up about what they thought to the voting that those Members had made from Deeping St James, they didn't like it. And now of course you don't see that, it's all sort of hidden and it's secret who votes; that shouldn't be secret.

So I move on, increasingly, I believe, that the system, and this is a personal view, I believe that the system, perhaps not just in this Council, but the system that we have, the Leader and Cabinet, does give the Leader an unhealthy grip on everything that happens in this Council and that it isn't inclusive and open. So I do question the role under the system, not just of opposition Members but question the role of backbench Members even of the controlling group within

this Council. I mean one only has to look at today's agenda, I have to say, to see, are we democratic, open and transparent, what are we being asked to do today as a Council? What is the one decision that we're being asked to make today? The one decision we're being asked to make today on this agenda is to appoint somebody to an outside body for the next three months, probably for one meeting, perhaps, and then in May we're going to have to do it all again. That's the one decision we're being asked to do and that we've all been brought here for today and what is the cost of that, you know, you've got to ask.

As for an opposition Councillor, I get more information about what's going on in this Council from the Grantham Journal, not my own local paper but the Grantham Journal, than I do through official channels within this Council. You only have to look at the budget statement as are we an open democratic council. Budget statements when they come round, when this council does come into its own and have a vote to make on the budget, are normally distributed to the press first before they are delivered and they are never then distributed to Council members, certainly not on this side of the Council Chamber, I've never seen one despite asking for it.

So in conclusion, I'll not go on, I would just say thank you for the question, Councillor Baxter, I think there is a problem. I'd be prepared to sit down and see if we could get more dialogue and the only final words: democracy is not a gift, it's an achievement and it's something we all have to work on every day.

Supplementary Question (transcript)

Councillor Dilks, could you suggest how we could improve democracy in this Chamber, perhaps you would want to comment on the role of backbench Conservatives in holding their own Cabinet to account?

Response (transcript)

That's a matter for the Conservative Group, I've got to say. I'm not here to speak for the Conservative Group but there are ways it could be improved and I do think that if we were to sit down in a private meeting, I'm sure that we could find ways of improving democracy and openness and transparency in this Council. It certainly does need it and I think we would all benefit from that and that we would improve the way that we do things. Thank you for your questions.

48. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bevan, Mike Cook, Cosham, Griffin, Higgs, Jock Kerr, Morgan, Parkin, Scott, Shorrocks, Ian Stokes, Mrs Sumner and Wilkins.

Decision

To approve Councillor Mike Cook's absence for the reason of his ill health for the period to the end of his current term of office.

The Chairman made reference to the requirement that Councillors attend one meeting in a 6 month period or they automatically cease to be a member of the authority unless their non-attendance was for a reason approved by Council. He therefore proposed that the Council approve Councillor Mike Cook's absence for the reason of his ill health for the period to the end of his current term of office. The proposition was seconded and on being put to the vote carried unanimously.

49. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

No interests were disclosed.

50. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 6 NOVEMBER 2014

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 November 2014 on were proposed, seconded and agreed as a correct record.

51. COMMUNICATIONS (INCLUDING CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS)

The Council noted the Chairman's engagements.

52. PRINCE WILLIAM OF GLOUCESTER BARRACKS UPDATE

The Chairman welcomed Lieutenant Colonel Stone, the Commanding Officer at Prince William of Gloucester Barracks. Lieutenant Colonel Stone gave a brief presentation covering:

- The units based in Prince William of Gloucester Barracks
- What the regiments based at the barracks do
- The future for the barracks
- The future of the Army
- The Army Reserve

A number of Councillors thanked Lieutenant Colonel Stone for his presentation and spoke of their support for the barracks and their pride at the relationship between the Barracks and both Grantham and the wider district.

During questioning, the Lieutenant Colonel, who was responsible for the new Army Training Regiment based at Prince William of Gloucester Barracks, was given the opportunity to comment on the role of Reservists and the time commitment required from anyone interested in becoming a Reservist.

Members of the Council showed their appreciation with a round of applause.

53. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Decision:

- 1. That the Council should appoint a representative onto the South Lincolnshire Fenlands Partnership***
- 2. That Councillor Woolley be appointed as the Council's representative on the South Lincolnshire Fenlands Partnership***

In considering report number LDS140 by the Chief Executive, it was proposed and seconded that the Council determine whether it wished to make an appointment to the South Lincolnshire Fenlands Partnership. In response to a query, officers clarified that the Partnership had been asked whether it would be prepared to wait for an appointment until May 2015 and confirmed that it wished to proceed at this time. A vote was taken on the proposition and Councillors agreed to appoint a representative at the meeting.

The Chairman invited nominations for a representative. It was proposed and seconded that Councillor Woolley be appointed as the Council's representative on the South Lincolnshire Fenlands Partnership. On being put to the vote, this was agreed.

54. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting was closed 14:57.