

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE  
NORTH WARWICKSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL HELD AT THE  
COUNCIL HOUSE, ATHERSTONE ON  
WEDNESDAY 14 DECEMBER 2011**

Present: Councillor Butcher in the Chair.

Councillors Davis, L Dirveiks, N Dirveiks, Ferro, Forwood, Fowler, Fox, Hayfield, Holland, Humphreys, Johnston, Lea, Lewis, May, Moore, Morson, B Moss, M Moss, Payne, Phillips, Pickard, Sherratt, Smith, A Stanley, M Stanley, Y Stanley, Sweet, Turley, Winter and Wykes.

Mr Stan Orton (Chairman of the Standards Committee) was also in attendance.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Barber, Freer and Simpson.

Before the commencement of business, Canon Adrian Mairs led the Council in Prayer.

**27 Declarations of Interest**

Declarations of Personal or Prejudicial Interest other than those declared in the minutes of the meetings of Boards/Committees and any personal interests arising from the membership of Warwickshire County Council of Councillors Fowler, Fox, Hayfield, May, Lea, B Moss and Sweet and membership of the various Town or Parish Councils of Councillors Butcher (Polesworth), Davis (Atherstone), Fox (Shustoke), Lewis (Kingsbury), Moore (Baddesley Ensor), Morson (Dordon), B Moss (Kingsbury), M Moss (Kingsbury), Phillips (Kingsbury), Pickard (Atherstone), M Stanley (Polesworth), Y Stanley (Polesworth) and Winter (Dordon) all of which interests were deemed to be declared at this meeting.

**28 Minutes**

The minutes of the Meeting of the Council held on 28 September 2011 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

**29 Mayor's Announcements**

The Mayor reported that

- **his Charity evening was to be held on 17 December 2011 at Polesworth Sports and Social Club;**
- **his Annual Dinner Dance was to be held on Friday 30 March 2012; and**
- **his Charity Golf Day was to be held at the Belfry on Tuesday 17 April 2012**

30 **Questions Pursuant to Standing Order No. 7**

The following question was received from Councillor Hayfield:

**‘Cllr Stanley was recently quoted in the papers as saying “In North Warwickshire the Conservatives left behind a financial mess for us to sort out”.**

**Can he please justify that statement by explaining just what financial mess that was?**

**The Council had been left with unprecedented levels of underspend and with accounts, reserves, and ‘use of resources’ consistently praised by our external auditors.**

**We had also managed to achieve the necessary savings targets (sharing all officer recommendations/options and financial information with the Labour Group).**

**We were even able to achieve a reduction in Council Tax during the present financial year and without the need for significant reductions in front line services or any need for compulsory staff redundancies – unlike so many of our neighbouring councils.**

**Just what part of that represented a ‘financial mess’?**

The response from Councillor M Stanley, Leader of the Council, was as follows:

**‘It is correct to say I was quoted in the local paper as having said that when the Labour took control of the Council’s affairs earlier this year we uncovered a financial mess left behind by the previous administration.**

**That is what I have said in the press and that is what I believe to be the truth.**

**The Council has been left facing unprecedented cuts in grant from the Conservative led coalition which is causing significant issues.**

**When I say we were left a financial mess I am referring not solely to the Council’s financial status on paper but to the reality of the appalling lack of financial provision for the upkeep and maintenance of council owned assets and the failure to address crucial issues that impact upon the Council’s finances after the Conservative’s eight years in office.**

**Cllr Hayfield’s question mentions underspend in the accounts, when in truth he should be apologising that he shamefully held back money for accounting purposes when that money should have been used to**

ensure that valuable assets like the Memorial Hall, the Shopping Arcade, Coleshill Leisure Centre, community centres, shops and many of our industrial premises were not left lacking maintenance and in need of urgent attention. The external auditors would have seen that money which should have been used to repair facilities was still in the council kitty, that is all. The auditors did not inspect the poor quality of the council facilities, poorly maintained for years, the dilapidation of sports centres like that at Coleshill and the cost of the Conservative negligence in creating an ever increasing gap between what needed to be spent and what was actually spent on these premises. Nor did it have to comment on the fact the council had entered into a “mortgage” of up to 20 years costing the taxpayer approximately £73,000 a year for super loo’s (-around £300,000 in this term alone).

Let me be clear, I place no blame on the officers for this. Dereliction of buildings was caused by a dereliction in political leadership. The politicians must take the blame for this and the leader of the Conservative Group should have the humility to accept that he is blameworthy.

On top of that, of course, is the sorry plight of the Council’s own Headquarters building. The Conservatives buried their heads in the sand, preferring to waste tens of thousands of pounds on consultants who the Leader at the time authorised to draw up grandiose plans for a big new headquarters building to be built at massive public expense. While they dallied, the comfort and safety of our employees and members of the public was being compromised. Nothing resulted from it but waste. This new administration has to fix that as a matter of urgency. All of this dereliction took place against a background of relatively generous support from the then Labour government. The wording of his question confirms our view that if the Conservatives had retained control of the council, the council buildings would have been left to decay into squalor as the Conservatives basked in their delusion that they would make the auditors happy. The Council’s first duty is to the people of this Borough and leaving them with buildings falling into ruin, failed the people of North Warwickshire.

Shortly after Labour gained control and in responding to the unprecedented savings demanded by the new government in Westminster, we discovered that measures put in place many years ago, in difficult labour market, to retain senior staff had never once been reviewed during the eight years of Conservative control. They maintained their position by voting against a review in opposition. Consequently it is left to this administration have to make unpopular decisions now that should have been made several years ago.

This, Cllr Hayfield, is the financial mess to which I referred.’

The following question was received from Councillor Smith:

‘Will the Leader guarantee to keep free car parking on the Council’s

**public car parks?’**

The response from Councillor M Stanley, Leader of the Council, was as follows:

**‘Cllr Smith will know that the Conservative administration spent £10,000 carrying out a survey of car parking in Atherstone. The terms of reference of this specified consideration of car parking charges. This became available to the public in 2010 and can be seen on the Council website.**

**This Labour administration has no current plans to introduce charging for car parking.**

**Future changes by Government or the County Council introducing Civil Parking Enforcement may require this Council to review the Borough’s parking arrangements.’**

The following question was received from Councillor Fox:

**‘With the abolition of Portfolio Groups – can the Leader please justify why special responsibility allowances are still being paid to Portfolio Holders?’**

**‘Will he also acknowledge that North Warwickshire is the only Council in Warwickshire to pay a special responsibility allowance to Area Forum Chairs and does he still feel that is justified where they only chair two of the four meetings a year?’**

The response from Councillor M Stanley, Leader of the Council, was as follows:

**‘There are three points to make.**

**Firstly, the Council hasn’t yet agreed to abolish the Portfolio Groups or make the changes to Portfolios. Those proposals, considered by Executive Board last month, are currently recommendations to Council to be considered later in this meeting. It would have been premature therefore to have acted on the special responsibility allowances.**

**Secondly, if Council does accept that recommendation then there will only be two Portfolio Holders – Health and Well-being and Community Life. Special responsibility allowances will continue for those but will not be paid for those Portfolios that are not continuing. Cllr Fox is wrong therefore to suggest that special responsibility allowances will continue for the Portfolios that will be abolished.**

**Thirdly, the special responsibility allowances for Area Forum Chairs have existed for some time. As detailed in the Executive Board resolution (minute 50 on page 150 of tonight’s agenda) we have already identified the need to review the allowances paid to Area Forum Chairs.**

**The Regulations governing special responsibility allowances state that it wouldn't be lawful for us to change the payments with the Independent Remuneration Panel having reported to us first.'**

**31 Minutes of Boards/Committees**

**a) Community and Environment Board – 3 October 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Phillips, seconded by Councillor Lewis and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Community and Environment Board held on 3 October 2011, together with the recommendations contained therein, be approved and adopted.**

**b) Area Forum (East) – 6 October 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Forwood, seconded by Councillor Morson and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of Area Forum (East) held on 6 October 2011 be approved and adopted.**

**c) Resources Board – 10 October and 21 November 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Moore, seconded by Councillor Morson and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meetings of Resources Board held on 10 October and 21 November 2011, together with the recommendations contained therein, be approved and adopted.**

**d) Area Forum (West) – 13 October 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor B Moss, seconded by Councillor Lewis and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of Area Forum (West) held on 13 October 2011 be approved and adopted.**

**e) Planning and Development Board – 17 October and 14 November 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Sweet, seconded by Councillor Winter and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meetings of the Planning and Development Board held on 17 October and 14 November 2011, together with the recommendation contained therein, be approved and adopted.**

**f) Area Forum (North) – 20 October 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Morson, seconded by Councillor Winter and

**Resolved:**

**That, the minutes of the meeting of Area Forum (North) held on 20 October 2011, be approved and adopted.**

**g) Area Forum (South) – 27 October 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Sherratt, seconded by Councillor Wykes and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of Area Forum (South) held on 27 October 2011, be approved and adopted.**

**h) Licensing Committee – 23 November 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor M Moss, seconded by Councillor Lewis and

**Resolved:**

**That, subject to the deletion of Councillor Morson from the list of those present, the minutes of the meeting of the Licensing Committee held on 23 November 2011, be approved and adopted.**

**i) Executive Board – 28 November 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor M Stanley, seconded by Councillor Sweet and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of Executive Board held on 28 November 2011, together with the recommendations contained therein, be approved and adopted.**

**j) Scrutiny Board – 5 December 2011**

It was proposed by Councillor Pickard, seconded by Councillor Morson and

**Resolved:**

**That the minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Board held on 5 December 2011, be approved and adopted.**

**32 Notice of Motion Under Standing Order No. 10**

There were no Notices of Motion received under Standing Order No. 10.

**33 The Common Seal**

It was proposed by Councillor Butcher, seconded by Councillor Winter and  
**Resolved:**

**That the Chief Executive be authorised to affix the Common Seal to any document as necessary to give effect to the decisions of the Council, in accordance with Article 13.05 of the Articles of the Constitution.**

Mayor wished fellow Councillors and Staff a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

**Chairman of the next ensuing meeting of the Council**