

MEETING OF MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL

At the Meeting of Middlesbrough Council, lawfully convened, and held in the Town Hall, Middlesbrough on 17 October 2018.

PRESENT: Councillors S E Bloundele (Chair), R Brady (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, D J Branson, Mr D Budd, D P Coupe, S Dean, J Goodchild, T Harvey, A Hellaoui, C Hobson, J Hobson, N Hussain, T Lawton, L Lewis, J McGee, L McGloin, J Mohan, G Purvis, P Purvis, J Rathmell, D Rooney, J Rostron, M Saunders, J Sharrocks, M Storey, M Thompson, Z Uddin, J A Walker, M Walters, J Young and L Young

OFFICERS: B Carr, R Grey, G Field, E Loughran, C Lunn, K Parkes, T Parkinson, S Reynolds, B Roberts, H Watson

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were submitted on behalf of Councillors Councillor S Biswas, Councillor J Blyth, Councillor J Brunton Dobson, Councillor M Carr, Councillor D Davison, Councillor E Dryden, Councillor T Higgins, Councillor B A Hubbard, Councillor T Mawston, Councillor D McCabe, Councillor F McIntyre, Councillor J McTigue, Councillor C M Rooney, Councillor N J Walker, Councillor V Walkington.

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None Declared

18/66 EXTRAORDINARY COUNCIL MEETING

A letter was received from six Councillors requesting that an Extraordinary Council meeting be held regarding school meal increases and the alleged constitutional failings of Middlesbrough Council.

The letter stated as follows:

"We, the undersigned request in accordance with the constitution, a meeting of the full Council to debate:

"The increases to school meals which, was purported to have been erroneously published as an officer delegated decision and, alleged to have been a decision of the full council.

We would like to debate the financial hardship this authority, are placing upon the residents of the town by not being open and transparent. We will also be debating the process and governance failings surrounding alleged decision making process by this authority."

The Chair advised that a request to cancel the meeting had been received from one of the signatories to the letter requesting the Extraordinary meeting. As the member requesting the cancellation of the meeting was not the Lead signatory to the letter, the wishes of the Lead signatory and the other signatories to the request were sought. The remaining signatories of the letter indicated that they wished to proceed with the meeting.

The Chair invited Councillor Rathmell to speak on behalf of the signatories in support of the request to call an Extraordinary meeting of the Council.

Councillor Rathmell explained that the request to cancel the meeting was a misunderstanding as the member requesting the cancellation had thought that he was the Lead signatory on the letter requesting to call the Extraordinary meeting.

Councillor Rathmell advised that the meeting could be broken into two parts but there was one part that did not need to be considered. The first part was the increase in school meals which was erroneously published as an Officer Delegated Decision and it was alleged that it was a full Council decision which was agreed by those that had voted for the Council budget. Councillor Rathmell stated that because the price increase had been withdrawn there was no longer a need to debate the financial hardship caused by the increase.

Councillor Rathmell outlined the reasons for calling the Extraordinary meeting which included:

- The issue of the erroneously published officer delegated decision
- The lack of consultation on the proposal to increase the cost of school meals;
- The fact that schools had been advised of the increase and notified parents of the increase in the cost of school meals;
- The fact that schools had to notify parents to advise the increase was not going ahead;
- The fact that Members were not notified that the proposed price increase would not go ahead until the full Council meeting;
- He queried with regard to who was bearing the brunt of the costs on the schools in respect of informing parents;
- The fact that further reports needed to be submitted to Executive;

The Executive Member for Environment and Commercial Services advised that there would be no increase to school meals at this time. If the authority did decide to increase the cost of school meals, the correct consultation process would be followed and a report would be submitted to Executive for consideration.

The Executive Member pointed out that clear and transparent governance processes were in place and that was why the error in respect of the Officer Delegated decision was quickly identified. The Executive Member pointed out that there had not been an increase in the price of school meals since 2009 and the price currently stood at £1.90 for a primary school meal and £2.00 for a secondary school meal. The Executive Member pointed out, that if the authority had increased the cost of school meals on a yearly basis since 2009, in line with inflation, the cost of a primary school meal would currently be £2.15 and the cost of a secondary school meal would be £2.26.

Middlesbrough Council had also achieved the Gold Standard award in excellence for the quality of its school meals and it had also been recognised for its commitment to promoting health through nutrition. The service level agreement between the Council and individual schools was a commercial agreement and as such, contained commercially sensitive information. The SLA was made up of a number of components which included a price for free school meals for low income people, the universal reception free school meals provided for year 1 and year 2 pupils and a number of additional services agreed with individual schools.

The Executive Member provided a comparison with school meals with other authorities and highlighted that 37 out of the 49 schools used Middlesbrough Council's school meals service. The Executive Member reiterated that robust governance processes were in place because the error in respect of the publication of the Officer Delegated Decision was quickly identified.

A debate was held and a number of Members commented on the issue.

In response to a query with regard to whether it was the intention of the Council to increase the cost of school meals, the Executive Member for Environment and Commercial Services advised that in the budget, there had been provisions made for an increase in a range of services, however the intention was, that the decision to make any increases, would be made by the Executive.

The meeting was subsequently closed.