

NEW FRANKLEY IN BIRMINGHAM PARISH COUNCIL

At a meeting of the New Frankley
In Birmingham Parish Council held
at St Christopher's Church Centre,
Holly Hill, Frankley on
17 December 2001 at 1930 hours.

Present

Councillor Eric Carter (In the Chair)

Councillors Linda Banks, Michael Denny, Sidney Grey MBE, Paul Kane, Reverend Derek Lewis, Kathleen Lewis, Joanna Walker and Geoffrey Williams.

Also in attendance –

Mr M Juggins – Customer Services Manager, Birmingham
Accord Limited

Mr Wilkie – Birmingham City Council Housing Department

There were 4 members of the public present.

APOLOGIES

There were none.

MINUTES

It was proposed, seconded and -

- 318 RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Parish Council held on 3 December 2001, having been previously circulated, were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

CHAIRPERSON'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resignation of Councillors Sheila and David Burton

The Chairperson reported that it was with regret he had that day received Sheila and David Burton's resignations. He paid tribute to the work they had done both for the Parish Council and the community and added that they would be a great loss to the area.

It was agreed to place on record the appreciation of the Parish Council for the work carried out by Sheila and David that the Clerk write to them thanking them for their efforts on behalf of the Council.

Appointments/Nominations

As a consequence of the resignations, the Chairperson reported that there were a number of vacancies to fill.

A. Appointment of Vice-Chairperson

Upon receipt of a nomination, it was –

- 319 RESOLVED: That, for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May 2002, Councillor Grey be elected Vice-chairperson of the Parish Council.

B. The Governing Body of The Beeches Infant and Nursery School

- 320 There being no nominations it was agreed that the Clerk write to the Clerk of the Governing Body, advising of Councillor Burton's resignation.

C. The Management Committee of the Tudor Rose Centre

Upon receipt of a nomination, it was –

- 321 RESOLVED: That, for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May 2002, Councillor Denny be nominated to serve on the Management Committee of the Tudor Rose Centre.

D. City Council's Standard Committee

Upon receipt of a nomination, it was –

- 322 RESOLVED: That, for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the Parish Council in May 2002, Councillor Carter be nominated to serve as the Parish Council representative on the City Council's Standard Committee.

Christmas Meal

- 323 The Chairperson referred to the recent Christmas meal which he considered to be great reward for all the hard work done by the Councillors during the year. He referred to the difficulties experienced during the past year in particular being ignored by some departments of the City Council - whereas one letter or telephone call should suffice it was often the case that several telephone calls or letters were required to get a result.

QUESTIONS

Coldstream Public House

- 324 In response to a question from Councillor Kane, the Clerk advised that, according to the letter he had received from the Clerk to the Licensing Justices, the determination of the application for a New Provisional Licence would be adjourned from 13 December to a date in January.

On the proposition of Councillor Grey, it was

- 325 RESOLVED: That the order of business be varied and that agenda item 6 be considered before agenda item 5.

HOUSING REPAIRS IN FRANKLEY

- 326 Mr Juggins, Customer Services Manager, Birmingham Accord Limited, gave a brief background of the company. Birmingham Accord Limited (BAL) was part of a larger group of companies which undertook a wide variety of local authority work as well as work for the Highways Agency. In Birmingham, BAL had taken over the work previously carried out by the Housing Department's Direct Labour Organisation. The contract between the City Council and BAL was for 5 years and the company had been fully aware of the Stock Transfer proposals when it had taken the contract on.

One of the first things that the company had to address was to turn round the former repairs service with fundamentally the same work force – the company were fully aware of the problems that it had taken on.

One of the problems that was currently being addressed was the problem of the call centres. Previously there had been 3 call centres and since taking on the contract the company had invested in a new telephone system and merged the 3 centres into one which was based at Stonebrook Way in Weoley Castle. There was to be a phased introduction of the new number and initial feedback from those tenants who had used the new system was favourable. Once the company was confident that the new system worked, it was proposed that the call centre would be operational 24 hours a day and 7 days a week. Tenants would be able to telephone the centre at any time to report a repair or to find out details of how a repair was progressing. However, because the City Council's computer currently shut down overnight, that system could not be fully introduced.

There also had been major changes on the management structure. Although the workforce was basically the same as previously, it needed focussing on the problems faced by the company. Previously,

the building operatives and the building inspectors were separate – the inspectors inspected the job and passed written instructions onto the building operatives. However, BAL had put both groups under one manager who was responsible for one area in order to improve and streamline the service.

There had also been a fundamental change in the contract conditions. Whereas previously, repairs had been classified as 15 working days or 26 week repairs the new system classified repairs as either 1, 3, 7 or 60 working days. Of the 60 day repairs, a proportion had to be completed within 15 days and a proportion within 40 days and the time it took to complete repairs from first being notified was the subject of regular performance reports.

BAL would take all repair calls at the call centre even though it was not responsible for undertaking the repair, for example repairs to gas fires. In those cases the request would be passed on to the appropriate contractor and the tenant would be informed accordingly.

In response to a question from the Chairperson as to when it was hoped that the new computer system would be fully operational, Mr Juggins explained that although the system was working now, it would not be fully operational until the end of January or the beginning of February. However, if there were problems with the system, that date could be put off until March as BAL had to be confident that the system would work.

Councillor Grey felt that one of the problems of the call centre system and the removal of the building inspectors from Neighbourhood Offices was the lack of face-to-face contact with the tenant. There were cases where elderly tenants, telephoning the call centre from a Neighbourhood Office, were not able to understand the information they were being given over the telephone. Councillor Grey also questioned whether tenants were told what category their repair fell into when telephoning the call centre.

Mr Juggins accepted that there had been problems in introducing the system, however all telephone callers should now be told what category their repair fell into and in addition the date given to the tenant was the date by which the repair should be completed and not the inspection date. With regard to the problem with tenants having to telephone from Neighbourhood Offices, it was proposed to install a dedicated line in each of the Offices connected directly to the call centre.

However, Councillor Grey did not feel that would overcome the problem experienced by some elderly tenants who had difficulty in understanding the information given by the call centre. They still preferred the face-to-face contact with the local building inspector who could take the time to explain anything they did not understand. He

then sought clarification as to whether BAL was just responsible for property repairs as, unlike other areas of the City, there were a lot of things on Frankley that were the responsibility of the Housing Department besides the properties. Should the proposed Stock Transfer be approved, then these areas could cause problems.

Mr Juggins said that the company had not yet been asked by the City Council to take on the additional work and therefore it was a situation which would have to be resolved with the City Council, but added that as the company was flexible he did not foresee any problem.

In response to a further question from Councillor Grey, Mr Juggins stated that BAL had only taken the core repairs.

Councillor Grey then referred to long-standing repairs such as window frames which in the past had received unsatisfactory temporary repairs and questioned whether the operative would come back to site to carry out a further repair if the first repair proved unsatisfactory. Mr Juggins said that he was aware that there were a number of longstanding repairs on Frankley that needed to be addressed and that there would be a number of new window frames being fitted in Frankley. He added that the contract was a managed repair contract – part of the contract required BAL to report back to the City Council on how the contract was being managed and to make suggestions for the more efficient discharge of the contract.

Councillor Williams pointed out that in the past tenants had had to wait a long time to get a repair inspected let alone repaired. Mr Juggins pointed out that whilst tenants had in the past had to wait 4 to 6 weeks for an inspector to visit the tenant before the repair could be authorised, BAL only had a maximum of 60 working days in which to inspect and carry out the repair. Therefore the whole process had to be speeded up. It was hoped that once the system settled down BAL could undertake zonal maintenance whereby BAL concentrated on zones in the City on a rotating basis and carried out all the repairs in that zone before moving on to the next zone.

The Chairperson referred to the fact that in the New Year it was hoped that the Parish Council would be opening an office in the Holly Hill shopping centre and asked Mr Juggins if BAL would be prepared to provide literature and publicity material which may be of assistance to tenants. Mr Juggins agreed to provide a copy of the contract specification and other materials for the office. He would also get the Area Manager to visit the office once it was opened.

Councillor Linda Banks asked whether all repairs including those outstanding from the DLO were in the new computer system. Mr Juggins said that, originally, BAL only undertook those repairs reported since the transfer but they had now taken on board those repairs reported before the transfer.

In response to a question from Councillor Denny, Mr Juggins said that all repair requests were acknowledged in the usual way – if the tenant was telephoning from a Neighbourhood Office then an acknowledgement could be faxed to them.

Councillor Grey reiterated comments made earlier in that a lot of elderly tenants came off the telephone after telephoning the call centre totally confused and the Neighbourhood Office staff could not help – what was needed was face-to-face contact in order that things could be explained. Mr Juggins accepted that initially there would be difficulties but he hoped that with time those difficulties would sort themselves out. Once the new technology was fully operational, tenants telephoning to report a repair would be given a specific appointment for the work to be carried out.

Councillor Williams questioned whether tenants were informed if a repair, such as a repair to a gas fire, was to be passed to contractor. Mr Juggins admitted that it was something that needed to be sorted out. The initial telephone call was important and he accepted that at the moment, things were not as good as they should be. However, he hoped that the situation would improve in the future.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Juggins for attending the meeting.

HOUSING STOCK TRANSFER

- 327 Mr Wilkie, City Council Housing Department, advised that the Housing Department had carried out an informal consultation exercise between 18 October and 28 November. Tenants had been contacted by either visiting them or, if they couldn't be contacted in that way, by telephoning them. The purpose of the exercise was to ensure as far as possible that all tenants were fully aware of Stock Transfer proposals and that the proposals were going to be the subject of a ballot early next year. Mr Wilkie added that nearly 100% of tenants had been contacted.

Every tenant had completed a questionnaire or an officer had completed it if the tenant had been contacted by telephone. An example of the questionnaire and the results for the Frankley area was submitted.

(see interleaved document no.1)

The aim of the questionnaire was to identify what tenants required so that it could be provided as part of the Stock Transfer.

In response to a question from Councillor Grey, Mr Wilkie affirmed that Birmingham Accord had been informed that the results of the

survey indicated that fast efficient repairs were a priority for the majority of tenants.

During the consultation exercise, if it was found that the tenant was not aware of the Stock Transfer proposals they were given or sent an explanatory pack of documents.

(see interleaved document no.2)

Mr Wilkie emphasised that the purpose of the exercise was to ensure that all tenants were fully aware of what Stock Transfer entailed.

Councillor Grey requested and Mr Wilkie agreed to send all documents relating to the Stock Transfer to the Clerk as many of the Councillors were owner-occupiers and would not therefore receive the documents. As tenants were likely to ask members of the Parish Council questions relating to the Stock Transfer, it was important that members were kept fully informed.

Mr Wilkie advised that the formal offer document, which was a legally binding documents, would be sent to all tenants in January next year and would consist of a City wide document and another document specific to the area in which the tenant lived. There would then be a formal consultation period before the tenants voted during which the Housing teams would ensure that all tenants had received the documents and were aware of what Stock Transfer entailed. Additionally, every tenant would receive a video as it was felt that people were more likely to view a video than read the documents. There would be 9 weeks of consultation during which it was hoped that the Housing teams would see more tenants than during the informal consultation exercise – lessons learnt from that exercise would be of assistance. The Housing teams would make sure that tenants understood what Stock Transfer entailed and answer any questions tenants might have on the proposals.

Mr Wilkie said that Frankley was one of the areas in which the Housing teams had experienced difficulties in contacting tenants and he asked whether there were any key areas for posters to be displayed.

(see interleaved document no.3)

Members suggested that the posters could be displayed at the Schools within the area, the Public Library and the Reaside Centre. Additionally, a smaller version could be inserted in the next edition of the Neighbourhood News which was due out at the end of February.

Hereon, Councillor Grey submitted the following document which had been produced by those tenants who were against the Stock Transfer.

(see interleaved document no.4)

BIRMINGHAM CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Hereon, Councillor Grey submitted the following documents from the Conference.

(see interleaved document no.5)

- 328 Councillor Grey briefly reported on the Conference which had been held on Saturday and Sunday 8 and 9 December. The theme of the Conference was the proposal to devolve powers down to a constituency level. Whilst some delegates had wanted it to be devolved to ward level the City Council did not think that to be a practical option.

The Parish Council had been mentioned as an option for devolution, but as the Parish Council was still in its infancy, the suggestion was not taken seriously. However, if power was devolved down to constituency level, then it could be further devolved to the Parish Council. It was therefore important that the views of the Parish Council were adequately represented.

Given the time that the two previous items had taken, Councillor Grey requested, and it was agreed, that the item be placed on the agenda for the next meeting.

BUDGET AND PRECEPT FOR 2002 -2003

The following report of the Clerk was submitted –

(see interleaved document no.6)

On the proposition of the Chairperson it was seconded and

- 329 RESOLVED: (i) That a Budget of £47,395 for the financial year 2002 – 2003, as detailed in Annex A to the report now submitted, be approved and that it be noted that a precept of £44,095 is required to fund the above budget.
- (ii) That the Director of Finance and Performance Review, Birmingham City Council, be advised of the approval of the budget and that, accordingly, a precept be issued to Birmingham City Council as the Billing Authority for the sum of £44,095.

ALTERATION TO THE TIME OF FUTURE COUNCIL MEETINGS

Members were advised that Councillor Kane had requested that the starting time of future meeting of the Parish Council be brought forward from 1930 hours to 1900 hours. As the starting time for meeting of the Parish Council was incorporated within the Council's Standing Orders, Standing Order 77 required that the proposal stand adjourned without discussion to the next ordinary meeting of the Council. It was therefore proposed and seconded and -

- 330 RESOLVED: That the question of changing the starting time of future meetings of the Parish Council from 1930 hours to 1900 hours do stand adjourned to the next meeting of the Parish Council.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SOCIETY OF LOCAL COUNCIL CLERKS

The Chairperson reported that the Clerk wished to join the Society of Local Council Clerks and was requesting that consideration be given to the Council paying the annual subscription. He felt that as membership of the Society would be of benefit to both the Clerk and the Council, the Council should pay the annual subscription.

It was therefore proposed and seconded and –

- 331 RESOLVED: That approval be given to the payment of the Annual Subscription of the Clerk's membership of the Society of Local Council Clerks.

PLANNING APPLICATIONS

Planning Application S/06252/01/FUL
Bedroom and utility extension, 45 Woodham Close, Rubery, Rednal,
Birmingham

At 2105 hours the meeting was adjourned so as to allow members time to study the plans relating to the above application.

At 2112 hours the meeting reconvened.

The following notification of the above Planning Application was submitted.

(see interleaved document no.7)

Following a brief discussion it was proposed and seconded and –

- 332 RESOLVED: That the City Council's Planning Department be advised that the Parish Council have no objection to Planning Application S/06252/01/FUL.

ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

Frankley Centre Development

- 333 Hereon, the Chairperson reported that he and Councillor Grey had recently attended a meeting at the Council House attended by Councillor Coulson, the Cabinet member for regeneration, Mr Pountney, the potential developer of the site and his agent Mr Dring together with a number of City Council officers.

Councillor Grey stated that it appeared that the City Council was putting pressure on Mr Pountney to get started on the site. However, the City Council wanted Mr Pountney to start on Site D, the industrial units, before he started on Site A, the retail unit. The City appeared to be concerned that if the development was unsuccessful, then it would be left unfinished. However, since the meeting, Mr Pountney had spoken to Councillor Grey and had indicated that it appeared that he had a provisional pre-let for one of the industrial units.

Both Councillor Grey and the Chairperson had stressed to Councillor Coulson the need to move the development forward. However, during the course of the meeting it transpired that the Planning Department had appeared to have mislaid the plans submitted by the developer with the Planning Application. Councillor Grey was amazed that, once the officers had noticed that the plans were missing, they had not immediately contacted Mr Pountney for an additional set of plans. Councillor Coulson had told the Planning Officers to expedite matters.

If Mr Pountney had managed to get a pre-let on a industrial unit then, hopefully, subject to the necessary planning approvals being obtained, work could start on Sites A and D by the beginning of April next year.

The Chairman pointed out that it had transpired at the meeting that Site A had not yet been sold and that the City had yet to set a price for the land. However, Councillor Grey indicated that the fact that the land still belonged to the City did not prevent Mr Pountney applying for Planning Permission to build on it.

PAYMENTS

The following Schedule of Payments was submitted.

(see interleaved document no.8)

It was proposed, seconded and –

- 334 RESOLVED: That the payments, as set out in the Schedule as now submitted, be approved.

REPORT ON ACTION TAKEN ON ISSUES RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

The following report of the Clerk was submitted.

(see interleaved document no.9)

Minute Nos 155 and 258

The Clerk reported that he and the Chairperson were to meet a representative of Birmingham Accord on 20 December to discuss the paved area in front of the Gannow Shops/Reaside Centre. In response to a comment from Councillor Denny the Clerk gave an assurance that it would be suggested to Birmingham Accord that the area in front of the shops and the Reaside Centre wanted redesigning.

- 335 RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

LOCAL ISSUED RAISED BY MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were none.

The meeting ended at 2123 hours.

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Chairperson