

Town Council
22nd March at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: T McMahon Chairman
J Carroll
C Copleston
D Dixon-Wilkinson
Y Farrell
S Goodchild
D Jones
M S Kennedy
R Morgan
A Slough
S Thorne
K Wattingham

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk

Public: 1

11555 APOLOGIES

None.

11556 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

11557 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

11558 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2021.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 18th January 2021 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

Cllr Kennedy advised that Cllrs Copleston and Dixon Wilkinson were having technical difficulties joining the meeting but hoped to join as soon as possible.

11559 COMMITTEE MINUTES

To receive the minutes of the following committees and consider any recommendations contained therein

Corporate Services Committee	23 rd November 2020 & 1 st February 2021
Community Services Committee	26 th October & 2 nd November 2020
Environment & Leisure Committee	16 th November 2020
Planning Committee	21 st December 2020, 4 th January, 25 th January &

	15 th February 2021
Town Partnership Committee	10 th November 2020

To receive the minutes of the following sub-committee and consider any recommendations contained therein

New Office Provisions Sub-Committee	17 th February 2020
New Cemetery Sub-Committee	16 th November 2020

It was queried whether any feedback had been received on the work completed by HRTC on the High Street Funding opportunity. It was noted that the budget announcement included a new fund to replace the Future High Street Fund called the Levelling Up fund. It was advised that CBC could submit 2 bids. Local authorities had been split into priority areas, Central Bedfordshire was in the lowest priority group, as such it would be hard to secure funding. It was noted that this would be a further disappointment for Houghton Regis residents.

Members considered the draft minutes of Corporate Services Committee held on 1st March 2021. At this meeting the following policies were considered and it was requested that these be brought forward to Town Council:

- Minute number 11533 - Mobile Phone and Telephone Use Policy
- Minute number 11534 - IT Policy

Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendations contained therein as follows;

- **11533 Mobile Phone and Telephone Use Policy**
- **11534 IT Policy**

11560 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

It was advised that the following events had been attended:

- Mayor of Luton 'Wear it Red'
- The Lord Lieutenant's Commissioning Ceremony for Deputy Lieutenant's
- The welcoming event for the new community worker in Bidwell West

11561 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillors provided verbal reports from meetings they have attended of outside organisations or from training courses they have attended on behalf of the Council.

Cllr Jones advised that he had attended the BATPC Finance and GP Committee. The main topic was the retirement of the lead officer.

Cllr Copleston joined the meeting at 7.19pm.

Cllr Thorne advised that she had not heard from Dial A Ride. In relation to the Houghton Regis Memorial Hall she advised that the car park work had been completed and that the Chair had secured further funding of £19,000 from s106 funds for other facility improvements.

Cllr Wattingham advised that next June was the 65th anniversary of the Hall opening. The

Committee would like to mark the event. Ideas were welcomed.

Cllr Kennedy advised that HHP had been a success during lockdown, but its success had brought problems around litter and parking. One consideration had been to charge for parking, but this was not supported generally. Government guidance was being followed regarding the re-opening of the centre.

11562 COUNCILLOR VACANCIES

Houghton Regis Town Council had 2 councillor vacancies, one in the Parkside Ward and one in the Tithes Farm Ward. An election had been called for both vacancies. Nominations were required to be submitted between 29th March and 4pm on 8th April to the Deputy Returning Officer, Unit 2, Bury Farm, Mill Lane, Stotfold. SG5 4NU. If either or both vacancies were contested, the election would be held on 6th May 2021.

11563 STRATEGIC POLICES 2021/22

To provide members with the opportunity to consider key council policies and a calendar of meetings and events for 2021/22. In accordance with Standing Orders these will be presented to the Town Council at the AGM, date to be confirmed.

The following comments were made:

- To adjust the Committee Functions & Terms of Reference to include consideration of highways proposals. It was suggested that this function be added to the Planning Committee
- To adjust the Council Calendar 2021/22 to remove the Celebration of Christmas and replace with Santa Float
- To see if Corporate Services Committee would like to consider what would happen if the Council's RFO was not available in an emergency situation
- The council may like to consider bringing forward an emergency plan
- 20th November Members Open Session included in error, to be removed
- To provide more time for budget discussions to swap Personal and Town Council meeting dates in January 2022
- Highlighted to members that the Planning agenda 29th March included the consultation on the highways works for Windsor Drive
- To hold the AGM on 18th May 2022 to allow more time should there be an election
- To increase the frequency of the Leaders Briefings to monthly to help ensure Leaders up to date. Clarification was sought on the purpose and objectives of Leaders Briefings and Member Open Sessions.

Resolved: To recommend to the Annual Meeting of Town Council approval of the following:

- **Scheme of Delegation**
- **Committee Functions & Terms of Reference subject to extending the Functions of Planning Committee to include consideration of highways proposals**
- **Standing Orders**
- **Financial Regulations**
- **Council Calendar 2021/22 – to be re-examined in light of the suggestions made**

11564 ANNUAL TOWNS' MEETING

Between 1st March and 1st June, parish and town councils were required to call an Annual Parish Meeting. The purpose of the meeting was to enable local government electors within the parish to discuss 'parish affairs'. At present there was no legal basis to enable this meeting to be held remotely. The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020 did not cover this type of meeting.

This meeting was scheduled to be held on 12th April. Unfortunately, Regulations do not permit this meeting to be held on this date.

At the time of preparing the agenda, NALC had not issued guidance to the sector regarding the Annual Towns / Parish meeting. As such it may be possible to hold this meeting in late May.

It was advised that DTC, LLTC and BTC had held their annual parish meeting remotely. It was agreed to look into this.

Resolved: To hold this meeting on Tuesday 25th May 2021 at 7pm provided that it was legal to do so.

Cllr Dixon Wilkinson arrived at 7.35pm.

11565 HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL'S AGM

Members were reminded that the date of the Annual meeting of Houghton Regis Town Council was scheduled for Wednesday 19th May 2021(7pm).

However, Members were advised that the Regulations which enabled local councils to meet remotely expired on 7th May 2021. NALC have advised that the government were not intending to extend this Regulation, such that all council meetings after 7th May 2021 would need to be held in person. NALC suggested that councils may like to consider holding their Annual General Meeting prior to 7th May in order to achieve certainty that the meeting could proceed.

In relation to the date of the Annual Meeting of Houghton Regis Town Council the Standing Orders required the meeting to be held on 'such day in May as the council decides' (Standing Order 4b).

To be held before 7th May, possible dates included Tuesday 4th May (although Planning Committee scheduled for 7pm), Wednesday 5th May or Thursday 6th May. Members were reminded that the by-election was on 6th May 2021.

The date of the AGM had to be set by Town Council, as such the date needed to be set at this meeting.

At the time of preparing the agenda, NALC had publicised some practical advice on preparing to hold face to face meetings, suggesting steps to take to provide distancing and safety of those attending. NALC state that 'there is still much uncertainty around how legislation or COVID-19 risks may change over the coming weeks and months. NALC will update this guidance as the situation evolves.'

To cover eventualities the following was suggested:

Should Regulations which permit a council to meet virtually be extended beyond 7th May, to hold the AGM on 19th May 2021;

If Regulations which permit a council to meet virtually are not extended beyond 7th May, to hold the AGM on 5th May 2021.

Should an alternative situation arise, it was suggested that the current arrangements, notably the position of Mayor, Deputy Mayor and membership of Committees etc and outside organisations be retained until such time as the AGM was held.

Due to this uncertainty over future meetings, Members were reminded of the delegation arrangements provided to the Mayor and the Clerk under Minute 11207 (Extract):

Resolved: To delegate authority to the Clerk and the Chair of the council to undertake any measures / make any decisions deemed necessary to provide support to the community and to protect the health and wellbeing of Councillors and staff based on government and NALC advice;

These arrangements had not been revoked to date and it was suggested that they remained in place until the council was confident that it had the means to legally meet through Town Council, Committees and Sub-Committees.

It was suggested that the Council could suspend the Standing order which required the AGM to be held in May.

- Resolved:**
- 1. Should Regulations which permit a council to meet virtually be extended beyond 7th May, to hold the AGM on 19th May 2021;**
 - 2. If Regulations which permit a council to meet virtually are not extended beyond 7th May, to hold the AGM on 5th May 2021 such that the AGM can be held virtually.**

11566 NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – FUNDING REQUEST

The Town Councils Neighbourhood Plan public consultation had to be put on hold due to Covid 19 restrictions.

Members considered a report in support of the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Groups funding request to commence the consultation as Covid restrictions were easing.

Members commented on the importance of the Neighbourhood Plan. It was suggested that the funding for the consultation be extended beyond that requested. It was agreed to hold a special meeting should further funding be required.

Resolved: To approve a budget of £6000, from budget heading 401-4062 which will be offset by a transfer in from EMR330, to enable the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group to undertake a public consultation on the Town Councils draft Neighbourhood Plan.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.30pm

Dated this day of 2021

Chairman