

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council

meeting held on

4th October 2021 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: J Carroll
E Cooper
Y Farrell
S Goodchild
D Jones
M S Kennedy
T McMahon
R Morgan
A Slough
C Slough
S Thorne
K Wattingham

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 2

Apologies: Councillors: C Copleston
D Dixon-Wilkinson

11792 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllrs Copleston and Dixon-Wilkinson.

Members were advised that Cllr Dixon Wilkinson would like to formally send his apologies to the Council until March 2022 as he was currently unwell.

Should the council be minded to formally accept Cllr Dixon Wilkinson's apologies, the 6-month rule which disqualifies a councillor from their position as a councillor would not apply. The situation would be reviewed as necessary at the March Town Council meeting.

Members agreed to accept Cllr D Dixon-Wilkinson's apologies and wished him well.

Resolved: That the reason, of serious ill-health, for Councillor Dixon-Wilkinson's absence from any meetings since 14th June 2021 be approved, with the approval of leave of absence being for a period until 31st March 2022.

11793 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Members received written correspondence from a member of the public on behalf of Parkside Ward Action Group, requesting additional seating to be installed on Parkside Recreation area. The Action Group offered the Town Council a financial contribution of £200.

It was advised the Environment and Leisure Committee would be looking into the provision of seating and would look at funding additional seating in the next budget.

A question was raised regarding the lack of available funding for a Health Hub. It was felt a Health Hub was needed due to the intended growth of Houghton Regis would render current surgeries oversubscribed.

11794 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Cllr McMahon declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 13 as she was a trustee of the Houghton Regis Heritage Society.

11795 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2021.

An amendment to the minutes was requested. Members approved the minutes as amended.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 21st June 2021 as amended.

11796 DIGITALISING DOCUMENTATION

Members agreed to bring this item forward in the agenda.

Following on from the consideration given by the council at its June meeting Members received a further report provided by Houghton Regis Heritage Society (HRHS) suggesting the digitalisation of Minutes and other documentation of the council. David Hill and Roger Turner from the HRHS were in attendance to present the report.

Members remained keen to support the project, a detailed breakdown of costs to the Town Council was requested.

Concerns were raised regarding potential staff time involvement with the processing of future documentation.

Resolved: To continue to support the project in principle, with more substantial support being subject to adequate resources being made available in the budget for 2022/23.

11797 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Corporate Services Committee	1 st June and 6 th September 2021
Community Services Committee	8 th February and 28 th June 2021
Environment & Leisure Committee	7 th June 2021
Planning Committee	24 th May, 14 th June, 5 th July, 12 th July, 26 th July, 16 th August and 7 th September 2021
Town Partnership Committee	27 th April 2021

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

New Office Provisions Sub-Committee	None to present
New Cemetery Sub-Committee	None to present

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

- 11636:** To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Fraud and Ethics Policy
- 11637:** To recommend to Town Council that the Late Payments and Bad Debts Policy be approved.
- 11638:** To recommend to Town Council that the Officer/Member Protocol be approved.
- 11640:** To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Marking the Death of a Senior National Figure or Holder of High Office Protocol.

11798 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members received a verbal report on events that had been attended by the Town Mayor.

The Mayor:

- Attended Morrisons get together
- Attended a catch-up session with the Mayor of Leighton Buzzard
- Attended the Mayor of Leyton Linlade's painting party
- Attended a Meet and Greet at Bidwell West
- Attended Houghton Rocks
- Participated in a Fun Run and Doggie Jog
- Attended Dunstable Scout Council AGM
- Attended Houghton Regis Bowles club fundraiser in aid of prostate cancer
- Attended High Sherriff event

The Deputy Mayor:

- Attended Houghton Regis Town Council Pop-Up Café for lunch
- Attended 1st & 3rd Scouts AGM
- Attended a Fire Station event.

11799 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

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

Cllr Thorne updated members on the following organisations:

Dial-a-Ride had faced difficulties in the current climate

Citizens Advice had been busy and had settled in their new venue

Memorial Hall's car park had been completed, the hall floor had been completed, a new roof had been installed over the fire escape and cellar. Pending works were refreshing the paint in the hall, new railings and a defibrillator placed at the front of the building. Fundraising options had been considered for the cost of a projector for the main hall. Acknowledgement and thanks were given to the Chairman, Cllr Wattingham, for his fundraising efforts.

Cllr Carroll had attended three virtual training sessions ran by BATPC on finance which he had found informative.

Cllr McMahon had attended virtual training through NALC and had enjoyed a tour of All Saints View, members were advised that previous concerns of noise at the front of the building were unwarranted as there was no noise intrusion.

Cllr Jones had attended a BATPC meeting, members were updated on the new appointment of Robin Thomas, County Officer. Also attended was the HR North Stakeholder Group meeting.

Cllr Goodchild had received Safeguarding Training, the slides from this training could be shared with members on request.

11800 AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2020/21

Members received the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for consideration.

Members were advised that the external auditor had not raised matters under Section 3 of the Return, nor had any matters been raised in the covering letter as minor scope for improvement.

Acknowledgement and thanks were offered to the Town Clerk for the work involved in the submission of the return.

Resolved: To approve and accept the Annual Return including the external auditor's certificate.

11801 REVIEW OF EAR MARKED RESERVES

Members reviewed the status of the Council's Ear Marked Reserves part way through the financial year.

An amendment to the officer recommendation 3 was proposed to read:

That £35,000 be transferred out of New Office Provision Earmarked Reserve into General Reserves.

The officer recommendation read: To consider allocating funds from General Reserves into specified Ear Marked Reserves.

Proposed by: Cllr Jones, seconded by: Cllr Wattingham. Members voted in favour of the amendment; accordingly, this became a substantive motion.

Members voted in favour of the substantive motion (3).

An additional motion (4) was proposed to read:
That £100,000 be transferred out of General Reserves into Pavilion Renovation Earmarked Reserve.

Proposed by: Cllr Jones, seconded by: Cllr Wattingham, members voted in favour of inclusion of the additional motion; accordingly, this became a substantive motion (4).

Members voted in favour of the substantive motion (4).

An additional motion (5) was proposed to read:
Council confirms that it does not wish for EMR transfers to be included in the budget for 2022/23

Proposed by: Cllr Jones, seconded by: Cllr Wattingham, members voted in favour of inclusion of the additional motion; accordingly, this became a substantive motion (5).

Members voted in favour of the substantive motion (5).

- Resolved:**
- 1. To note the Schedule of Ear Marked Reserves 2021/22**
 - 2. To consider the allocation of Ear Marked Reserves to Town Council and committees during the budget setting process**
 - 3. That £35,000 be transferred out of New Office Provision Earmarked Reserve into General Reserves.**
 - 4. That £100,000 be transferred out of General Reserves into Pavilion Renovation Earmarked Reserve.**
 - 5. Council confirmed that it does not wish for EMR transfers to be included in the budget for 2022/2023.**

11802 COUNCIL MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

Members were requested to consider the nature and format of council meetings going forwards from January 2022.

An amendment to the officer recommendation 2 was proposed to read:
Meetings of committees and sub-committees will be held in the council chamber with remote access being available to non-members and residents until April 2022, a review will be carried out March 2022;

The officer recommendation read: Meetings of committees and sub-committees will be held in the council chamber with remote access being available to non-members and residents.

Proposed by: Cllr Jones, seconded by: Cllr Morgan. Members voted in favour of the amendment; accordingly, this became a substantive motion (2).

- Resolved:**
- 1. To note that meetings of Town Council will be held in larger local venues (no remote access or visual recording possible) until April 2022, after which time they will be held in the council chamber (with remote access and recording possible);**
 - 2. Meetings of committees and sub-committees will be held in the council chamber with remote access being available to non-members and residents until April 2022, a review will be carried out March 2022;**
 - 3. Meetings of individual working groups and other informal meetings will consider how they would like to meet (in person, hybrid or remote)**

11803 STAFF WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Members were requested to consider staff working arrangements from January 2022 in the form of hybrid working arrangements.

Members were advised that since the introduction of hybrid working office arrangements, careful consideration had been given to staffing to ensure forward facing services had not been disrupted.

Members were advised that a statistics report would be produced on the number of visitors the office received after 4pm. This data would aid the consideration of the offices closing to members of the public at 4pm, to allow the practicable implementation of the staff Flexitime Policy.

- Resolved:** For the council to continue to offer hybrid working arrangements to staff from January 2022.

11804 REVIEW OF NUMBERS OF COUNCILLORS

Members were advised that CBC had contacted town and parish councils to explore whether there was an interest in carrying out a Community Governance Review (CGR) ahead of the anticipated timeline of 2023. This review could consider the number of town or parish councillors and the parish boundary.

CBC received a request for an early CGR from Arlesey Town Council (at its meeting on 27th May 2021) as this council was interested in reducing the number of parish councillors due to long standing councillor vacancies.

The Democratic Services Manager at Central Bedfordshire Council suggested that the number of councillors a parish or town council had should be reflective of the case work from residents and of the requirements of each council. There was no standard or guidelines as to the number of electorate each town or parish councillor should or could represent.

The Democratic Services Manager, CBC, also suggested that HRTC may like to consider exploring with Chalton Parish Council the suitability of the parish boundary between the 2 parishes.

Members suggested that with the growth of Houghton Regis, the number of councillors needed to adequately service the town was expected to increase. Members wanted to have an appreciation of what measures CBC would put in place to support councillors.

Members considered the precept impact on Chalton if the boundary was to change.

A motion was proposed to read:

That the Council respond to CBC, expressing its interest in having an early Community Governance Review, and in particular its view that the parish boundary with Chalton parish should be amended in the interests of future fair and efficient local government arrangements.

Members voted in favour of the substantive motion.

Resolved: That the Council respond to CBC, expressing its interest in having an early Community Governance Review, and in particular its view that the parish boundary with Chalton parish should be amended in the interests of future fair and efficient local government arrangements.

11805 CHRISTMAS RECEPTION OPENING

The following Christmas reception opening hours were suggested:

Friday 24th December	Open 9am to 1pm
Monday 27th December	Closed
Tuesday 28th December	Closed
*Wednesday 29 th December	Closed
*Thursday 30 th December	Closed
*Friday 31 st December	Closed
Monday 3rd January	Closed
Tuesday 4th January	Normal reception hours resume

** During these times, the Council can be contacted on: 01582 708540 or by email info@houghtonregis.org.uk*

Telephone services would remain, the grounds staff would check the play areas and pavilions on 29th December and 31st December and staff would be on call should an emergency situation arise. Members were reminded that the town council does not provide any core front line services such as social services, housing and highways. These were provided by the principal authority.

Resolved: To approve the reception opening hours between Christmas and New Year as follows:

Friday 24th December	Open 9am to 1pm
Monday 27th December	Closed
Tuesday 28th December	Closed
*Wednesday 29th December	Closed
*Thursday 30th December	Closed
*Friday 31st December	Closed
Monday 3rd January	Closed
Tuesday 4th January	Normal reception hours resume

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.16pm

Dated this 13th day of December 2021

Chairman