

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 20th March 2023 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: J Carroll
Y Farrell
S Goodchild
D Jones
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: P Burgess
E Cooper
C Copleston
M S Kennedy

12396 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Burgess, Cllr Cooper, Cllr Copleston and Cllr Kennedy.

12397 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Members were asked whether they were in favour of supporting the Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space's request to pursue the registration of Windsor Drive as a Community Asset.

Members queried whether indicating their support status contravened the rules of the pre-election period and were advised that the question was asked for their personal view, however, as this meeting was recorded and circulated to a wider audience, members may feel uncomfortable sharing their views during the meeting.

12398 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12399 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 23rd January 2023 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12400 COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Corporate Services Committee 28th November 2022, 16th January and 30th January 2023

Members are referred to:

- *12273 Local Government Pension Scheme: Statement of Local Discretions
To recommend to Town Council that the Local Government Pension Scheme: Review of Statement of Local Discretions be approved.*
- *12275 Eye Care Policy
To recommend to Town Council that the Town Councils Eye Care Policy be approved.*
- *12277 Health & Safety at Work Policy
To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Health & Safety at Work Policy.*
- *12278 Risk Management Strategy & Schedule
To recommend to Town Council that the HRTC Risk Management Strategy & Schedule be approved with the approved amendments.*

Community Services Committee 7th November, 15th November 2022
Environment & Leisure Committee 14th November 2022
Planning Committee 9th January, 30th January and 20th February 2023

Members are referred to:

- *Minute 12340 Neighbourhood Plan Update
To recommend to Town Council that funds continue to be drawn from EMR 330, for the 2023/2024 financial period, for the progression of the plan to examination stage.*

Town Partnership Committee 18th October 2022

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

Office Provisions Sub Committee None to present
Proposed New Cemetery Working Group None to present

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

- To approve that funds continue to be drawn from EMR 330, for the 2023/2024 financial period, for the progression of the plan to examination stage.
- To approve the Local Government Pension Scheme: Review of Statement of Local Discretions.
- To approve the Town Councils Eye Care Policy.
- To approve adoption of the Town Councils Health & Safety at Work Policy.
- To approve that HRTC Risk Management Strategy & Schedule be approved with the approved amendments.

12401 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor updated members on the many events that had been attended since the last Town Council meeting, which included the 5th anniversary of Minds Together, Leighton and Linslade Charity Dinner, Loo of the Year Award in Houghton Regis, Leighton and Linslade Relax and Refresh afternoon, Houghton Regis Pride of Houghton Awards, Mayor of Leighton and Linslade Civic Service and a Bingo night.

Members were advised the Deputy Mayor had attended the Mayor of Dunstable Civic Service.

12402 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 Goodchild advised members that she had attended a SORTED meeting, at which discussions were held around the work that had been undertaken for the children and young people affected by domestic violence.

Cllr A Slough updated members on the Friends of Windsor Drive Community Open Space, the website was now live, Andrew Selous had visited, a march had been organised for March and a Coronation Picnic with competitions was planned.

Cllr Jones advised members he had attended a meeting of the BATPC, the meeting marked the passing of Sir Samuel Whitbread, it was advised two representatives would attend the service. Discussed was the sale of national headquarters and a review of the training offer, which was provided directly by BATPC or through outside providers.

It had been agreed that representations would be made on the Levelling Up Fund and the Regeneration Fund direct to the Government and copy NALC. Arrangements for the AGM were discussed with the venue to be confirmed.

12403 STRATEGIC POLICES 2023/24

Members were provided with the opportunity to consider key council policies and a calendar of meetings and events for 2023/24. In accordance with Standing Orders these would be presented the Town Council at the AGM on 17th May 2023.

The following points were put forward for discussion:

- Scheme of Delegation
This policy was put forward without any suggestions for alteration / amendment
- Committee Functions & Terms of Reference

Members received a Motion for consideration. The changes suggested in the motion were highlighted in the policy received.

Members were advised that an amendment to point 2, paragraph 2 was proposed by Cllr Jones, seconded by Cllr Morgan to read:

Sub-Committees and Working Groups of the Council shall consist of 5 Councillors, with the exception of the Complaints Sub-Committee, the Complaints Appeals Sub-Committee and the Disciplinary Grievance & Appeals Sub-Committee, the membership of all of which shall consist of 3 Councillors.

The original motion read:

Sub-Committees and Working Groups of the Council shall consist of 5 Councillors, with the exception of the Complaints Sub-Committee, the Complaints Appeals Sub-Committee, the Disciplinary Grievance & Appeals Sub-Committee and the Pride of Houghton Awards Working Group, the membership of all of which shall consist of 3 Councillors.

Members voted in favour of the amendment; accordingly, this became the substantive motion.

The substantive motion was proposed by: Cllr Jones and seconded by Cllr Morgan
This was carried.

It was also suggested a recommendation be put forward to Town Council in May to conclude the New Office Sub Committee. This Sub Committee last met on 27th September 2022 where it agreed that the revised Chamber layout was suitable for meetings and as such the building would continue to be maintained as required.

Members suggested that the New Office Sub-Committee meetings be left on the calendar as it was felt that it could become overlooked, alternatively it was suggested that it be incorporated into Corporate Services Committee meetings annually. Members agreed to leave the decision for the new administration in May.

It was also understood that the Events Working Group gave some consideration to the Functions & Terms of Reference of the Pride of Houghton Working Group. However, as the Pride of Houghton Working Group reported to the Community Services Committee it was not for the Events Working Group to consider such arrangements. Members were invited to put forward their suggestions to this meeting.

This item was superseded by the agreed motion presented at Committee Functions & Terms of Reference above and would consist of 5 members from May.

- Standing Orders
This policy was put forward without any suggestions for alteration / amendment
- Financial Regulations
The Internal Auditor suggested 2 amendments which would enable the current practices of the council to be in accordance with Financial Regulations, these amendments were highlighted in para 5.2 and 5.3.

Members were advised that a review was being undertaken of Financial Regulations and it was anticipated that further amendments would be put forward to Town Council in May. Of note, these would relate to Budgetary Control and Authority to Spend.

- Council Calendar 2023/24
Suggested changes to the format of the current calendar included:

Allotments Working Group to meet every 2 months or more frequently if required

Members suggested it was appropriate for the Allotment Working Group to reduce the number of meetings in the calendar year, and alter the frequency to every 2 months.

Town Council

Members were invited to consider the necessity of having a Town Council meeting in December and also in January. It was felt that there was scope to combine these meetings into one. The officer preference was to remove the January meeting, this would mean that the council would set its budget in December.

Members discussed whether it was viable to combine the two meetings into one, and whether it would be more beneficial for the December or January meeting to remain.

Members received a draft calendar for 2023/24.

Members highlighted some discrepancies and requested amendments to be made to the calendar.

Members requested the comments made at this meeting be taken to the AGM in May to enable the new administration to discuss further and make appropriate decisions.

Members were advised that the Internal auditor recommended as part of his 21/22 audit that the council review its asset register to ensure its accuracy. This work was under way. However, to aid this work the Council were requested to define an asset.

Within the Practitioners' Guide (Joint Panel on Accountability and Governance) March 2022 it advises that the term 'fixed assets' mean property, plant and equipment with a useful life of more than one year used by the authority to deliver its services.

However, it was also suggested that a monetary value be placed on the councils definition. The Internal Auditor suggested using the value recorded in Financial Regulations up to which the Clerk has the authority to spend (Para 4.4). This value was £1,000.

Other purchases made with a longevity of use of over 1 year would be recorded on an inventory list.

Resolved: To define for HRTC an asset as being a purchase of over £1,000 with a longevity of use of over 1 year.

12405 INTERNAL AUDITOR INTERIM REPORT

Members were advised that the interim Internal Audit (IA) for 2022/23 was completed on 21st February 2023 by IAC Audit and Consultancy Ltd.

Members received the following:

1. Cover Letter dated 27th February 2023 – this detailed the areas covered by the audit
2. Observations – this included detail on the audit test, the IA observation and any IA recommendation. In the Comments column Members would find the Clerks response to the Recommendation. Members were requested to consider the Recommendation and the response in the Comments Column.
3. Summary – this summarises the audit

Members requested some of the comments contained within the report be queried as it was felt that the council had been misrepresented in some areas of the report.

Resolved: To support the Comments provided on the interim Internal Audit report.

12406 TITHE FARM RECREATION GROUND SPORTS PROJECT - BORROWING APPROVAL

Members may recall in March 2022 Town Council agreed to apply for borrowing approval (Minute 11993). As this project has progressed borrowing approval had been applied for, however feedback on the application required an extension to the Resolution to confirm the annual loan repayments and comments on the precept increase.

Minute 11993 reads:

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- Resolved:**
- 1. To seek the Secretary of State's approval for the proposed borrowing from the Public Works Loan Board of £500,000 as an annuity loan over 28 years;*
 - 2. To fund associated repayments from 299 4871 in 2022/23 and for subsequent repayments to be funded from a new code in cost centre 299 specifically set up for loan repayments associated with this project.*

Members discussed generally discussed the relationship between the tax base and the precept and the funding requirements of the town council over the medium term. It was acknowledged the tax base would not have to be increased to fund these loan repayments.

Resolved: To extend Minute 11993 as follows:

- 1. To note that an annuity loan of £500,000 over 28 years will invoke an annual loan repayment of £32,551.34;**
- 2. Repayments due in 2023/24 will be met through 299-4871, subsequent repayments will be budgeted for;**
- 3. It is not intended to increase the council tax precept for the purpose of the loan repayments.**

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.32pm

Dated this 17th day of May 2023

Chairman