

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 2nd October 2023 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: N Batchelor
E Billington
P Burgess
J Carroll
E Cooper
E Costello
Y Farrell
W Henderson
M Herber
D Jones
T McMahon
C Rollins
A Slough
C Slough

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Ian Haynes Head of Environmental &
Community Services
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 1

12561 APOLOGIES

None.

12562 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12563 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Cllr Costello had confirmed that he had a registered interest in agenda item 13. As a councillor and resident with a particular interest in this service Cllr Costello had requested a dispensation to enable him to take part in this discussion and vote thereon on Agenda Item 13.

Resolved: To grant dispensation to Cllr Costello to enable him to take part in the discussion and vote thereon on Agenda Item 13.

12564 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19th June 2023. Minor amendments were requested and agreed.

Jc

Resolved: To approve the minutes as amended of the meeting held on 19th June 2023 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12565 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

Members received the minutes of the following committees and considered any recommendations contained therein

Corporate Services Committee	30 th May 2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minute number 12463 Officer / Member Protocol • Minute number 12464 Councillors Expenses
Community Services Committee	6 th February 2023
Environment & Leisure Committee	5 th June 2023
Planning Committee	12 th June, 3 rd July, 24 th July and 14 th August 2023
Town Partnership Committee	24 th January 2023

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

Proposed New Cemetery ^{Sub} Working Group Committee 15th August 2022

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

- Minute number 12463 Officer / Member Protocol;
- Minute number 12464 Councillors Expenses.

12566 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members received a verbal report on events that had been attended by the Town Mayor. Since July 62 events had been attended; of note was the Terra Croft allotment opening ceremony, the topping out ceremony at Tithe Farm and the phase one opening at All Saints View.

Cllr Cooper reported that she had attended a Morrisons charity event in aid of sick children, and a civic service in Harpenden.

It was suggested that the Mayor's Handbook needed to be updated.

12567 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 Farrell confirmed that the Memorial Hall Committee's end of year accounts had been approved and that the AGM would take place on 17th October.

Cllr A Slough reported that Windsor Drive had won the CPRE award and that the application for an Asset of Community Value had been submitted.

JK

Cllr C Slough advised that All Saints View stakeholders would hold a meeting on 10th October, the outcomes of which he would report back at the next meeting.

Cllr Jones reported that the AGM for Hospice at Home Volunteers had taken place, the committee had been re-elected and the Chairman had given notice that this would be his final term in office. Houghton Hall Park Project Board had held a meeting in July which had been an information sharing session with the new members. It had been decided that room hire rates would increase and a motion to install a dog wash facility on the site had been approved. Cllr Jones had also attended a meeting of the BATPC and a report on model financial regulations would be put before the County Committee meeting.

Cllr Billington confirmed that SORTED Counselling service had managed to reduce their waiting times; however, they had lost their Children in Need funding and were looking to find other funding sources.

Cllr Burgess advised that the Parkside Action group had carried out a poll on a community hub in Parkside and had received positive responses.

Cllr McMahon confirmed that she had been elected Chair of the Houghton Hall Park Project Board and would represent the Council. There had been some staff changes at HHP and further details would be forthcoming at the next meeting. New toddler play equipment was being installed at the visitor centre and the old equipment repurposed. The dog agility trail was also in place and proving very popular.

12568 AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2022/23

Members were advised of the outcomes of the external audit 2022/23.

There was some discussion regarding whether a response made on the Audited Annual Governance & Accountability Return should have been entered in the negative. Members were informed that this matter would be discussed with the internal auditors at a meeting in November to clarify the situation.

- Resolved:**
- 1. To approve and accept the Audited Annual Governance And Accountability Return 2022/23.**
 - 2. To note the matters raised in the Completion Letter dated 21st September 2023 and Section 3 of the Audited Annual Governance And Accountability Return 2022/23 and in future to:**
 - Continue with arrangements put in place to ensure that the council would meet its statutory obligations in respect of public rights and answers no in the Annual Governance Statement where this has not been achieved;**
 - Ensure that the Annual Governance and Accountability Return was accurate and complete;**
 - Use the standard proforma provided in Mazars' guidance for the reconciliation of boxes 7 and 8 clearly showing which debtors and creditors are responsible for the difference;**
 - Ensure the Internal Audit covers objective L.**

12569 EQUALITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION POLICY

Review of this policy was carried out annually by Town Council and was last reviewed at the meeting held on the 19th December 2022.

Members were advised, at the meeting held on the 19th December 2022, that advice had been sought from the Town Councils HR provider as to the suitability of the Town Councils established Equality & Diversity policy. The response was that, whilst that policy remained suitable, the Town Council may like to consider updating the policy by going beyond the basic equal opportunity policy (which reflected compliance with the law) and positively encourage a more diverse workforce. Hence a new Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Policy was adopted, minute number 12299.

There had been no further guidance and therefore it was considered that this policy remained fit for purpose.

Resolved: To review and approve the Town Councils Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

12570 NEW OFFICE PROVISION EMR

Members were advised that at the Corporate Services meeting held on the 11th September 2023, members received a report on the New Office EMR and some works suggested to improve the office space. At the meeting Members agreed to defer making any recommendations to Council as it was felt that Council should be consulted first, as the EMR holder.

Members were reminded that at the Town Council meeting held on the 19th June 2023 it was suggested that the use of funds from the EMR for New Office Provision be considered (minute number 12497). Members were provided with a report in order to support the use of funds from EMR New Office Provision which allowed the modelling of the Town Council offices.

Members were advised that a councillor had suggested that this EMR be transferred to the Community Services Committee to enable this committee to use the fund to bring forward community-based projects. Members were asked to consider this suggestion.

Concerns were raised about whether the correct process had been followed in regard to the retrospective sum for new office furniture. It was suggested that when considering new projects and initiatives, including the appointment of new staff, that full consideration and budget provision be made to support all on costs.

It was proposed and seconded to accept Recommendation 1 and a recorded vote was requested. Members voted as follows:

In favour:

Cllrs: Y Farrell, A Slough, E Billington, D Jones, W Henderson, C Slough, E Cooper, E Costello, C Rollins, M Herber

Jc,

Against:
Cllr: P Burgess

Abstentions:
Cllrs: J Carroll, T McMahon, N Batchelor

It was accepted that the Recommendation relating to IT and electrical works, was a health and safety matter and Members agreed unanimously to the sum of £10,000 for this purpose.

As the lobby area costing would not incur any charge, this was also agreed by the Council.

A recorded vote was requested on Recommendation 4 that the Corporate Services Committee would take on responsibility for EMR Office Provision. Members voted as follows:

In favour:
Cllrs: Y Farrell, A Slough, E Billington, D Jones, W Henderson, C Slough, E Cooper, C Rollins, N Batchelor, E Costello

Against
Cllrs: J Carroll, T McMahon, P Burgess, M Herber

- Resolved:**
- 1. To recommend approval, retrospectively, of a sum of £1,125 for the purchase of new chairs and desks for new members of staff and for this sum to be taken from the EMR New Office Provision;**
 - 2. To recommend that a further sum of up to £10,000 to be used for works to upgrade the IT cabling and electrical works and for this sum to be taken from the EMR Office Provision;**
 - 3. To agree to a costings exercise in order to enable reconfiguration of the lobby area in order to allow for more office space;**
 - 4. To recommend that the committee responsible for the EMR Office Provision be amended to the Corporate Services Committee.**
 - 5. To agree that as new projects, initiatives and staff structures were developed all on-costs were costed and budgeted for.**

12571 PARKSIDE RECREATION GROUND PAVILION (REMODELLING FEASIBILITY) OR PARKSIDE COMMUNITY HUB

Members were presented with the considerations of Community Services Committee from 17th July 2023. The following recommendations had been resolved at the July meeting (minute item 12521):

- To consider and recommend that the expenditure for delivery of this project is taken from EMR for New Office Provision, therefore the project and delivery can start as soon as the EMR has been approved at full Town Council.

Jc.

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- To use part or full amount of £5,000 to be spent on a consultation event with residents of Parkside.
 - Both of the above motions be put forward for consideration.

A discussion followed focussing on the most effective use of funds. While the option of a community hub was met with general approval, it was agreed that a consultation process with residents and stakeholders was required; this would establish how best to meet the needs of both residents and stakeholders.

It was felt that the corporate plan should be completed prior to official consultation as this would establish long-term plans and financing. The corporate plan would be presented to Town Council at the beginning of December and the associated budget would be agreed at Town Council in January. It was suggested that Town Council report back to Community Services who could then engage with potential stakeholders in preliminary discussions to establish what facilities might be required.

- Resolved:**
1. **To advise Community Services Committee that Town Council considered their resolution put forward from its meeting on 21st July but on balance felt that Town Council corporate plan process should be concluded and the supporting Town Council budget be considered and agreed prior to a consultation exercise being carried out with residents;**
 2. **To encourage Community Services Committee to consider an informal approach being made to potential stakeholders to gauge their interest and support for community hubs.**

12572 START TIME FOR WORKING GROUP MEETINGS

At the June Town Council meeting it was requested that in relation to the Combating Crime Working Group, it be investigated whether a change of start time (currently 11am) would fit in the other attendees working patterns (Bedfordshire Police and Central Bedfordshire Council Officers).

Feedback from Bedfordshire Police was that a working group finish time of after 4pm would generally fall outside of their normal working day and as such would likely restrict their ability to attend. Feedback from CBC advised that they would try and fit in with the group's preference for a start time.

The support of Bedfordshire Police at this meeting remained crucial for the continued success of the work of this working group. As such it was suggested that the timings of the Combating Crime Working Group should remain the same.

- Resolved:** **To continue with the current start times for the Working Group.**

JC

12573 CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF HOUGHTON REGIS DAY CENTRE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

As members were aware, CBC were running a Consultation on the future of Houghton Regis Day Centre for Older People. The consultation was scheduled from 14th August to 6th November 2023. Details of the consultation could be found at the following link: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations

Members were provided with the consultation document.

The consultation advised that, having looked at several options for the future of the day centre, CBC's preferred option was to relocate the service for existing customers to a community space at All Saints View, the new Independent Living Scheme in Houghton Regis. CBC would then close Houghton Regis Day Centre.

In appraising this consultation, Members were requested to consider the issues highlighted in the consultation report and whether the proposed course of action continued to support the needs of services users. Some concerns were expressed that the proposed new style of provision would be unable to accommodate the current number of service users and would not be able to offer lunch and other support services.

It was also highlighted to members that on the CBC website there was some detail on 'The future day offer for adults with disabilities and older people' which included reference to the Amphill Day Centre and the Townsend Day Centre. Whilst CBC were not actively reviewing the Townsend Day Centre service at the time, an email address had been made available for ideas to be put forward for the future day offer, day.offer@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk It was suggested that if members had any ideas that they wished to put forward that they should email in directly.

- Resolved:**
1. **To express concerns that the proposed new style of provision may not be able to accommodate the current number of service users and would not be able to offer other currently available extended services and to encourage CBC to explore options to address these concerns;**
 2. **To encourage CBC ward Cllrs to scrutinise the current provision and the new provision to ensure they fully appreciate the operational implications prior to making a final decision**

12574 CHRISTMAS RECEPTION OPENING

Members were advised of the following Christmas reception opening hours:

Friday 22nd December 2023	Open 9am to 1pm
Monday 25th December 2023	Closed – Bank Holiday
Tuesday 26th December 2023	Closed – Bank Holiday
*Wednesday 27th December 2023	Closed
*Thursday 28th December 2023	Closed
*Friday 29th December 2023	Closed

Jc.

Monday 1st January 2024

Closed – Bank Holiday

Tuesday 2nd January 2024

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 27th December and 29th December and staff would be on call in the event of an emergency situation. Members were reminded that the town council did 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.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.32pm

Dated this 11th day of December 2023

Chairman

