

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 18th March 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: J Carroll Town Mayor
P Burgess
E Cooper
E Costello
Y Farrell
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

Apologies: Councillors: W Henderson
E Billington

12748 APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Cllr Billington and Cllr Henderson

12749 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

It was highlighted to Members that there was concern regarding the lack of indoor sports hall access in Houghton Regis. This was a separate issue from the provision of leisure centre facilities.

Even with the proposed use of Houghton School, a shortfall would remain when compared with the recommendations of the CBC leisure strategy, which set out to provide 'equal or better' replacement provision within a reasonable distance of the original site. The report findings documented the provision of a replacement facility 'to the size of 6 badminton courts' and it was felt there was a disparity between what was being offered and what CBC recommendations suggested.

Long term there was the possibility of a sports hall addition to the leisure centre; however, Members were questioned whether, in the short-term, it would be possible to use the existing facility.

Cllr A Slough declared a conflict of interest, being a committee member for the Houghton Regis Badminton Club.

JC.

The community currently had approximately 102 operative hours per week access to an indoor sports hall, but this would be significantly reduced since admission to Houstone was unlikely to be granted before 5.30pm. Houstone School would also be subject to block bookings for educational purposes, which would further inhibit access, as would the available space of only 4 badminton courts.

Members were informed of the success stories of former users of the sports hall, which had provided a wide variety of sports activities. Clubs were moving to Dunstable due to the lack of provision within Houghton Regis.

The Town Clerk was requested to gather information on how many days exams were likely to be set up in the sports hall in an academic year, based on when the school was full.

Members felt that the Head of Environmental and Community Services should include this item on the Community Services, and the Environment and Leisure agendas and bring it to the attention of the Town Partnership Committee.

12750 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12751 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 22nd January 2024. Minor amendments were requested and agreed.

The following amendments were requested and made to the minutes:

Under Minute 12671 2024/25 Budget and Precept

- the text 'the balance on the earmarked reserves showed £244,000 was amended to read 'The earmarked reserves for the pavilion renovation showed £244,000 transferred out.
- Cllr Jones requested that the text 'the draft budget be agreed' was amended to read 'the amended draft budget be agreed'

The amendments were proposed by Cllr C Slough

Seconded by Cllr Costello

Members voted unanimously in favour of the amendments

Resolved: To approve the minutes as amended of the meeting held on 22nd January 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12752 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

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Corporate Services Committee	4 th December 2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minute number 12628 adoption of the Town Councils Staff Expenses Policy. • Minute number 12629 Town Councils Domain Name change • Minute number 12632 adoption of the Town Councils Sickness Absence Policy.
Community Services Committee	7 th November (grants) and 13 th November 2023
Environment & Leisure Committee	18 th September 2023
Planning Committee	27 th November and 18 th December 2023. 8 th January and 29 th January 2024
Town Partnership Committee	14 th November 2023

Environment & Leisure Committee draft Minutes from 5th February 2024

Members were also presented with the draft Minutes from the Environment & Leisure Committee meeting held on 5th February 2024. Members were referred to Minute 12695 regarding the purchase of land off Cemetery Road and requested to support the resolution. Funding for the purchase would come from General Reserves. The associated legal fees were estimated to be up to £1000, funded through 190-4059.

It was suggested that the use of general reserves for the purchase of the land should form part of the resolution prior to the Town Council meeting. It was proposed that an additional bullet point to this effect be included.

Proposed by Cllr C Slough

Seconded by Cllr Jones

Members voted unanimously in favour of this inclusion

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

- **Minute number 12628 adoption of the Town Councils Staff Expenses Policy.**
- **Minute number 12629 Town Councils Domain Name change**
- **Minute number 12632 adoption of the Town Councils Sickness Absence Policy**
- **Minute number 12695 Purchase of land off Cemetery Road**
- **Funding for the purchase of land off Cemetery Road would come from General Reserves**

12753 TOWN MAYOR ANNOUNCEMENTS

A verbal update was provided.

The Mayor had attended 29 events covering a broad range from the Holocaust Memorial Day to the Dunstable Food Bank.

The Deputy Mayor had attended: Keech Hospice; Houstone School; the Mayor of Kempston's charity quiz; the National Moment of Remembrance; the Mayor of Dunstable's Civic Service; the Singing Café; The Mayor of Kempston's Charity Bingo Evening and the Mayor of Biggleswade's Civic Service

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12754 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED

Councillors were requested to provide verbal reports from meetings they had attended of outside organisations or from training courses they had attended on behalf of the Council.

Cllr Farrell informed Members that the Memorial Hall was experiencing plumbing problems, which were being investigated. There had also been a competitive quote for an updated kitchen. Cllr Farrell had also attended Beds RCC for the 70th Anniversary and the launch of the Strategic Plan.

Cllr Slough informed Members that Windsor Drive had been nominated for a Pride of Houghton Award. A litter pick had recently been carried out and the CPRE March had taken place. The AGM would be held on 3rd April. The Neighbourhood Plan was offering additional protection to Windsor Drive and would be going to Poll soon.

Cllr McMahon gave an update on staffing at Houghton Hall. There were upcoming bookings from the NHS and Costa for the Lime Room. Houghton Hall was hoping to acquire funding for decorating, and the new play equipment would be arriving soon. The café had offered to help with events free of charge.

Cllr Jones had attended a meeting of the Houghton Regis North stakeholder group. A presentation had been given by Linnere, referencing the inability to progress as quickly as hoped. There had been an update on Bidwell West from CBC, who were questioned about the lack of provision of a primary school and community facility. There had also been questions regarding the impact of these developments on the Bedford Road.

12755 COMMITTEE WORKPLANS

At the December meeting of Town Council members approved the HRTC Corporate Strategy for 2024-2028. The plan included 4 Pillars under which were a number of Objectives along with some suggestions as to how these might be achieved. Members were invited to consider allocating the objectives to one of the council's standing committees for further consideration. The Objectives would be presented as Committee Workplans to the respective committee for more detailed consideration of delivery mechanisms and subsequent monitoring.

Resolved: To approve the Committee work plans

12756 STRATEGIC POLICIES 2024/25

To provide information to members to enable a review of the Town Councils strategic policies prior to them being presented at the Town Council meeting to be held on 15th May 2024.

Members felt unable to accept the proposed changes to the Personnel Sub-committee whereby it would contain a representative from each standing committee since Members of the Independent Group would be excluded. This would also apply to the Town Partnership Committee and these items should, therefore, be removed.

It had been suggested that the Events Working Group be disbanded with the Community Services Committee taking on the strategic direction. This would also give members of the public the opportunity to attend meetings where events were discussed – something which was not currently possible. Members felt that the Events Working Group should not be disbanded as events formed a substantial part of the budget. Members were keen for alternatives to be explored and suggested that meetings could be held less frequently. It was questioned whether Community Services would have the capacity to include Events on the agenda and that making Events a sub-committee would allow members of the public to attend. It was suggested that further consideration be given to the proposal following this feedback.

It was highlighted that the Scheme of Delegation needed further amendments:

- Head of Grounds position no longer exists and should be Head of Environmental & Community Services
- Word ‘of’ used rather than ‘or’ in some places

These changes would be made to the Scheme of Delegation and a draft circulated prior to May.

Going over the recommendation, Members agreed that:

- Changes should not be made to the membership of Personnel and Town Partnership Committees
- Options regarding the Events Working Group needed further consideration
- Wording should state that meetings would be held Monday to Thursday
- Wording should state that Town Council would stand on Monday or Tuesdays
- The Personnel and Proposed New Cemetery Sub-Committees should moved from 6pm to 7pm, since people should not be excluded from committees due to timing

The Membership of the Disciplinary and Grievance Appeals Sub-Committee was discussed. There had been 1 Disciplinary and Grievance Sub-Committee which had caused considerable difficulties and it was felt that available choice should be from the whole council rather than the Corporate Services Committee alone.

The item relating to Committee Functions and Terms of Reference would be delayed and go back for further amendment. This would be shared informally for feedback and then be presented at the AGM without being recommended for approval by the Town Council. The remaining 3 recommendations could be approved.

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

- **Scheme of Delegation as amended**
- **Standing Orders**
- **Financial Regulations as amended**

12757 COUNCIL CALENDAR 2024/25

Members were provided with a draft calendar of meetings and events for 2024/25.

The presumption was that meetings would take place on Mondays or, if this was not an option, Tuesdays. The following amendments were requested:

- For sub-committees to begin at 7pm
- To schedule Leaders Briefings for days where another committee meeting was being held
- For Leaders Briefings to be held at 11am rather than 3pm
- To avoid two meetings on the same evening and to amend the calendar where the Proposed New Cemetery Sub-Committee was scheduled prior to another meeting
- A Planning Committee meeting to be scheduled for 31st March
- Italics to be checked for consistency
- Combatting Crime Working Group to be shown as a hybrid meeting

It was agreed to make the amendments and distribute a further draft to Members.

It was confirmed that the Events Working Group had been omitted while a decision was made on how to progress with future meetings.

It was agreed to accept the calendar once these amendments had been made.

Proposed by Cllr Jones

Seconded by Cllr A Slough

Members voted unanimously in favour of the proposal

Resolved: To recommend to the Annual Meeting of Town Council approval of the Council Calendar 2024/25 with amendments.

12758 ANNUAL REVIEW OF COUNCIL ASSETS

Members were presented with a list of council assets held on 31st March 2023, as amended by additions and disposals during 2023/24.

At the council meeting in March 2023, it was agreed that a council asset should be defined as a purchase of over £1,000 with a longevity of use of over one year. The review of council assets has been undertaken to apply this definition.

12759 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY AND SCHEDULE

Members were provided with a copy of the Risk Management Strategy and Schedule. Following advice from the Internal Auditor, the Town Councils Risk Management Strategy and Schedule review date had been changed. Whilst this document had been reviewed annually by the Corporate Services committee, it would now be reviewed annually at one of the earlier meetings of Town Council. It was suggested that this be the June meeting. In

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order to comply with Internal Arrangements for this year and for next financial year, the document would also be presented at the June Town Council meeting.

Resolved: To approve the HRTC Risk Management Strategy & Schedule.

12760 INSURANCE RENEWAL UPDATE

Members had been advised that the Town Council's insurance provision was due for renewal on 1st June 2024. It had been proposed to present a recommendation directly to Town Council in March; however, timescales meant that insurance quotes had not been obtained. Members were requested to consider delegating the appointment of the Town Council's insurer to the Town Clerk, in conjunction with the Head of Corporate Services, and for the outcome to be reported at the next Corporate Services Committee. Members were advised that this appointment would meet all requirements of the Council's Financial Regulations

Resolved: To authorise the Town Clerk, in conjunction with the Head of Corporate Services, to make the necessary arrangements for the Council's insurance.

12761 TOWNSEND DAY CENTRE CONSULTATION

Members were advised that there was a CBC consultation on the future of the Townsend Day Centre which would run from 8th January 2024 to 1st April 2024. Members comments were invited.

The town council were keen to represent the community and to work with partners to protect and enhance local services and facilities. HRTC had significant concerns over the proposal to relocate services from the Townsend Centre to the new Houghton Regis Community & Leisure Centre. Although the consultation provided some analysis of the options considered for the service and the benefits or otherwise of these options, there was insufficient information on the detail to enable stakeholders and residents to fully appreciate what was being proposed and the impact it would have on the services currently provided from the Townsend Day Centre.

There were concerns that the replacement facilities would not be suitable for the needs of the current users of the Townsend Day Centre. The Day Centre currently offered a safe space in familiar surroundings. The proposed relocation to a public facility with the noise, bustle and changing surroundings would create barriers for participation and engagement. This would be to the detriment of the Townsend Day Centre service users.

It was understood that the plans for the Houghton Regis Community & Leisure Centre included a community room for use by local groups and residents. If it was the intention to use this community room as the replacement space for the Townsend Day Centre, the local community of Houghton Regis had again lost out on accessible community space (the Houghton Regis Day Centre and the Bedford Square Community Centre in particular).

Although refreshments could continue to be provided in the new venue, they would be from a public café. This could cause issues for some service users and residents. Users of the Townsend Centre had complex needs which may not always be compatible with other users.

12762 TITHE FARM SPORTS PROJECT

Members had been made aware of the following four outstanding issues:

UK Power Networks

Section 278

Anglian Water

Car Park Lighting

The issues relating to Anglian Water and car park lighting had been resolved.

UKPN had still not given a date for the terminal to be installed. The local MP had been involved, but it was felt that a formal complaint should not be made.

A Section 278 was required for the entrance change to the Tithe Farm site and the CBC Highways contractor was yet to provide a quotation. This was a planning condition which could potentially cause a completed project to remain vacant until the necessary paperwork was processed.

It was questioned what costs were likely to be incurred as a result of these issues. Members were advised that any UKPN costs could be covered within the contingency. The Section 278 should not incur increased costs; however, HRTC might need to investigate a means of gaining permission to open the facility without discharging all of the planning conditions.

Other issues were raised, including the possibility of reputational damage incurred by a finished project being left vacant. There was also the risk of future income being impacted by these delays.

Members questioned whether Beds FA could apply some pressure. It was also suggested that Houghton Regis Town Council contact CBC councillors to progress the Section 278.

Resolved: ~~In accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item set out below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.~~

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.10pm

Dated this 24th day of April 2024

Chairman

f Carroll