

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 16th July 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: E Cooper Town Mayor
J Carroll
E Billington
P Burgess
E Costello
W Henderson
M Herber
D Jones
T McMahon
C Rollins
A Slough
C Slough
D Taylor

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 2

Apologies Councillor: Y Farrell

12902 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllr Farrell.

12903 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12904 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12905 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2024.

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17th June 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12906 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

Members were updated on the Corporate Peer Challenge process and presented with an Action Plan reflecting on the Corporate Peer Challenge Report.

Members questioned whether the sum of £14,000 to support Amber-flagged projects would be adequate and suggested a sum of up to £20,000.

Members felt that the report contained much that would prove useful in the coming months and years. There was some disappointment, however, that there had been no opportunity to provide feedback to the team who carried out the Corporate Peer Challenge as there were some points for future consideration, as follows:

- At one of the meetings, 2 councillors suggested that groups within the council were not working together. One of the CBC councillors was not present at this meeting and were not subsequently invited to provide written comments to inform the process.
- At another meeting, one of the Chairs was unable to attend due to work commitments and the electronic communications were insufficient for their contributions. There was no opportunity to take part in the process and so the information provided may have been incomplete.

There was a need to ensure that working councillors had the opportunity to make the same contribution as other councillors.

- In addition, a member of the peer team had said they did not feel equipped to conduct their assigned role as it was not within the scope of their experience. An alternative Peer may have picked up on additional / pertinent issues.

It was emphasised these points did not, in any way, detract from the report.

A query was raised in relation to item 3.9 of the Action Plan which stated, 'develop a programme to increase the visibility of the town council in the new housing areas of Bidwell West and Linnere'. There was a sum of £60,000 allocated to this item and it was questioned whether this would be a one-off or an annual payment. It was confirmed that this was likely to be an annual payment to be funded in the first instance by s106 funding.

It was also questioned how the Town Council anticipated achieving higher visibility in the new housing areas, especially Linnere. The Town Clerk confirmed that Houghton Regis Town Council was working closely with Land Improvement Holdings and would increase the council's involvement over time.

Cllr Jones advised that the Liberal Democrat group did not accept all the contents of the report as there were certain items with which they disagreed. It was confirmed that the report was useful and had focussed the Town Council's attention on actions needed to implement the Corporate Plan. The Action Plan was thorough, but it was anticipated that the actions coming out of it would take time to be realised.

Councillor Carroll proposed an amendment to the recommendation to increase the sum of £14,000 for the Amber-flagged projects to £20,000.

Seconded by Cllr Herber

For: 5

Against: 6

The recommendation remained as presented.

Resolved:

- 1. To endorse the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan;**
- 2. To approve the use of General Reserves up to £14,000 to support the Amber flagged projects to enable delivery, subject to Committee approval, in 2024/25.**

12907 MOTION RE OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR BEDFORDSHIRE

The following Motion had been received from Cllr Herber:

This Council notes and shares the widespread public dissatisfaction in the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Bedfordshire and that Houghton Regis Town Council fully supports the Motion Proposed by Liberal Democratic Councillor Leamen at Central Bedfordshire Council's meeting held 17th January '24.

Liberal Democratic Councillor Leamen's – Motions reads *That this Council notes the hard work of Bedfordshire's police officers, PCSOs and auxiliary staff in trying to keep our local communities safe.*

Further notes that despite their best efforts, according to Home Office statistics, over 4,000 burglaries went unsolved between July 2021 and June 2023 in Bedfordshire with a 10% increase in car thefts in the year to June.

Believes that many more crimes could be prevented in Central Bedfordshire with an increased community policing presence and believes that many of our towns and villages have seen a drop in police visibility and presence in their local communities over recent years.

Notes that according to a Freedom of Information request, the Office of the Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner, including staff running costs, came to £1,210,233 an increase of 13% on the previous financial year.

Further notes that since 2015, 67 Police Community Support Officers have been removed from Bedfordshire's streets.

Believes that the cost of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner could be better spent on providing frontline police services - the equivalent of 52 new Police Community Support Officers.

Further believes that regardless of the incumbents political allegiances it is clear that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is not a necessary role and calls on the

Leader of the Council to write to the Home Secretary expressing this Council's view that the role should be abolished with the financial savings reinvested into frontline policing that would benefit Central Bedfordshire.

Central Bedfordshire colleagues carried the above motion.

Therefore, I request a recorded vote of Houghton Regis Town Council to agree that we also believe that regardless of the incumbents political allegiances it is clear that the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner is not a necessary role and calls on the Town Clerk of the Council to write to the Home Secretary expressing this Council's view that the role should be abolished with the financial savings reinvested into frontline policing that would benefit residents in Houghton Regis.

Members were invited to consider the above Motion.

Cllr McMahon seconded the Motion

Cllr Jones advised that it was regrettable that it had not been possible to consider the Motion prior to the meeting of the Town Council. On behalf of the Liberal Democrats, Cllr Jones advised that it was felt that the post was not a suitable use of taxpayers' money; however, this was not a reflection on the new incumbent. The Liberal Democrats looked forward to working with the new PCC and seeing how he approached the role. Cllr Slough endorsed the comments relating to PCC Tizzard who had shown commitment to neighbourhood policing. While any savings would be welcomed, it was questioned, how the job would be carried out without a PCC. An amendment to the proposal describing how the work would be done and the associated cost, would, however, be supported. Cllr Slough was not in favour of abolishing the role without knowing what would take its place and felt that someone was needed who was familiar with the area and could guide the strategic development of the police. Cllr Slough felt unable to support the Motion.

Members continued to discuss the value of the role, the suitability of a town council voicing an opinion and how any released funding could be used.

Members were keen to state that this discussion was not a reflection on PCC Tizzard but was a discussion about the value, scope and suitability of the role of PCC.

Cllr Herber withdrew the Motion and advised that she would reconsider the Motion in light of the discussion and may resubmit at a future date.

12908 NALC SUPER COUNCILS NETWORK

As a member of the NALC Super Council Network, the council was invited to nominate a councillor representative to attend network meetings.

The next meeting was scheduled for Thursday 12th September between 18:00-19:15 (virtual).

NALC provided the following clarification on the frequency, timings and venue of these meetings:

- *Network meetings are open to officers and councillors from Super Councils. Councils are encouraged to nominate at least one councillor to join the network mailing list and attend meetings when they can.*

- *Meetings take place quarterly on Zoom, with four scheduled in a calendar year.*

There was no set day of the week for network meetings. They were previously scheduled to take place from 12:00-13:15, however NALC would be trialling a 18:00-19:15 slot for the next meeting.

Cllr Costello nominated Cllr Jones as representative.

The Town Clerk informed Members that the invitation was open to all councillors.

Cllr McMahon asked to be put forward as a representative.

It was suggested that to get a balance of view Group Leaders could be nominated.

Resolved: To nominate Group Leaders as the Councils representatives to the NALC Super Councils Network.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 19.47pm

Dated this 14th day of October 2024

Chairman