

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 14th October 2024 at 7.00pm

Present: Councillors: E Cooper
E Billington
E Costello
Y Farrell
W Henderson
M Herber
D Jones
T McMahon
C Slough
D Taylor

Town Mayor

Officers: Clare Evans
Louise Senior

Town Clerk
Head of Democratic Services

Public: 1

Apologies Councillor: P Burgess
J Carroll
C Rollins
A Slough

13003 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs Burgess, Carroll, Rollins and Slough.

13004 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A statement from the Head of the Academy of Central Bedfordshire, covering the following points, was read out to Members.

The proposal to move sports hall provision to Houstone School, where access would be limited, would result in ACB experiencing a significant loss to their ability to provide PE. ACB currently paid for the use of the sports hall but this cost would increase if it became necessary to transport students to another site. On opening in 2012, ACB had access to a facility, but access was subsequently removed in 2013; since 2013, payment had been made to the leisure centre for use of the facilities as there was insufficient space and funding to build a sports hall on campus.

A large portion of the ACB curriculum was dedicated to PE lessons; however, loss of the hall and increased costs meant that PE would be timetabled less frequently. This would impact the education of the students, and result in less support for their wellbeing and mental health.

There were 73 students on Kingsland Campus, 40% of whom were 'pupil premium', 41 received free school meals allowance, 26% had an EHCP and 8% are subject to a child protection plan. It was necessary to have an engaging curriculum to ensure attendance by

students who were disadvantaged or at risk of abuse. Should the quality of the curriculum drop it was anticipated a fall in student attendance would also be seen.

ACB had been used in support of the initial bid to secure funding for the building of the new leisure centre. That the building of the new leisure centre should then have a limiting impact on the delivery of sports to pupils was hard to accept.

Any other further opportunity to discuss the leisure centre remaining accessible to ACB and the wider community would be welcomed.

This concluded the statement.

A representative for the Academy added that, whatever Service Level Agreement existed with Houghton School, indoor leisure space would remain at a deficit and the loss of a preventative space would have a significant impact. It was suggested that Houghton Regis Town Council formally approach Central Bedfordshire Council requesting that a new sports hall be added to the leisure centre currently being built. It was felt there was sufficient land to achieve this.

It was additionally proposed that HRTC approach CBC to establish the situation in the interim, and to propose taking on ownership of the existing sports hall as a community asset. Purchase of the sports hall could be achieved by borrowing money, raising the precept and potentially a public work loan.

The Town Clerk responded that it would not be possible to discuss or determine an outcome at this meeting as the issue would need to be presented as a committee report.

An update was provide on discussions with CBC at the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee. It was felt that there had been insufficient awareness at CBC of the issue. The situation had since stagnated and further discussions were yet to be confirmed.

It was brought to the attention of Members that Houghton Regis Badminton Club had met with the leisure services contract manager and had been informed that the need for a sports hall was evaluated by an algorithm. This had been based on population at that point and had, therefore, failed to take into account the increased population of Houghton Regis.

It was emphasised that it was not simply the loss of courts that was problematic but the amount of time available for the community to use indoor leisure facilities. Approximately 98 hours per week, 50 weeks per year were currently available, but this was likely to fall to 48 hours, 35 weeks per year when accounting for school use.

It was felt that individuals within the community would be significantly affected, and this would be especially detrimental to those who were disadvantaged or vulnerable. Members of the Committee highlighted that public use of school facilities had proven to be an unsatisfactory model which resulted in all parties involved being negatively impacted. Members expressed their frustration that this situation had been allowed to arise.

It was suggested to the speakers that they attend the next Town Partnership meeting since this would provide a further opportunity to present this case to Central Bedfordshire councillors. It was agreed there would be merit in attending the meeting as the Town Partnership Committee as an executive member was due to attend who would be able to take these concerns back to the relevant member of the executive at CBC.

13005 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

13006 MINUTES

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024

Resolved: To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 16th July 2024 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

13007 COMMITTEE AND SUB-COMMITTEE MINUTES

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

Corporate Services Committee	10 th June, 23 rd July and 27 th August 2024 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minute number 12868 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Family Friendly Policy ○ Flexible Working Policy ○ Capability Policy ○ Grievance Policy ○ Officer/Member Protocol ○ Training Agreement ○ Training Statement of Intent • Minute number 12870 (as agreed in private session)
Planning Committee	To request approval from Town Council for the use of General Reserves up to £4,000 for supporting IT 13 th May, 3 rd June, 24 th June, 15 th July, 5 th August, 27 th August 2024
Community Services Committee	8 th April 2024
Environment & Leisure Committee	29 th April & 29 th July 2024
Town Partnership Committee	23 rd April 2024

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

New Cemetery Sub-Committee	None to present
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- Resolved:** To receive the Minutes detailed above and to approve the recommendation contained therein as follows:
- **Minute number 12868**
 - Family Friendly Policy**
 - Flexible Working Policy**
 - Capability Policy**
 - Grievance Policy**
 - Officer/Member Protocol**
 - Training Agreement**
 - Training Statement of Intent**
 - **Minute number 12870 (as agreed in private session)**
To request approval from Town Council for the use of General Reserves up to £4,000 for supporting IT

13008 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Mayor updated members that forty-five events had been attended since the last meeting. The events had included:

- The Army Benevolent Fund, June
- Bedfordshire Games Committee, July
- Birds of Prey, August
- Newport Pagnell Cultural Committee event, September.
- Luton and Dunstable Fundraising concert, October

The Deputy Mayor had attended 18 events including:

- The Luton Irish Forum which offered support to all members of the community
- The Army Benevolent Fund – Members were requested to urge veterans in need of support to contact the organisation.
- Three fund raising events and a resident's 100th birthday

13009 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 attended on behalf of the Council.

Cllr Farrell advised Members that the kitchen at the Memorial Hall was progressing, as were external works to make the pavements safer.

Cllr Herber had attended the South Beds Dial-a-Ride AGM where it was confirmed their lottery funding had ended. Hospice at Home Volunteers had highlighted that Dunstable and Houghton Regis Town Councils were the main source of funding and asked whether Houghton Regis Town Council could provide a Service Level Agreement for £2,000 annually.

Cllr McMahon informed Members that the pathway at Houghton Hall Park was due to be resurfaced soon and that three memorial benches were to be installed. The MacMillan Coffee Morning had raised £546.10. Forthcoming events were being advertised online

and it was hoped to include a food historian coming in to demonstrate processes used in the past.

Cllr Jones apologised to Members as he had been unable to attend many of the committees he represented due to various reasons. The APPP meeting had been attended and the main item of business had been a discussion with the Police and Crime Commissioner.

13010 AUDITED ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2023/24

Members were advised of the outcomes of the external audit 2023/24.

A recommendation had been made for the internal auditor's letter to be shared with the external auditor - a point which had been raised the previous year and was something that needed to be actioned, with clarification sought on the procedures to be applied.

An item had been raised at the June meeting (Minute 12884) regarding a discrepancy between the interest paid on the public works loans in the previous year and the current year. It was questioned whether this should have been accrued and how the discrepancy would be accounted for in the coming year. The Town Clerk requested the opportunity to investigate this further outside of the meeting and to update Members at a later date.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve and accept the Audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return 2023/24.**
- 2. To note the matters raised in the Completion Letter dated 23rd September 2024.**

13011 INTERNAL CONTROLS POLICY

During a recent internal audit, it was noted that the Town Council did not have a specific Internal Controls Policy. In order to rectify this, Members were provided with an Internal Controls Policy for approval.

Internal controls were set up by the Clerk/RFO, but Members needed to ensure they had an understanding of those controls and were responsible for checking that they were operated effectively.

The following changes to the document were proposed:

- The wording at the top of page 89 of the document be amended to read 'current financial year' rather than 'the coming year'.
- The wording of the last paragraph on page 91 to be amended to read 'but whilst no significant internal control issues were identified during the year the council strives at all times...'
- There were four references in the document to the RFO as Responsible Finance Officer or Responsible Financial Officer. There needed to be consistency.

Members were happy to move the recommendation with these alterations being implemented.

Resolved: To review and adopt the Internal Controls Policy.

13012 MARKET CHARTER

At the Community Engagement Sub-Committee it had been requested that an update be provided regarding the Dunstable Market Charter.

Dunstable Town Council were considering HRTC's request for them to consider their use of their Market Charter rights at their Community Services Committee meeting in November.

As such, a more comprehensive update was anticipated to be provided to Council at the December 2024 meeting.

13013 2025/26 BUDGET SETTING PROCESS

Members were advised of the anticipated budget setting process for the financial year 2025/26.

The budget preparation process had been brought forward to allow for more consultation. There was some dissatisfaction with 3rd January being scheduled as part of this process as it was extremely close to the Christmas break. The Town Clerk highlighted that this was how the dates fell when taking into account the agenda publication dates, and that bringing the budget process forward allowed councillors more flexibility in their considerations. Members asked if it would be possible when setting next year's calendar to delay the budget setting by a week, thereby allowing more time post-Christmas. The Town Clerk advised that extensions had been requested in previous years and that precept information would still be requested ahead of the Town Council meeting.

There had been discussions about using Members open sessions for training. It was confirmed this would form part of the October briefing.

It was confirmed that the tax base was announced in November.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.05pm

Dated this XX day of XXX XXX

Chairman