

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

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Minutes of a Meeting of BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Held in the Hall, Civic Centre on
Monday 14th November 2022 at 7.30 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors:

W. Conian (Chairman, Town Mayor)
N. Taylor (Deputy Town Mayor)
S. Cloughton
G. Corry
A. Foster
J. Jones
G. Stevens
P. Fisher
M-J. Hardinge
R. Freedman

ALSO PRESENT

Sue Severn, Town Clerk.

Members of Public

No members of the public were present

FC 112/22 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were **received** and **accepted** from Councillors P. de Hoest, A. Peeler,

The Clerk advised the meeting that Cllr Porter by reason of non-attendance at six consecutive meetings, without apologies for absence, was no longer qualified to be a councillor. No casual vacancy has arisen due to the lack of time before the next ordinary elections.

Opening remarks

Cllr Conian formally welcomed the new Town Clerk to the meeting and recorded the thanks of the Royal British Legion for her help in organising the Remembrance Day parade.

Cllr Conian wished to record and pass on the Council's thanks to John Bushby, Town Warden for the provision and installation of the new noticeboards which have been well received.

Cllr Conian also asked that the council's thanks for her work be extended to Danielle McGlynn for her work as temporary Deputy Town Clerk over the past twelve months.

FC 113/22 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Conian declared an interest as a Trustee of Sunnyside Rural Trust.

FC 114/22

The **Minutes of the Previous** Berkhamsted Town Council **Meeting** held on 5th September 2022 (previously circulated) were received and approved and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

FC 115/22 Public Participation

No members of public were present.

STANDING COMMITTEES to receive and adopt the minutes of:

FC 116/22 Transport and Environment Committee 31 October 2022

The minutes were received and adopted.

FC 117/22 Finance and Policy Committee 17th October 2022

Cllr Freedman stated that the F & P committee had transferred (by virement) monies from reserves to cover overspend on grants budget. Cllr Armytage asked for the figures which Cllr Freedman asked the Clerk to confirm. [*Confirmed as £20,000 transferred from general reserve to grants where budget shortfall was £4,674 in July 2022*]. Additional budget has not yet been spent. Councillors were asked whether there were any objections to the virement. Cllr Foster stated that in her view budgets should be adhered to.

It was agreed that the clerk would circulate a single-sheet analysis of budget against actual which will inform councillors of the council's finances on a monthly basis. This will be added to each agenda.

The minutes were received and adopted.

FC 118/22 Town Planning Committee meetings: 28th September 10th October, 7th November

The minutes were received and adopted.

FC 119/22 OTHER WORKING GROUPS & COMMITTEES

Allotment Management Team

The notes of the meeting held on 17th October 2022 were received and adopted.

A minor amendment to the Lease held by Sunnyside Rural Trust was agreed (specified in the Clerk's report to councillors) to permit the Trust to sell produce from their allotment area in accordance with their charitable aims and objects for a trial period of 12 months was agreed unanimously.

Cllr Conian asked that in future the Clerk lists resolutions in the agenda as separate items for consideration by councillors. This was noted and agreed.

FC 120/22 FINANCE & GOVERNANCE MATTERS

AGAR – Annual Accounts for the year ended 31st March 2022

- i. The signed Annual Governance and Accountability Return was received under cover of the External Auditor's 28th September 2022 letter. (Previously circulated).
- ii. It was noted that the certificate, notice of conclusion of audit and full return with supporting documentation were published on 30th September 2022 on the Town Council website. The notice of conclusion of audit was similarly publicised and all papers made available for public inspection as set out on the notice of conclusion of audit for not less than five years.
- iii. It was noted that the auditor's opinion is that, based on their review, the information in the annual returns is in accordance with proper practices and there are no other matters that have

come to their attention giving cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met.

The Chairman expressed the council's thanks to Dori Beecroft, Finance Officer, for a job well done.

FC 121/22 Budget preparation and Precept 2023/24

It was noted that the proposed timeframe for the budget approval is as follows:

21st November: Councillor workshop for budget preparation.

5th December: Formalised budget proposals considered by Finance & Policy committee for further consideration.

It was noted that early sign-off would be advantageous.

4th January: Consideration of final budget to be completed at Finance & Policy committee.

16th January: Final budget and precept to be approved at Full Council.

FC 122/22 Update to Standing Orders

1. To approve the addition of wording to Section 3 of the Council's standing orders to permit members of the public to speak during debate, if recognised by the Chairman. (Previously circulated in Clerk's report).

Councillors considered the wording submitted which they believed should be amended to include 'members of the public may indicate that they wish to speak by raising their hand. The Chair may recognise them'. A revised version of the amendment will be circulated for final approval at January's full council meeting.

2. To decide whether public participation timings should be increased, or remain as current.

It was resolved to leave timings at three minutes for individuals to speak. It was noted that if there were a large number of members of the public present who wished to speak a total time-limit should be imposed by the Chair.

FC 123/22 Update to Bus project

Councillors were asked to approve further investigation of the options, costs and potential funding to further the possible provision of a limited bus service for Berkhamsted residents. Cllr Stevens detailed work carried out to date and what was needed to ascertain possible feasibility.

Councillors approved the further investigation with working group reporting back to council.

Action Cllr Conian will speak to Community Action Dacorum to investigate costs and services which could be made available. The Clerk will contact Sawbridgeworth Town Council and commercial providers within TAS report and report back to working group.

FC 124/22 Applications for Grant Funding

The Clerk was authorised to apply for grant funding to appropriate funders for BTC initiatives outside of the scope of precept funding. Any grants with restrictions should be referred to council for consideration before proceeding.

The first such grant is to cover the cost of professional planning consultant to lead the work for a Neighbourhood Plan. Cllr Freedman advised that he has been approached by a personal contact whose ethical company offers free of charge advice.

Action The clerk will contact the firm to find out more.

FC 125/22 Civic Centre lease and building condition

Lease: The Clerk reported that the terms of the Lease were now agreed with Dacorum for a further 4 years ending in June 2025, as circulated. Cllr Stevens commented that they were more onerous than the original lease but were approved by the council's legal advisor.

Action Once received, the new Lease should be signed by the Mayor and Town Clerk, in accordance with Standing Orders, on behalf of the council.

Building condition: The condition of the building and décor as detailed in the clerk's report was noted. Estimates are outstanding for the necessary work at the date of this meeting. Cllr Freedman suggested that the estimates should be discussed at the budget workshop and presented to January full council meeting for approval.

FC 126/22 Cost of Living

Councillors considered BTC's response to the current cost of living crisis. Cllrs Foster, Stevens, Taylor and the Clerk attended DBC workshops intended to find ways in which joint working between charities, agencies and others could best be achieved. Since the original meeting Cllr Stevens has a list of churches and others locally who will be contacted to have a round table discussion. Hertfordshire CC has a pot of money available on an 'as and when' basis. Cllr Corry thought that local charities should be involved and that the British Legion would be a good organisation to include in discussions. The Baptist Church, via schools, has access to families in need and they receive groceries for them. The working group will report to full council. Cllr Freedman said that he had spoken to local charities last year to gauge interest in forming a charity council to be proactive, the feedback had been that this was already in place with the Chamber of Commerce. Cllr Taylor was asked to speak to the CoC. Warm space for homework could be an idea. Thoughts on possible solutions should be passed to members of the working group.

FC 127/22 Coronation 6th May 2023

A working group set up with some volunteers already following Transport & Environment meeting. Cllrs Stevens, Foster and Jones will work with community members and groups to create a proposal to council for a celebration event. It was agreed to include budget for the celebrations in 2023/24 budget.

FC 128/22 Exclusion of Press & Public

It was resolved under Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 to exclude any members of the press and public due to the confidential nature of the business to be concluded.

FC 129/22 Sunnyside Rural Trust Allotment lease

Resolved under FC 119/22 above

FC 130/22 Staff incremental progression

It was resolved that the Deputy Town Clerk and Town Warden's salaries should rise by one scale point from 1st January 2023 in accordance with their terms and conditions of employment.

FC 131/22 Local Government National Salary Award 2022-23

It was noted and agreed that the salary increase awarded from April 2022 would be paid to all staff; and with effect from 1st April 2023 all employees would receive an additional day's leave entitlement.

Clerk's report

Activities suggested for the council and officers to undertake (previously circulated) were discussed. It was pointed out that if ward councillor participation would be required they must be consulted and agree to take part in advance. The following suggestions were discussed:

Christmas lights competition

The suggestion was that a small prize be given to a winning display in each ward. After discussion it was thought that for this to work effectively residents would be asked to vote for their favourite in an online poll.

Best front garden competition

Again prizes for winning gardens in each ward, judging end June. Cllr Conian suggested including requirement for sustainable, bio-diverse gardens to encourage things such as holes in fences for hedgehogs, perennial, rather than annual, planting to attract bees, butterflies and wormeries, bug hotels.

Dementia Friendly Town

Considered a good idea but essential to engage with Age Concern and other charities.

Loneliness project/family friendly ideas

Consider creating 'happy to talk' benches which are signed to encourage people to sit and talk. Possibly recruit local café/pub to put on a monthly community lunch at affordable, fixed price. Family friend ideas include books swaps, maybe a shed, provision of a warm meeting place where people can 'bring their own coffee/drinks/snacks'. For many young families and those in need it was recognised that a chance to spend time with others at little or no cost could be extremely welcome.

Berkhamsted Town Council magazine

As the main TC communication to every household in Berkhamsted it was suggested that this could attract many advertisers who would cover the cost of the magazine and it would be of interest and value to residents. Volunteer editorial team would be needed with contributions from local groups, authors, schools and young people being sought.

Signed:

Dated:

Dates of next Full Council meetings

Monday 16th January 2022

Monday 20th March 2023

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.50pm.