

## **BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL**

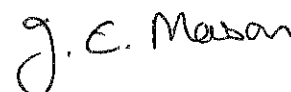
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27 August 2019

### **SUMMONS TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

Notice is hereby given that a meeting of **Berkhamsted Town Council** will be held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Berkhamsted on **Monday 2 September 2019** at **7.30 pm** for the purpose of transacting the business set out in the agenda below and you are hereby summoned to attend.



Mrs J Mason  
Town Clerk

#### **MEMBERS:**

Councillors    G Stevens (Town Mayor)  
                  G Corry (Deputy Mayor)  
                  A Armytage  
                  S Cloughton  
                  W Conian  
                  P de Hoest  
                  P Fisher  
                  R Freedman  
                  M Hardinge  
                  J Jones  
                  A Peeler  
                  T Porter  
                  N Taylor  
                  P White  
                  N Woolner

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ARE INVITED TO ALL MEETINGS OF THE TOWN COUNCIL**

## OPENING MATTERS

**FC 84/19** To receive **Apologies for Absence**

**FC 85/19** To **receive declarations of interest** regarding items on the agenda

**FC 86/19** **Minutes of the last meeting**

To receive and approve the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 10 June 2019 (previously circulated).

**FC 87/19** **Public Participation**

To **suspend standing orders** to allow any members of the public present to speak.

**FC 88/19** **Town Mayor's Communications**

- (i) NALC Newsletter re Annual conference 28/29 October 2019  
(15-07-19)\*
- (ii) HAPTC Bulletin August 7th  
(9-8-19)\*
- (iii) NALC Chief Executive's Newsletter  
(9-08-19)\*
- (iv) NALC newsletter – NALC opens nominations to its Larger Councils Committee  
(16-08-19)\*
- (v) Visit Herts | Business Barometer Newsletter  
(15-08-19)\*
- (vi) NALC Newsletter – new ICO Guidelines  
(16-08-19)\*
- (vii) Herts Valleys CCG Annual General Meeting – Thursday 12 September 2019.  
(21-08-18)\*

\*Date circulated to Council.

## STANDING AND OTHER COMMITTEES

To **receive and adopt** the minutes of the:  
(\* denotes already circulated and \*\* to follow)

**FC 89/19** **Finance and Policy Committee**

Held on: \*29 July 2019

- (i) Health and Safety Policy – to **ratify** the Health and Safety Policy adopted at that meeting:
- (ii) To **receive** a brief update on the Christmas lighting scheme.

**FC 90/19 Town Planning Committee**

Held on:                   \*24 June 2019  
                                  \*15 July 2019  
                                  \* 5 August 2019  
                                  \*\* 27 August 2019

**FC 91/19 Transport and Environment Committee**

Held on                   \* 17 June 2019  
                                  \*\*19 August 2019

**FC 92/19 Climate Change Steering Group - Working Group Terms of reference**

- (i) To **ratify** the draft terms of reference for the three working groups (Travel; Energy and Mitigation) that will report to T & E through the Climate Change Steering Group (to follow);
- (ii) To **agree** the budget provision proposed for these groups.

**FC 93/19 Allotments**

- (i) To **receive and adopt** the minutes of the Allotment Management Team meeting held on 8 July 2019;
- (iii) To **note** that AMT recommends that there should be no increase in allotment charges in September 2019. Changes to the charges would be considered for the allotment year commencing September 2020.

**YOUTH MATTERS**

**FC 94/19 Youth Town Council and Swan Youth Project**

To **receive** a verbal update on any matters as appropriate (Cllr N Woolner).

**POLICY MATTERS**

**FC 95/19 Engagement with the Community Strategy (Cllr P de Hoest)**

- (i) Following discussion at F & P on 29 July 2019, **to consider** proposals in a paper prepared by Cllr P de Hoest, set out in attachment 1 to this agenda (a copy of the initial paper discussed at F & P is also attached for ease of reference);
- (ii) To **RESOLVE** that the proposals and recommendations contained in the paper be agreed.

**FC 96/19 Newsletter**

- (i) To **discuss and agree** a timetable for the preparation of the next edition of Update, the newsletter of Berkhamsted Town Council;
- (ii) To **consider and agree** the method of distribution;
- (iii) To **nominate** a small group of councillors to act with the Town Clerk as the editorial team.

**FC 97/19 Recycling bin provision (Cllr P de Hoest)**

- (i) To **note and as appropriate agree** that in order to improve recycling and reduce the amount of waste going to landfill, there is an urgent need for improved recycling bin provision in the Town;
- (ii) To **consider** a proposal by Cllr de Hoest that an eye catching fish design bin also be installed, which a local engineering firm has agreed to produce and donate to the Town;
- (iii) To **RESOLVE** that the Town Council should work with DBC in order to increase recycling bin provision in the shopping area and to **authorise** Cllr P de Hoest to liaise with the appropriate officers regarding the installation of further standard bins and the fish bin.  
(Pictures of the current style of bin and an example of a fish bin are at attachment 2)

**FC 98/19 Berkhamsted Parochial Charities**

To **ratify** the appointment of Ms B Newton as a Town Council nominated Trustee.

**FC 99/19 Budget 2020-21**

- (i) To **remind** Committee chairs that budget preparation for 2020-21 will commence in the autumn;
- (ii) To **agree** that each committee should review requirements for the year and also consider the preparation of a three year plan;
- (iii) To **note** that budget recommendations will then be discussed at F & P for agreement at Full Council in January.

**FC 100/19** To **RESOLVE** that under Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded for the remainder of the meeting, because it is likely that publicity would prejudice the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business or for other special reasons stated in the resolution, arising from the nature of the business or proceedings.

**FC 101/19 Support Services Group Meeting 9 August 2019**

- (i) Finance and Allotment Officer – **update** on readvertising and **approval** of the extension of contractual hours;
- (ii) To **confirm** the mandate given to Support Services Group at Full Council on 15 April 2019 that Group Members and the Town Clerk have delegated authority to interview, select and appoint the post holder. Any such appointment would be ratified at Full Council (a short extraordinary meeting may be called for this purpose).
- (iii) To discuss other issues arising and to **agree** appropriate action.

JEM 27-08-19

## Engagement with the Community Strategy

### Motion

#### Council notes:

- (i) That social and technological changes in the Berkhamsted community over time have resulted in people now consuming information and communicating in a more diverse range of ways.
- (ii) That there are significant policy challenges in the coming years including addressing the Climate Emergency and other environmental concerns and also responding to the new Local Plan.

Council **resolves** that one of its primary duties is to represent interests of the local community in its decision making and therefore, in order to maintain its legitimacy, it requires robust consultation mechanisms to ensure that it understands the needs and views of our community. In turn Council also needs to have clear and diverse information channels so as to keep the community as fully informed as possible on developments taking place and the impact that these may have for local people.

Council **agrees** that currently it lacks adequate visibility and recognition from within the community. There is insufficient interaction between the council, residents, business and other interest groups which thereby undermines local democracy, inhibits a local community feel and diminishes the role that BTC can play within this community.

In response, Council **resolves** that it can be more inclusive through more proactive use of social media tools, developing consultation techniques and ensuring that councillors are more visible in the community.

Council **agrees** with the Engagement with the Community Strategy prepared by Cllr Paul de Hoest and requests that the Town Clerk, in conjunction with Councillors, develops a plan for implementation of the actions contained therein.

Council **resolves** that the priority areas for the plan to address within the next 6 months are to:

- (i) Research and develop an on-line community centre.
- (ii) Introduce Councillor "surgeries" by way of using periodic market stalls.
- (iii) Introduce social media communications proportionate to a Town Council of our size and recognising resource constraints.
- (iv) Develop a mechanism for handling popular surveys via an open or closed contact list.
- (v) Provide Councillor correspondence and media training.
- (vi) Provide staff training in use of social media and communications tools.
- (vii) Agree a review mechanism for the strategy.

## **APPENDIX:**

### **Berkhamsted Town Council Engagement with the Community Strategy**

#### **MOTIVATION**

1. In today's world of multi-channel communications and the potential of viral social media to spread fake news it has become more challenging for organisations to manage their image amongst stakeholders.
2. With perhaps some justification there has been a perception grown over time within the Berkhamsted community that "local councils" have become less responsive to the ideas and needs of the local community. Although unrealistic to expect to please all the people all the time there is a perception that local councils (collectively) have not always tried to engage and when they have engaged they have not listened. Although there has not been a formal survey to test this we know that several councillors can directly relate to this experience and/or have received feedback along these lines from local residents. It is worth noting that many in the community do not distinguish between the three tiers of local government.
3. At the same time there appears to have been a modest reversal in the long time trend of comparative apathy to local politics with a pick up in the Berkhamsted election turnouts (around 45% in May versus mid 30's typically) and the rise in the number and intensity of activist groupings.
4. It would be appropriate to find ways to tap into this local energy for the mutual benefit of our town. BTC already has links with some groups and has sought to increase this participation in the past.
5. Alongside these democratic changes there have been considerable changes in the technological capabilities to engage in mass communications (social media, digital surveys for example) that may be worth exploring in order to connect with a wider audience whilst at the same time not excluding those familiar with more traditional methods of communication.
6. As this is a new Council largely made up of new councillors now seems like an opportune time to think about our engagement strategy: What do we hope to achieve by it and which approaches will best achieve those objectives?
7. The remainder of this document is structured to outline the purpose of the strategy followed by principles to guide the strategy and then by identification of potential tools that can be utilised to meet those purposes and principles. Finally the note considers success measures and next steps.

8. It is important to recognise that the Council shares information and interacts with the community today in many ways successfully. This document is intended to be a holistic communication strategy and is not intended to reflect a judgement on what activities currently do or do not exist.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the public engagement strategy is to:

1. Provide routine information in multiple ways and in an easily accessible and informative manner. This information includes:
  - a. Standing information such as the statutory powers and accountabilities of the council, councillors and staff ,role of councillors;
  - b. Ongoing updates on Council activities and decisions; reporting via Town Council staff; discussions at meetings; public participation at meetings ; recommendations and other influence exerted to related local authority bodies such as Dacorum Borough Council and Herts County Council.
2. To promote good Council decision-making through active gathering of local knowledge and opinion from as wide a range of interested parties as possible as input to more complex decisions and recommendations to the related local authority bodies.
3. To demonstrate that the Council listens to the views of residents and to show how it takes these views into account during decision making (it is important to note that councillors are representatives and not delegates)
4. To enhance the sense of community within Berkhamsted and the role of Berkhamsted Town Council as an integral part of this community.

## **PRINCIPLES:**

1. As per statutory obligations, Council will be open and transparent in all its dealings.
2. Councillors and the Council body will be accessible and held to account to Berkhamsted residents for their decisions and activities<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> In practical terms there are limits to the 'accessibility' bearing in mind that councillors are unpaid community spirited volunteers rather than professional career politicians and these boundaries will need to be respected

3. Every interaction with the Council as a body, staff and councillors as individuals should be a good experience (even if the outcome is not always what the correspondent wishes to hear). Councillors will be polite and courteous in all their interactions and when people do want to raise an issue it will be handled expeditiously, and correctly.
4. When people do want to become involved it will be easy to find out what the current situation is, what is going on, why it is so and how they can get involved and/or provide feedback.
5. Councillors will be proactive in reaching out to seek the views of local residents.
6. Councillors will develop inclusive ways to connect with those people that want to connect and in ways that suit them.

## **TOOLS**

There are a variety of approaches possible and whilst many are multi-purpose these have been loosely collated under the headings of Information, Consultation, and General Interaction.

### *1. Information tools:*

- a. BTC web-pages – useful for standard information on who the councillors are, what the council is for, meeting schedule, agendas, decisions etc. Also can cover “whats new” type items and would be a place to share outcomes of consultations etc. This facility already exists although focusses primarily on the statutory information. The website could benefit from a review to make it easier to navigate.
- b. On-line community centre: via either the BTC web or a newly created Facebook page or by some other means the Council hosts a section whereby various vetted local interest groups share information about local issues such as: historical information; upcoming entertainment or charity events; or other recent news. This facility would encourage people to engage with the Council hosted site and become more aware of what it does and would help promote a community culture.
- c. Councillor Blogs: periodically the Mayor, the Clerk or individual Councillors by rotation can post a blog of various activities that they have been engaged in to help promote a picture of life as a councillor. This need not be too information heavy but may help to make councillors more human and demonstrate they are an active part of the community.



- d. Newsletters – periodic “push” communications most suitable for controlled one-way messaging. Largely for updates on recent events and valuable for improving overall visibility. Can be on-line version and/or paper copy. Paper copies can be distributed via retail outlets and other public spaces as well as door to door although there is a significant environmental and financial cost to paper distribution. A house to house paper distribution has been used in the past and this is projected to be reinstated with 2 issues per year. This distribution could be extended to public spaces complemented by an on-line version in tandem with some alternative channels below.
- e. AGM – annual open meeting for Council to report back to the community and respond to questions. This could also be an occasion to include a wider exhibition on the activities of council for public perusal and comment.

## 2. Consultation tools:

- a. Links to local interest groups including BCA or BDCC. Informal links already exist and updates provided proactively on, for example planning matters from/to Townscape and BRAG. These could be extended to other interest groups and action groups and potentially Council could extend this to receiving more presentations from external groups (e.g. Transition Town). Although it is important to avoid creating an impression of partiality.
- b. Working Parties – eg Parking Forum and the Allotment Management Group. These are set up as special interest groups which could be temporary (eg Berkhamsted Castle Liaison Group) or permanent. Typically they will co-opt non-councillors for their specialist knowledge or because they represent stakeholder interests primarily as input to Council decision-making. Working parties with external support are likely to feature as part of the climate emergency strategy.
- c. Surveys: “survey monkey” or similar – for relatively simple consultations or feedback mechanisms to capture views on issues such as Christmas lights, local museum facilities, refill water provision, planter boxes etc. Closed surveys are usually promoted via a dedicated contact list and some councils have established a large email database of local residents who can provide quick feedback on issues. In order to facilitate this a database containing a critical mass of contacts who can be contacted at short notice to provide feedback on various issues would need to be established via, for example, sign-up on the web page/facebook and invitation via the newsletter etc. Open Surveys could be promoted via the web-pages and in order to get maximum and unbiased benefits from this it needs to be

complemented with mechanisms to prompt and direct people to them when they arise (eg newsletters, via local interest groups or email distribution lists).

- d. Set piece consultation: usually an evening or weekend event – promoted via the information channels referred above complemented with leaflets and posters (and email lists if developed). Useful for larger scale consultations of the type sometimes used for major planning decisions. Can be via plenary sessions or drop-in occasions such as the DBC Local Plan exhibition in 2017.
- e. Peoples’ or citizens’ assemblies. Suitable for very complex multi faceted issues where there are many competing objectives and the outcomes may be unpredictable. They are a constructive and productive way to engage a diverse set of stakeholders and to gather specialist input. Issues such as the response to the climate emergency, the local plan or the creation of a neighbourhood plan all lend themselves to this type of approach. Citizens’ Assemblies (CAs) have been suggested at the national level and extinction rebellion has called for them but they are difficult to do well and we may need external assistance. CAs need a stratified random sample to ensure that all relevant stakeholder groups are involved. At a national level a jury style sortition can be legislated through Parliament whereas at a local level there is a small sample issue and activist bias concerns to control. There will be expenses to manage.

### 3. General Interaction Tools:

- a. Facebook. Facebook can be used for almost anything – as an information tool, for promoting up-coming events, as a feedback portal or a consultation tool. It has the advantage of being more widely accessible than either print media or web pages. As this is open access there is a high maintenance cost in terms of time to monitor the site. It does have the advantage of a relatively high reach.
- b. Other social media: Twitter/Instagram etc. Could be used for occasions to push out a message (eg temporary road closures for example) but also runs the risk of being used as a means of open complaint which may be more productively routed via bilateral contact rather than via public media.
- c. Confidential feedback portal hosted by the web-page may be a simpler and preferable option for some people than sending an email.
- d. Councillor Surgeries: meeting local residents face to face periodically (say 3 – 5 councillors for a monthly event which would mean each

councillor being available roughly once every 4 months). Some people prefer a face to face discussion to raise issues than writing emails. This shows council to be visible and accountable. These could be held day time or evening and could be on-site or (say) a stall on the market. Surgeries would be promoted via the information channels.

- e. Letter/email correspondence: It has been the experience of many people that they do not always receive replies to letters/email communications from residents. This is a difficult area to get right. Issues arise sometimes:
- i. There can be a grey area between what is an individual councillor versus a collective Town Council response;
  - ii. The issue raised is not directly a Town Council matter (eg complaint about the bins which lies within the Borough accountability or as recently arose within the Canal and River Trust area of responsibility) and therefore out of the Town Council's formal jurisdiction;
  - iii. Some correspondents send to multiple councillors and there may be confusion as to which recipients will respond and sometimes there may be multiple, possibly conflicting, responses or none at all;

The principle ought to be that every communication receives a response even if this is only to pass the query onto someone else. If in doubt, Councillors can rely heavily upon the Clerks' Office to assist with responding to queries and as a point of principle all external correspondence should be copied into the office so there is a central record. All new councillors should receive some training in handling correspondence effectively as a collective group.

- f. Local media (press and radio) interaction. There was a time when it was standard practice for local journalists to attend Council meetings. Local press no longer have the resources to maintain this level of engagement but nevertheless many of our activities would be suitable for local media interest and we may need to be more proactive to help gain the profile we used to receive automatically. We could prepare a media briefing following significant meetings (all Full Council and all sub-committees that cover Strategy/Policy discussions for example). More broadly, as elected representatives we may want to publicise issues and may need to respond to journalist's ad hoc inquiries. It would be helpful to have some training in these matters so as to be confident that we remain within our powers and represent the Council in the most effective manner.

## **OUTCOMES and SUCCESS MEASURES**

1. Delivering on the above array of tools should achieve the 4 purpose statements outlined above: namely the Council has a well understood and well used means of two-way communication with the community and can demonstrate that it receives, hears and acts upon the views of local residents, businesses, charities and other community groups.
2. If an ability to survey the local population is established then it would be simple to obtain some measure of success via these tools. Additionally monitoring hits to the website and feedback received will provide indications of whether the additional engagement channels are well used, constructive and appreciated.
3. It would be a positive outcome if we were able to measure a significant increase in the percentage of the community that said “the council communicates well with the community and listens to their views”. We could for example establish a “before and after survey” with say 12 – 18 months in between.

## **NEXT STEPS**

1. If council approves this strategy then the first task is to select which tools would most likely be the most effective in terms of achieving the stated objectives at acceptable cost. From there the chosen options need to be prioritised for delivery and developed into a workable plan.
  - a. It is proposed that we implement the following:
    - i. Review and update the website structure and usage
    - ii. Develop an on-line community centre
    - iii. Commence Councillor blogs
    - iv. Include an on-line version of the newsletter
    - v. Create an exhibition of the Town Council activities at the AGM
    - vi. Extend the use of working parties
    - vii. Commence councillor surgeries
    - viii. Receive correspondence and media training
  - b. It is proposed that we research and develop costed proposals for the following:
    - i. Facebook page
    - ii. Other social media
    - iii. Survey mechanisms (open and closed) including creation of a closed survey contact list
    - iv. Use of peoples’ assembly to consult on a major issue surrounding either/or the response to the climate emergency, the local plan, our vision for Berkhamsted in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

2. In terms of this research, it may be helpful to consult with other councils that have extended their communications channels to areas such as facebook/digital surveys to learn lessons on how they have controlled issues such as trolling and GDPR.
3. One of the first pieces of consultation/information should be this strategy. For example by publicising the strategy and seeking feedback on perceptions of communications to date, which developments would be of most interest etc and re-survey in (say) 18 months time.

PdH 19.7.19

FC 2-9-19 attachment 2

FC 97/19.

