

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a Meeting of

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Berkhamsted on

Monday 11 November 2019 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT:

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

OTHERS PRESENT:

Mrs J Mason, Town Clerk

There were no members of the public present

OPENING MATTERS

FC 103/19 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr T Porter and Cllr P While.

FC 104/19 Declarations of interest regarding items on the agenda

None.

FC 105/19 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 2 September 2019 were received, approved and signed by the Town Mayor.

FC 106/19 Public Participation

The Town Mayor **suspended standing orders** to allow any members of the public present to speak.

FC 107/19 PCSO Funding

- (i) Inspector Jeff Scott, Safer Neighbourhoods Police Team, spoke on PCSO joint funding costs in the light of the Town Council's wish to see, and support, increased officer presence in Berkhamsted. He advised that it should be possible to recruit a PCSO for Berkhamsted early in the new year. He hoped that the Town Council would then agree to a minimum two year agreement from 1 April 2020. He advised that the total annual cost of a PCSO is currently £34,200 including on-costs. External partner funding is on the basis of "buy one get one free" so for one PCSO, the costs would be split between the Town Council and Hertfordshire constabulary; the Town Council would be required to pay £14,750 annually with a Constabulary contribution of £19,450. It was noted, however, that Hertfordshire Constabulary would be increasing the budgeted cost with effect from 1 April 2020, to reflect increasing staffing costs. This would impact on the cost to the Town Council and although the figure had yet to be set, he anticipated that it would be around 10%. Requests for funded PCSOs also required prior approval by Hertfordshire Constabulary.

During discussion, it was established that a Memorandum of Understanding, which included service level agreements, would be signed by the two parties. This would include a six month notice period of termination. Inspector Scott undertook to send a copy of an MOU to the Town Clerk.

Action Inspector J Scott

The PCSO would be based in Berkhamsted and operate solely in Berkhamsted (unless of course a major incident was declared). Their working week would be 37 hours, on a rotating shift pattern. The Town Council would be able to advise Inspector Scott where it wished the officer to be deployed. He advised that the Hightown Housing Association had recently funded a PCSO and had seen a marked reduction in anti-social behaviour so reinforcing his view, and that of the Town Council, that visible officer presence does improve public safety and confidence.

In conclusion, Inspector Scott advised that he was always happy to meet with councillors who he saw as the eyes and ears of their wards. It was **agreed** that the Town Clerk should forward his contact details to all councillors.

Action Town Clerk

- (ii) Thanking Inspector Scott for his contribution the Town Mayor reinstated standing orders. Councillors **agreed** that the Town Council should proceed with its wish to fund an additional PCSO for Berkhamsted. Reservations were expressed about the uncertainty, at this stage, about future increases, however, the 6 month notice period gave some reassurance. It was also **noted** that unspent PCSO funding in the current year budget could be used to fund the additional annual costs if a two year contract is agreed. Provision will be included in the draft budget.

FC 108/19 Open Door Project

- (i) Following a recent grant award from the Town Council, to **receive** a short update from a representative of the Open Door Project;

The Town Mayor suspended standing orders. Mrs J Fisher, co-founder of the project, and Ms T Knowles, Project Secretary, thanked the Town Council for recent grant payments, which had been used to repair the studio and the aged electrics. The Project provides a community space and serves refreshments and food. Currently, young people from the Prince's Trust were helping to restore the gardens, which had been cultivated as nursery gardens since 1770, albeit somewhat neglected in more recent years. Other current projects include the popular dementia café, social prescribing, Christmas events and the recently launched Campaign to End Loneliness. The intermingling of different age groups across the various projects was very rewarding. 2020 will be Hertfordshire Year of Culture and associated projects are currently being planned. Anyone who would like to work as a volunteer should contact opendoorberko@gmail.com .

During discussion it was suggested that the local Care Commissioning Group (CCG) might be a source of funding in support of the social prescribing work. It was also noted that funding was stretched as Open Door expanded and large one off property repairs would be challenging. In conclusion, Mrs Fisher thanked the Town Council members for their time and advised that it was likely that further funding applications would be made to the Council in due course.

The Chair reinstated standing orders.

FC 109/19 Town Mayor's Communications

- (i) Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust AGM 28 November 2019 at 8 pm.
- (ii) HAPTC - Policy Consultation E-Briefing 12-19 Independent Review Into Local Government Audit Call For Evidence
- (iii) NALC Chief Executive's Bulletin 18 October 2019
- (iv) Dacorum Heritage Trust autumn Newsletter no 96
- (v) Herts County Council – 28 October bulletin – Have your say on how your council tax is spent
- (vi) BDCC Christmas Lunch - 19th December 2019
- (vii) DBC - CANCELLED - Town and Parish Council Conference - 29th November
- (viii) NALC Chief Executive's bulletin 1 November 2019
- (ix) Graham Green Birth Place Trust – Information about entry to the Trust's film review competition
- (x) NALC and LGA pre-election period guidance.

STANDING AND OTHER COMMITTEES

To **receive and adopt** the previously circulated minutes of the:

FC 110/19 Finance and Policy Committee

Held on 23 September 2019

The Town Mayor, as Chair of the committee, outlined key points that had arisen. The minutes were then **received and adopted**.

FC 111/19 Town Planning Committee

Held on:

16 September 2019 – The minutes were **received and adopted**;

7 October 2019 – The Town Mayor, as Chair of the Committee, drew attention to the application to redevelop the Old Dairy in Castle Street. This had received a number of objections from residents and the Town Council. A Parking Forum meeting had now been arranged for 19 November. The minutes were **received and adopted**;

28 October 2019 – The Town Mayor highlighted key points following which the minutes which were **received and adopted**.

FC 112/19 Transport and Environment Committee

(i) Held on 21 October 2019

Cllr W Conian as Chair of the committee gave brief updates on a number of issues. Following discussion, the minutes were **received and adopted**.

(ii) HCC Gulley Clearing Schedule - arising from minute TE 72/19 (i) it was **agreed** that the Town Clerk should ask HCC to review their clearance schedule policy and to identify those areas where gulley clearance should be undertaken more frequently than on an eighteen-month rolling basis.

FINANCE & GOVERNANCE

FC 113/19 Annual Accounts for the Year Ended 31 March 2019 – Completion of Limited Assurance Review by PKF Littlejohn LLP (External Auditors)

The following had been reported to F & P on 23 September 2019. However, as set out in FP 71/19, it is a requirement that these matters are received and approved at Full Council:

- i. The Town Council **received, approved and accepted** the signed Annual Governance and Accountability Return received under cover of the External Auditor's 9 September 2019 letter;
- ii. It was **noted** that the certificate, notice of conclusion of audit and full return with supporting documentation were published on 16 September 2019 on the website. The notice of conclusion of audit was placed on all Town Council notice boards and all papers made available for public inspection as set out on the notice of conclusion of audit. Public access to documents will be available for not less than five years;
- iii. It was **noted** that in the auditor's opinion and on the basis of their review, the information in the annual return 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.

FC 114/19 Interim Internal Audit Visit

It was **noted** that Ms S King of Auditing Solutions will be attending on Friday 15 November 2019. The Town Council offices will be closed to visitors that day.

FC 115/19 Budget revisions and virements 2019 -20

The Town Council **approved/confirmed** the following changes to the accounts:

- (i) To **increase** the agreed budget for the Festival of Light (cost centre 204 nominal code 4605) from £18,000 to £22,000 (previously approved at Full Council 10 June 2019, FC 82/19 refers);
- (ii) To **make a virement** of £2,000 from staff salaries (cost centre 101, nominal codes 4001/4002/4003) to staff training (cost centre 101, nominal code 4008) to cover the training in Colony (allotment software) and Rialtas Omega (finance software);
- (iii) To **make a virement** of £2,500 from staff salaries (cost centre 101, nominal codes 4001/4002/4003) to Accounting Services (cost centre 101, nominal code 4059). This is to cover DCK Accounting Services costs for visits to the office one day a month whilst the Finance and Allotment Officer post has been vacant;
- (iv) It was further **agreed** that DCK's last visit to input the accounts should be in December 2019.

FC 116/19 Budget preparation and precept 2020 - 21

- (i) It was **noted** that committee chairs are currently working on draft proposals for next year's budget. The Town Clerk advised that the budget should be finalised in time to submit precept proposals to Dacorum Borough Council in mid to late January 2020. DBC officers will be advising the Town Council shortly of their precise timetable. Informal discussions will be scheduled in advance of F & P on 9 December when progress to date will be reported. Further discussion and refinements will

take place prior to making final proposals to F & P on 6 January with approval at Full Council on 13 January 2019.

- (ii) To **agree** a mechanism for the consolidation of such draft budget proposals in advance of the F & P Committee on 9 December 2019

It was **agreed** that Cllr G Stevens, Cllr W Conian, Cllr N Taylor and the Town Clerk should meet over the course of the next fortnight, on a Friday afternoon, to progress matters. **Action Town Clerk**

- (iii) To **consider and as appropriate agree** that estimated costs should be sought for possible legal fees associated with the drafting of the Town Council's response to the forthcoming Local Plan consultation.

To pros and cons of such a course of action were discussed. It was **noted** that the Local Plan Working Group would be reconvened to discuss the proposals once received. This group is made up of interested groups and individuals. It was **agreed** that although legal fees would be very costly with no guaranteed outcome, it would be **sensible to make a budget provision** for expert advice on, for example, particular technical or environmental issues arising.

Action Town Clerk

FC 117/19 Policy Matters

It was **noted** that the Town Clerk attended the DBC session on use of social media on 24 October 2019 and will now be preparing a draft policy for consideration. She will also be reviewing Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

FC 118/19 CIL Receipts

It was **noted** that £14,388.68 was received on 7 October from DBC for the six-month period ending 30 September 2019. Therefore, total unspent CIL receipts stand at £106,139.

OTHER WORKING GROUPS AND COMMITTEES

FC 119/19 Allotments

The Town Council **received and adopted** the minutes of the Allotment Management Team meeting held on 14 October 2019. It was anticipated that the tree works referred to would be undertaken during the winter well in advance of bird nesting.

FC 120/19 Canal & Riverside Partnership

- (i) Progress following recent discussions with the Canal & River Trust and the Chiltern Conservation Board representative was **noted** (as reported for information to T & E on 21 October 2019);
- (ii) The revised terms of reference circulated with the agenda were **approved and adopted**;
- (iii) It was **noted** that a meeting of CARP will now be arranged.

YOUTH MATTERS

FC 121/19 Youth Town Council and Swan Youth Project

Cllr Woolner **reported** that footfall and membership at the Swan Youth Project (SYP) had increased following the appointment of a new Project Manager. Three new youth workers had also been appointed together with two volunteers. The Project Manager had made a number of fund-raising suggestions, some of which had already been implemented. Imaginative and engaging activities continue including a search for a suitable location for a mural. A new logo had been designed and consideration was also being given to a new name for the project, which was likely to be HP4 Youth. At the AGM on 6 November the accounts had been approved and more trustees were being sought.

Turning to the Youth Town Council (YTC) five new members have joined and the first meeting of the academic year had been held on 16 October with further dates set to May 2020. A rebranding exercise is underway, examining the logo, the website, notice boards, badges and fliers. Skate park improvements were being discussed and DBC would be approached with a view to achieving reduced gym fees. In conclusion, the SYP and YTC would be running a stall together at the Festival of Light on Sunday 24 November 2019.

EVENTS

FC 122/19 (i) Remembrance Sunday 10 November 2019

The Town Mayor thanked councillors for their help at the poppy stall on Saturday 9 November. A letter of thanks had been received from the British Legion for help with poppy sales and attendance at the Remembrance Sunday parade and service. Councillors commented on the success of the crochet/knitted poppy displays around the town and it was agreed that a letter of congratulations should be sent to the British Legion.

Action Town Clerk/Deputy Town Clerk

(iii) Festival of Light 24 November 2019 – The Festival will be open to public at 3.30 pm.

The Town Clerk thanked those Councillors who had offered to serve refreshments to volunteers in one hour shifts from 3.30 pm to approximately 7 pm. There were still some gaps in the schedule and it was agreed that she should circulate this to councillors who would then advise which times they could cover.

Action Town Clerk

WEST MIDLANDS TRAIN SERVICE TO BERKHAMSTED

FC 123/19 Cllr W Conian **reviewed** recent delays to the West Midlands train services and the dreadful disruption and frustration this had caused Berkhamsted residents. It was **agreed** that the Town Clerk should write to West Midlands trains, with copies to National Rail, DBC, HCC and the Department of Transport. She would advise that they were failing to fulfill their franchise requirements and ask what was being done to rectify matters. **Action Town Clerk**

FC 124/19 It was **RESOLVED** 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 125/19 Swan Youth Funding

To **review** in advance of budget preparation.

Current funding from the Town Council is £15,000 per annum. In general, councillors were sympathetic to an increase and various options were discussed. Prior to coming to a conclusion, it was **agreed that Cllr Woolner** should arrange for the recently approved accounts and report to be sent to the Town Clerk for discussion during budget preparation.

Action Cllr Woolner

FC 126/19 Finance & Allotment Officer Appointment

The Town Council ratified the appointment of Mrs Thayanithy Raveendran to the position of Finance & Allotment Officer with effect from 2 December 2019. Mrs Raveendran has been appointed to salary point 19 of pay scale LC2 (18 – 23) and will work 20 hours per week.

FC 127/19 Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer Vacancy

(i) To **receive** an update

A number of applications had been received and reviewed.

(ii) To **consider** and agree the next steps

Interviews will be held on Wednesday 20 November 2019. The panel will be: Cllr G Stevens, Cllr A Armytage, Cllr P de Hoest and the Town Clerk.

FC 128/19 Staff Incremental progression

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Warden should progress from salary point 11 to salary point 12 with effect from January 2020 which is the anniversary of his appointment to pay scale LC1 (9 - 12).

FC 129/19 Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 9.40 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....