

# 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023

Minutes of the proceedings of the **TOWN COUNCIL** held in the Main Hall, Town Hall, Market Place, Wokingham on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2023 from 7.30pm to 8.28pm.

## **PRESENT:**

Chair: Cllr S Gurney (Mayor)

Cllrs: B Alvi, A Betteridge, R Bishop-Firth, B Callender, R Comber, S Cornish, A Croy, P Cunningham, W Dixon, A Fraser, M Fumagalli, M Gee, A Jones, T Lack, M Malvern, A Mather, A Medhurst, N Nagella, H Richards, I Shepherd-Dubey, L Timlin.

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Katy Hughes – Town Clerk.

Helen Jefferies – Mayor's Celebrant

Thoughts of the day were given by the Mayor's Celebrant Helen Jefferies, prior to the start of the meeting.

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)**

Apologies were received from Cllrs A Domingue, M Lucey and K Malvern.

## **MEMBERS' INTERESTS (Agenda Item 2)**

None were declared.

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OR PUBLIC (Agenda Item 3)**

There were no questions raised.

## **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS COUNCIL MEETING (Agenda Item 4)**

The Mayor noted that Cllr Fumagalli's name had been missed from the attendance list in the previous minutes, and these had been added to the formal copy for signing.

It was proposed by Cllr S Gurney and seconded by Cllr R Comber and the following was

**RESOLVED  
30755**

that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Council Meeting held on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2023 (pages 16843 to 16848) be received as a true and correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

## **MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS (Agenda Item 5)**

The Mayor welcomed members to the last meeting of the calendar year and noted that cards for councillors were on the side table.

The Mayor presented a gift to the Mayor's Celebrant.

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The Mayor reported that it had been a busy but brilliant last few weeks, with attendance at a number of events, including two funerals, the town's Remembrance event, Fireworks, the Winter Carnival, a show at Pinewood Gymnastics, a vigil for the White Ribbon Campaign and most recently the town council's Dressing the Christmas Tree event.

The Mayor reported that she had been able to attend celebrations to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wokingham Film Society and the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Wokingham Horticulture Association and thanked the Deputy Mayor, Cllr R Comber, for attending the event to mark the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Link Visiting Scheme.

The Mayor thanked councillors for the opportunity to attend all these events to represent the town. She also thanked the Civic Officer, Nikki Payler, for all the work she does to organise everything, to David Dunham, the Mayor's Attendant, for his support at all the events, to the Town Clerk and to Cllr R Comber, the Deputy Mayor, for his support.

The Mayor's list of engagements since the last Council meeting was also received.

#### **AMENITIES COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 6)**

It was proposed by Cllr M Malvern and seconded by Cllr H Richards and the following was

**RESOLVED  
30756**

that the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Amenities Committee meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (pages 16819 to 16822) be adopted

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

A copy of the draft minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (pages 16858 to 16860) was received by members.

Cllr M Malvern drew members' attention to the following items discussed at the 7<sup>th</sup> November committee meeting:

- Christmas lights are now up. The LED motifs are more energy efficient.
- The grounds maintenance contract has been amended to a 5-year contract which gives better value for money and better assurance for the contractor.
- Much of the graffiti update was deferred as Cllr T Lack had been unable to attend the meeting.
- No recommended changes to the Risk Register but that health and safety policies were being reviewed and any recommended changes would be brought to a future committee meeting.
- The committee had a discussion on how the council's new principles would be embedded into the work of the committee.
- The monitoring report has been completely cleared, with the completion of the installation of the new defibrillator at Woosehill Community Centre.

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- The resurfacing of the play area at Leslie Sears Playing Fields has been completed.
- Damaged surfacing at Elms Field play area has been repaired.
- The trampoline at Elms Field has flooded and is currently being monitored. It has been reviewed by the contractor and is safe to remain in use.
- An encampment of tents appeared in Howard Palmer Gardens in October. These town council has worked with the teams at Wokingham Borough Council to resolve these. Unfortunately, a further tent appeared on the day planned for cleaning up the park, so this was deferred. The cleaning up is now underway and it is anticipated that the park will reopen by Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> December.
- Work has commenced on the Tan House Lane bridge replacement work and is due completion by the end of March 2024. It was noted that there is currently no proposed permanent use of allotment space, as the bridge access is being replaced with steps rather than a ramp.

### **ARTS AND CULTURE COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 7)**

It was proposed by Cllr B Callender and seconded by Cllr M Malvern and the following was

**RESOLVED  
30757**

that the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Arts and Culture Committee meeting held on 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (pages 16809 to 16812) be adopted

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

A copy of the draft minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 6<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (pages 16854 to 16857) was received by members.

Cllr B Callender drew members' attention to the following items discussed at the 6<sup>th</sup> November committee meeting:

- The Committee resolved to make the Lunar New Year event an ongoing event
- The Committee requested a funding increase for Chalk About It and a small budget to progress investigations into the Human Library project.
- The Committee had agreed to concentrate on the quality of events rather than the quantity.
- A working group is reviewing Sunny Saturdays and the committee is getting closer to agreeing improvements to this event
- Phillipa, the council's Marketing Officer attended the meeting and talked about communications, and had lots of ideas. Topics included the accessibility of the council's website, connectivity of events across the committees and how to reach out to younger residents in the late-teen / early 20s age demographic.

Cllr Callender reported that he had attended the Dressing the Christmas Tree event the previous evening. He thanked other councillors who had attended, some with their families. He thanked the Arts and Culture Officer, Gemma

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Cumming and David Dunham for organising and supporting the event. He gave thanks to the Wokingham Choral Society for their support at the event, and to the Mini Mayor, Leah Vas and the Mayor, Cllr S Gurney, for opening and closing the event. He noted the good attendance, despite the weather, and the wide mix of residents who had attended.

Cllr T Lack asked why the Sunny Saturdays events were not being held in Market Place. Cllr B Callender noted the lack of space and feedback from market traders. It was noted that the event had previously been held in Market Place and in Elms Field, but that Peach Place had been agreed as being the most successful venue for the event, with its layout and the numerous cafes and restaurants with outside seating.

### **CIVIC COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 8)**

It was proposed by Cllr A Mather and seconded by Cllr W Dixon and the following was

**RESOLVED  
30758**

that the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Civic Committee meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (pages 16823 to 16827) be adopted

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

A copy of the draft minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (pages 16867 to 16871) was received by members.

Cllr A Mather drew members' attention to the following items discussed at the 20<sup>th</sup> November committee meeting:

- The committee had discussed the council's approved vision and principles and some feedback had been given to the Strategy Working Party.
- The Committee had gathered feedback on the Remembrance event, which was very successful. Cllr A Mather thanked the Civic Officer, Nikki Payler for her work to organise this event. He noted that the committee had overwhelmingly supported further investigation into an outside memorial location, where the wider community could take a greater part in the wreath laying ceremony. The committee will continue to investigate options for a temporary structure.
- The committee considered councillor photographs and noted that going forward, members could decide whether their official photograph is in robes or not. It was agreed that for cost reasons, the current set of photographs would not be changed.
- The poppy appeal this year has been very successful, with more than £74,000 being raised in Wokingham. Cllr A Mather thanked David Dunham for his work to raise such a record amount.

Cllr M Gee noted in regard to the visions and principles that the Strategy Working Party makes recommendations to full council or other committees, and that members had an opportunity to review the strategy proposals in the papers for the previous council meeting. Cllr S Gurney noted that she had asked group leaders

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to encourage their members to read the papers and raise any questions or comments on them when they read the papers, ahead of the meeting where any proposals are put to council for approval. Cllr M Gee noted that the Strategy Working Party had appreciated feedback on the wording. Cllr P Cunningham noted that the committee had understood that the strategy had been adopted, but the discussion had arisen because the committee were considering how it could be embedded into the work of the committee.

Cllr A Croy noted that a strategy would not be revisited annually, and it was noted by Cllr S Gurney that the vision is a roadmap for the work of the council, rather than a restrictive plan.

Cllr A Croy asked for clarification on the council's policy of attendance at church services for members, following a parade in council robes. Following discussion, it was recommended that the issue be discussed at a future Civic Committee meeting.

#### **FINANCE AND PERSONNEL COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 9)**

**RESOLVED  
30759**

It was proposed by Cllr M Gee and seconded by Cllr B Alvi and the following was

that the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (pages 16828 to 16836) be adopted

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Cllr M Gee reported that the committee considered grant funding applications from a wide range of community organisations. She reported that some applications were rejected as they did not meet the grants criteria.

Cllr M Gee encouraged members to share information about the council's grants process and encourage groups to apply for funding to support services and activities for town residents.

**RESOLVED  
30760**

It was proposed by Cllr M Gee and seconded by Cllr B Alvi and the following was

that the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Finance and Personnel Committee meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> October (pages 16849 to 16853) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

A copy of the draft minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023 (pages 16872 to 16881) was received by members.

Cllr S Gurney noted a small amendment to wording in the table on page 16873.

Cllr M Gee drew members' attention to the following items discussed at the 21<sup>st</sup> November committee meeting:

- The committee had recommended a maximum increase in the precept of 8.75%. Cllr Gee noted that in the previous year, the precept had been increased by a rate lower than inflation. She noted that the committee will

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review the budget again in January, before it comes to council for final approval.

Cllr A Mather asked about CIL Funds. Cllr M Gee reported that CIL income is not included in the calculation for the precept, but that CIL funds are currently being put aside each year to fund longer term playground equipment replacement. She noted that future projected play area replacement costs are being considered to ensure that sufficient funds are being ringfenced, but that the council will need to consider in the future how it transitions from CIL funding to precept funding for this cost. Cllr M Gee noted that a sizeable proportion of the precept increase (5.75%) is to cover additional staffing costs.

#### **PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 10)**

It was proposed by Cllr Shepherd-Dubey and seconded by Cllr W Dixon and the following was

**RESOLVED  
30761**

that the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Planning and Transportation Committee meetings held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2023 (pages 16813 to 16818) and on the 11<sup>th</sup> October 2023 (pages 16837 to 16842) be adopted

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

A copy of the draft minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2023 (pages 16861 to 16866) was received by members.

Cllr N Nagella reported that a number of larger planning applications had been considered by the committee.

#### **STRATEGY WORKING PARTY (Agenda Item 11)**

Cllr S Gurney reported that the extraordinary meeting of the Strategy Working Party had met on 9<sup>th</sup> December and discussed the proposals for the Matthews Green Community Centre. She noted that this was still under discussion and that any recommendations would be considered by the Finance and Personnel Committee.

Cllr S Gurney reported that the notes of the meeting of the working party of the 29<sup>th</sup> November have been circulated electronically. She reported that the Annual Town Meeting had been discussed and that the date for the 2024 meeting has been proposed to be moved to Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> May, to improve the opportunity to engage with residents. The meeting will start in the town hall and move out to a stall on Market Place.

#### **STANDING FINANCIAL REGULATIONS (Agenda Item 12)**

Cllr M Gee reported that the Finance Committee had recommended a change to the existing wording for the Standing Financial Regulations (SFRs) to enable electronic tenders to be received.

It was proposed by Cllr M Gee, seconded by Cllr R Comber and the following was

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**RESOLVED  
30762**

To update the council's SFRs in line with the Clerk's report 31(b)/2023

**COUNCIL REPRESENTATION ON OUTSIDE BODIES (Agenda Item 13)**

Representatives' reports were received in relation to the following organisations:

- Emmbrook Village Hall Management Committee.

The Mayor then wished all members a merry Christmas and a happy New Year and closed the meeting at 8:28pm.

**CHAIR**

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