

28th January 2025

Minutes of the proceedings of the **TOWN COUNCIL** held in the Main Hall, Town Hall, Market Place, Wokingham on 28th January 2025 from 7.30pm to 8.40pm

PRESENT:

Chairman: Cllr R Comber (Mayor)
Cllrs: B Alvi, A Betteridge, R Bishop-Firth, B Callender, S Cornish, A Croy, W Dixon, A Domingue, A Fraser, M Gee, S Gurney, C Jamthe, A Jones, T Lack, K Malvern, M Malvern, A Mather, A Medhurst, N Nagella, H Richards, I Shepherd-Dubey and L Timlin.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Katy Hughes – Town Clerk
Lisa Davison - RFO
David Dunham – Mayor's Attendant

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr M Fumagalli.

MEMBERS' INTERESTS (Agenda Item 2)

There were none

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OR PUBLIC (Agenda item 3)

There were no questions raised.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Agenda Item 4)

It was proposed by Cllr L Timlin and seconded by Cllr H Richards and the following was

**RESOLVED
30996**

that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Council Meetings held on 10th December 2024 (pages 17112 to 17117) be accepted 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)

- a) The Mayor drew members' attention to the following engagements, which were a selection of those carried out since the last council meeting:
- Attendance at the Bloom and Allotment awards on 12th December. The Mayor commended the Grounds and Bloom Officer, Marianna, for the work put in to deliver the joint events.
 - Visits to the Link Visiting Scheme Christmas lunch and two care home visits on 25th December. The Mayor noted that some 75 people who would otherwise have spent Christmas day alone attended the lunch, and noted the importance of these events to our community.
 - Earley Town Mayor's reception and community awards on 9th January

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- d. Wokingham Town Council's Civic Awards event on 24th January, where nine residents were given awards for their work in the local community. The Mayor noted that the impact of hosting this event in the Town Hall should not be underestimated.

The Mayor reminded members of trustee training scheduled for 11th February at the town hall.

The Mayor asked Councillors to respond to the Arts and Culture Officer regarding support for the upcoming Lunar New Year event on 9th February.

- b) The Mayor's list of engagements since the last council meeting was received.

AMENITIES COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 6)

It was proposed by Cllr T Lack and seconded by Cllr M Malvern and the following was

**RESOLVED
30997**

That the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Amenities Committee held on 5th November 2024 (pages 17086 to 17088) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous

Cllr T Lack reported on the meeting of the Amenities Committee held on 14th January 2025. He reported that the committee reviewed a request from the Wokingham Horticultural Association (WHA) to extend their building over an area of the car park to accommodate a toilet facility. He noted that due to the pressures on car parking already experienced at that site, the request was refused, and the WHA were asked to consider the use of an area at the end of the building as an alternative.

Cllr T Lack reported that Cllr A Croy had shared an annual report on graffiti clearance. Cllr A Croy advised members that some 600+ items of graffiti had been removed over the last year, with the highest concentration being in the Wescott wards.

Cllr T Lack reported on a meeting scheduled to discuss the community orchard at Viking Field.

Cllr T Lack reported on unauthorised parking of cars for extended periods at Redlands Farm Park and noted that the Grounds and Bloom Officer is progressing plans to install a lockable gate to deter this activity.

ARTS & CULTURE COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 7)

It was proposed by Cllr B Callender and seconded by Cllr A Domingue and the following was

**RESOLVED
30998**

That the approved minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Culture Committee held on 4th December 2024 (pages 17082 to 17085) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous

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Cllr B Callender reported on the meeting of the committee held on 20th January 2025. He reported that the committee had considered the request from the Civic Committee to take on the Christmas Music event, but declined the request and agreed to cancel the event due to a lack of resource at this time of the year. He noted the opportunity for the Mayor's Charity to be offered a free hire of the hall to run a fundraising event, as an alternative.

Cllr B Callendar reminded members that this week had marked Holocaust Memorial Day, and the importance that this day represented to himself personally but also to the wider community.

CIVIC COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 8)

It was proposed by Cllr K Malvern and seconded by Cllr A Jones and the following was

**RESOLVED
30999**

that the approved minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 25th November (pages 17098 to 17102) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

It was proposed by Cllr A Mather and seconded by Cllr A Jones and the following was

**RESOLVED
31000**

that the approved minutes of the meeting of the Civic Awards Selection Committee held on 6th December 2023 (pages 16889 to 16890) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Cllr R Comber reported on the meeting of the Civic Award Selection Committee held on 13th December 2024 (pages 17118 and 17119). He noted that 14 nominations had been received, and nine award winners selected. He noted the impressive extent of volunteering being undertaken by people in our community. He reported that one letter of recognition had been sent to an individual nominated in their capacity as an employee, who whilst not meeting the qualifying criteria for a civic award, deserved recognition for their nomination.

Cllr R Comber reminder members of the importance of spreading the word about Civic Awards to charities and groups that members work and interact with.

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

**RESOLVED
31001**

that the approved minutes of the meeting of the Civic Awards Selection Committee held on 13th December 2024 (pages 17118 to 17119) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Cllr K Malvern presented the draft minutes and recommendations of the Civic Committee meeting held on 13th January 2025 (pages 17127 to 17129). No other matters raised at the meeting were discussed.

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The Mayor requested that the order of the agenda be altered, and item 10 be taken next.

PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 10)

It was proposed by Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey and seconded by Cllr N Nagella and the following was

**RESOLVED
31002**

that the approved minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 19th November 2024 (pages 17093 to 17097) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Cllr N Nagella reported on the meeting of the Planning and Transportation Committee held on 17th December 2024 (pages 17120 to 17124). He reported that the committee had noted the planning appeal for houses on land at Blagrove Lane due to be heard from 18th March 2025. He noted the committees concerns over the loss of land with historic importance and the impact on local wildlife. Members noted that Cllr W Dixon is due to speak at the appeal hearing on behalf of the committee.

Cllr N Nagella reported that the committee reviewed three CIL Co-funding requests received from Wokingham Borough Council. He reported that the committee recommended funding towards the provision of a toucan crossing on the A329 at Mill Close, but declined funding towards two zebra crossings on the understanding that funding had already been allocated by the borough council for these proposals.

FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 9)

Cllr M Gee reported on the meeting of the committee held on 3rd December 2024 (pages 17103 to 17111) and noted that the committee had recommended to officers that the precept increase be limited to five percent.

Cllr A Domingue asked regarding a proposal to no longer offer partnership grants. Cllr M Gee noted that the committee had recognised that due to inflationary pressures, setting grant levels and commitments for three years was not realistic, and therefore all but one grant applicant (Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers) would be asked to submit applications to be reviewed annually.

At this point in the meeting, the Mayor noted that, in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it was advisable in the public interest that the press and public be temporarily excluded and that they are instructed to withdraw.

It was proposed by Cllr H Richards and seconded by Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey and members

**RESOLVED
31003**

that the press and public be temporarily excluded from the meeting.

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The Town Clerk gave a confidential verbal report on matters relating to a town council lease.

Cllr M Gee reported on an extraordinary meeting of the committee held on 7th January 2025 and related financial matters which have an impact on the 2025-26 budget.

At this point in the meeting, the Mayor re-opened the meeting to the press and public.

Cllr M Gee reported in relation to the extraordinary meeting of the committee held on 7th January 2025 that the committee had received a funding request to fund expert advisers for the planning appeal for houses on land at Blagrove Lane. Cllr M Gee reported that the committee had declined the request for funding but had offered practical support and resources to the residents' group.

Cllr M Gee reported that the committee had received and endorsed the recommendation of the P&T Committee to support the CIL co-funding request to contribute to the costs of the provision of a toucan crossing on the A329 at Mill Close.

The Mayor noted that the level of funding exceeded the delegated authority of the F&P Committee and asked members for an indicative vote on the matter. It was noted that a formal vote will come to the 2nd April Full Council meeting. An indicative vote was taken and all members indicated their support for the request.

It was proposed by Cllr B Alvi and seconded by Cllr S Gurney and the following was

**RESOLVED
31004**

That the approved minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 7th January 2025 (pages 17125 to 17126) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Members received the minutes and recommendations of the F&P Committee held on 21st January 2025 (pages 17136 to 17143). Cllr M Gee highlighted the revised recommendation from the F&P Committee of a six percent increase in the precept for 2025-26.

BUDGET SETTING FOR YEAR END 31ST MARCH 2026 (Agenda Item 11)

Members received the reports and papers relating to the setting of the town council's budget for the 2025-26 financial year.

The RFO gave a verbal report on the process for building the 2025-26 budget. She reported on meetings with officers from October 2024 to review expected spend to year end, and noted that figures were reviewed again in January using income and expenditure actuals to 31st December 2024.

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She noted that increase to some contracts are coming in at higher than RPI rates, with waste collection costs increasing by five percent, payroll software costs increasing by seven percent and water charges proposed to be increased by 22% for supplied water and 34% for wastewater in the coming year. She noted that energy costs and insurance premiums had also increased substantially.

The Mayor and Cllr M Gee thanked the Town Clerk and RFO for their work on the 2025-26 budget.

Cllr M Gee reported on the projected position for the town council's reserves balances at year end, and noted that the F&P committee were due to meet again before the end of the financial year to consider a paper on council reserves and to consider the re-allocation of expenditure in the financial year against CIL.

PRECEPT SETTING 2025-26 (Agenda Item 12)

It was proposed by Cllr M Gee and seconded by Cllr H Richards and members

**RESOLVED
31005**

that the Finance & Personnel Committee's recommendation be accepted and that the precept be confirmed and set at £1,307,942 for the financial year ending 31st March 2026.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE (Agenda Item 13)

Members received and reviewed the Town Clerk's report 03/2025 to establish a Working Group to review the town council's input into the borough council's Community Governance Review for towns and parishes in Wokingham.

It was proposed by Cllr B Callender and seconded by Cllr M Malvern and members

**RESOLVED
31006**

That the working group be established for the purpose of supporting the CGR review

That Cllrs R Comber, S Cornish, A Croy, A Domingue, M Gee, S Gurney and A Medhurst be appointed to the newly established working group.

That the Terms of Reference for the town council's CGR working group be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

EXTERNAL REPRESENTATION (Agenda Item 14)

No reports were received.

The Mayor thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 8:40pm

CHAIR

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