

**Minutes of a meeting of the Leisure Services Committee held at the Oakwood Centre
on Tuesday 6 June 2023 at 8:00 pm**

Present: *Councillors D. Smith (Chairman); K. Charles Bey; Y. Edwards;
D. Errawalla; M. Firmager; K. Gilder; R. Horskins; C. Jewell; M. Kennedy;
V. Lewis;*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Deputy Town Clerk; E. Whitesmith, Leisure Services Manager;
M. Filmore, Committee Officer*

Also present: *1 member of the public*

1. **APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN**

The Deputy Town Clerk asked for nominations for the position of Chairman of the Leisure Services Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year.

It was proposed by Councillor Firmager, seconded by Councillor Kennedy, and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That Councillor Smith be appointed to the position of Chairman of the Leisure Services Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Voting: For: 7 Against: 0 Abstentions: 2 No Vote Recorded: 1

It was proposed by Councillor Kennedy, seconded by Councillor Lewis, and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That Councillor Firmager be appointed to the position of Vice Chairman of the Leisure Services Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year.

Voting: For: 6 Against: 0 Abstentions: 3 No Vote Recorded: 1

2. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence from Members.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

4. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 APRIL 2023**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting of 11 April 2023 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5. **BUDGETARY CONTROL**

Members reviewed the Budgetary Control report. Following a query as to the accuracy of expenditure figures for Cricket and the Bowling Green, which were identical, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed he would check and inform Members.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 10/23.

6. **WOODFORD PARK LEISURE CENTRE, SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The Leisure Services Manager presented Report No. LS 11/23.

The Leisure Services Manager advised that the report had been provided in a similar format as that presented to the previous committee, but that it was flexible and he was open to suggestions for changes.

Members noted that, with regards to membership cancellations, attention was given to those who had moved to another leisure centre. Of the two Members who had done so in the last period, one cancelled because they wished to attend a leisure centre with a pool, whilst the other wished to attend a gym closer to their home.

Members were advised that membership, and consequentially income, tends to decrease during the summer holidays, when people are more inclined to exercise outdoors, but that numbers tend to pick up again in Winter. Whilst Members noted the impact Covid had on income figures, the Leisure Centre Manager said income was returning and it was hoped that the centre would reach pre-covid levels soon.

In regards to the opening of the Paddling Pool, the Leisure Centre Manager advised that this had been exceptionally popular on the day of opening, and during the May half term, and he estimated between 600 and 1,000 people visited during the weekend of the 3-4 June. Members noted that the pool is usually closed on an occasional day or two during the summer to allow the water quality to recover following overuse.

The Leisure Centre Manager advised that the Amenities team had recently undertaken works to repair the 3G pitch football goals which, after 7 years, were showing major signs of wear and tear. Members noted that the hope was for the existing goals to last for the next season, but it would be likely that the goals would need to be replaced soon, at a cost of around £3k-£4k for a set.

Members requested that future reports include not only details of cancellations, but also new Memberships for the same period, to give a comparison, and to provide, where possible, reasons for joining. The Leisure Centre Manager agreed to look into this.

Following a query, the Leisure Centre Manager confirmed that cancellation due to injury was not due to specific injuries occurring at the centre itself, but more generally when an individual has an injury which means they have decided to cancel their membership.

With regards to promoting leisure centre activities, for example Family Racket Attack, the Leisure Centre Manager confirmed this was mainly achieved through social media channels, such as Facebook, and also word of mouth. He advised that a recent post advising of the opening date for the Paddling Pool received over 130,000 views; that drives significant traffic to the social media channels and means this is the best method of getting information out to people. He also advised that paying for additional marketing activities was also not considered cost effective as, in the example of Family Racket Attack, due to the capacity of such events the potential income received from any increased attendance would likely not cover additional marketing costs. Following a query, it was advised that a revamp of the Leisure Centre's website was being considered as part of an overall project to update the Council's websites.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 11/23.

7. **PARKS AND BUILDINGS**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented Report No. LS 12/23.

With regards to the new waste contract, which commenced in June, Members noted that this would provide an increased proportion of recycling at both the Leisure Centre and Oakwood Centre. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the contract provided the Council with the opportunity to review recycling levels, and adjust the contract in future to improve these.

Members noted that the Council would shortly be going to tender for new gym equipment at the Leisure Centre, with the current equipment's lease ending in November 2023.

The Deputy Town Clerk updated Members to confirm that two lamp columns along the footpath from Coronation Hall had now been repaired.

Following a query as to whether the new bins being trialled in Woodford Park would provide for recycling as well, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that, at present, they would not. However, he confirmed that he was in discussion with other Councils as to their experiences of providing recycling points in public spaces to understand how contamination of recycled waste is dealt with and whether the Council could pursue this in future. Members requested that an update on this be brought back to the next meeting of the Committee.

Members commented that bins in Woodford Park were regularly full to overflowing on Sundays, and the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that, at present, amenities staff did not work on Sundays. A suggestion was made that, on Saturdays, additional temporary bins could be placed near the most highly used areas, and that this may be an inexpensive method of resolving the issue. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed he would discuss the matter with the Amenities Manager to consider possible solutions.

Following a query as to whether, following the ruling that charges for local authority sports facilities fall outside the scope for VAT, the Council was now overcharging residents, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that the agreed charges had always been set based on what was considered a reasonable charge for the facilities, when compared to the charges applied by other centres locally, and not with consideration to the VAT added. He confirmed that clubs that had previously benefitted from a VAT discount on block bookings were now being offered an equivalent discount, and that Members would then review overall charges next year for 2024/25.

In relation to the recent successful Picnic in the Park event, run by the Town Council in commemoration of the coronation of King Charles III, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that Officers were considering whether this style of event could be run again in future years. He advised that this could possibly be in conjunction with Love Parks week.

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that holders of larger, 10 pole allotments plots can contact the Council to request reducing to a smaller, 5 pole plot should they feel unable to manage the upkeep of their existing plot. He also confirmed that consideration was being made to converting more areas of the site to allotment plots, whilst acknowledging that some areas should remain as wildlife areas.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 12/23.

8. **ALLOTMENTS TASK & FINISH WORKING GROUP**

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that a task & finish working group had previously been set up to review the current tenancy agreement and resolve a particular issue at the site. Whilst the previous issue had now been resolved, the working group had not been able to meet earlier in the year to review the tenancy agreement and had, by default, been dissolved.

Members noted that a small number of changes to the tenancy agreement needed to be considered, along with some feedback from the Allotments Tenants Committee.

It was proposed that the terms of reference for the working group be updated to include specific reference in its overall purpose to making minor improvements to the tenancy agreement, which had been extensively overhauled a couple of years ago, whilst also taking on board comments from the Allotments Tenants Committee and current tenants. It was also proposed that the terms of reference should be updated to include the appointment of up to 5 non-Councillors to the working group, to be made up of a mix of members of the Allotments Tenants Committee and allotments holders. Members unanimously agreed to these proposals.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To form an Allotments Task & Finish Working Group to review the current Allotments tenancy agreement and make recommendations, as necessary, to the Leisure Services Committee regarding any potential changes. The approved terms of reference are included at **Appendix A**.

Voting: For: 10 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Recorded: 0

- ◆ To note the appointment of Councillors Charles Bey, Horskins, Kennedy and Swaddle to the Allotments Task & Finish Working Group.

9. **YOUTH SERVICES**

The Deputy Town Clerk provided Members with an update regarding the Youth Services tendering project.

Members noted that the Youth Services Task & Finish Working Group, which sits under the Strategy & Resources Committee, last met on 17 April, with the report from that meeting due to be presented to that committee next week. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that, following the unsuccessful tender exercise and the absence of a Youth Service SLA, the report includes a recommendation to Strategy & Resources to ring fence the £27k youth service budget for 2023/24 to avoid the money falling back into the general pot. Assuming this is approved, it is anticipated that the Strategy & Resources Committee are likely to hand the matter back to the Leisure Services Committee to consider how best to now proceed.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that he had previously taken part in an informal meeting with Earley Town Council regarding the possibility of a joint approach to securing youth provision in both areas. Whilst this had gone quiet recently, he advised that he was due to meet with Earley Town Council next week to further discussions. Members also noted that the Deputy Town Clerk had spoken to a number of youth service providers who had previously expressed an interest in providing a service to the Council, albeit who didn't submit a tender, and they had shown interest in coming back to discuss again with the Council about how they might be able to get involved.

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk provided some history of the youth service in Woodley, explaining that the Council had previously provided detached youth work via a provider. He explained that the dynamic had changed over time and, around two years ago, when the contract with the previous provider came to an end, a large project took place to develop a new youth strategy. This led to the attempt to tender for a new SLA, which had ultimately been unsuccessful.

It was highlighted that the average youth worker salary was around £25k a year. A suggestion was made that the £27k budget might therefore be used for the Council to employ either a full-time or two part-time youth workers, although Members noted that the budget had previously only provided 3 hours of outreach provision a week. Members also noted that outreach work had previously been deemed successful, compared to provision of a specific youth centre, as groups of young people tended to move around.

A suggestion was made to contact St Andrews Church in Sonning who provide a good youth service, and it was agreed Councillor Firmager would make contact.

Members discussed the possibility of providing a space for young people to gather; a suggestion was made to use space at the Leisure Centre, potentially for a youth café, or to provide another covered seating area within the park. A suggestion was also made to consider whether it was possible to convert one of the empty retain units in the Town Centre into a youth café.

The Chairman advised that alternative youth service options could be considered and asked the Deputy Town Clerk to prepare some options based on the discussions at the meeting. He also stated that his intention would be to form a task and finish working group to progress this matter. It was suggested members of the Community Youth Partnership might take part in this. The Chairman also suggested that, with the next Committee meeting due to take place in September, an extraordinary meeting of the Committee may need to be called to expedite this matter.

10. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no future agenda items highlighted by Members.

11. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

A suggestion was made to publicise matters raised at the meeting, including the opening of the paddling pool, the new irrigation system at the bowls green, the installation of the new living wall at the Oakwood Centre, the picnic in the park event, and the new bins. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that he believed most of these items had already been publicised on our website and social media channels, but would check.

A query was raised about the potential installation of water fountains near the play area in Woodford Park, and the Deputy Town Clerk advised this is due to be included in a future potential projects list.

The meeting closed at 9:23 pm

ALLOTMENTS TASK AND FINISH WORKING GROUP

VERSION	DATE	AMENDED?	COMMENTS
0.1	24.05.23	No	Original Draft
1.0	06.06.23	Yes	Draft updated and approved by LS Committee – 6/6/23

1. **TYPE OF COMMITTEE** => Task and Finish Working Group
2. **PARENT COMMITTEE** => Leisure Services Committee
3. **6 MONTH MEETING RULE VALID (see 6.1.k)**
 - a. YES
4. **SIZE** => 4 Councillors; up to 5 representatives, made up of a mix of members of the Allotments Tenants Committee and allotments holders.

5. DUTIES AND POWERS

5.1 OVERALL PURPOSE

- a. To review the existing allotments tenancy agreement and make a recommendation to the Leisure Services Committee regarding any proposed changes.
- b. To make minor improvements to the allotments tenancy agreement, which was extensively overhauled two years ago, whilst taking on board comments from the Tenancy Committee and current tenants.

5.2 MEETINGS

- a. Meetings of the working party shall take place as and when required until the task has been completed, or where no meeting has occurred in a 6 month period.
- b. Officers will attend the meetings of the working party.
- c. Meetings will take place virtually.

5.3 TERMS OF OPERATION

- a. To review the current allotments tenancy agreement and consider any updates or amendment which may be required.
- b. To make a recommendation to the Leisure Services Committee regarding any changes to the allotments tenancy agreement.