

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 11 October 2022 at 8 pm**

Present: *Councillors J. Sartorel (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; J. Anderson; K. Baker; A. Chadwick; J. Cheng; M. Doyle; M. Forrer; K. Gilder; A. Heap; C. Jewell; V. Lewis; R. Skegg; A. Swaddle;*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Deputy Town Clerk; M. Filmore, Committee Officer;*

Also present: *Zoran Matic (Emergency Planning Officer - Wokingham Borough Council)
Harry Williamson (Emergency Planning Manager - Wokingham Borough Council)
5 members of the public*

35. *Before the meeting commenced, the Town Mayor asked those in attendance to observe a one-minute silence in remembrance of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.*
36. *A maximum of 30 minutes was set aside for members of the public to pose questions to the Council in the Town Forum, as reported in **Appendix A**.*
37. *Zoran Matic, Emergency Planning Officer at Wokingham Borough Council, provided Members with a presentation on emergency planning within the Borough. He advised Members of the scope of the Emergency Planning team and detailed the organisations they work with.*

He advised Members that the team prepare for events such as flooding, severe weather, displaced people, major highways incidents, and AWE Burghfield (MOD site). He explained that the team do not plan for apocalyptic events, such as asteroids hitting the earth or nuclear warfare, as they are only required to plan for reasonable worst-case scenarios. With regards to events, such as war, he advised that the Borough would be led by central government.

In response to a query about how information would be disseminated from central government in the event of war, Harry Williamson, Emergency Planning Manager at Wokingham Borough Council, advised that it would depend on who is impacted and how. He explained that, in the case of displaced people, their job was to provide humanitarian assistance, and to also ensure that the Borough Council's services continued to operate. He advised that, in the event of war, information would be disseminated via COBRA, through the DLUHC, to local authorities. In this area, information would likely also come through via the Thames Valley Resilience Forum (TVRF), which is a local group of councils and organisations who work together to mitigate and respond to emergency events.

A concern was raised that the Town Council did not know what would be expected of it in the event of war, and that the Council may be expected to respond with zero planning. However, Harry confirmed that the Borough's existing processes, whilst they may not be written to cover that specific event, would cover the potential impacts, such as the displacement of people.

Zoran confirmed that the Borough Council did not have a specific plan for a train or plane crash in the area, but that the response to such events would be in line with the standard response structure, dependent on the impact. He confirmed that the Borough Council has four nominated reception centres across the Borough, including Bulmershe Leisure Centre, should a centralised location be needed to respond to an event. However, the Borough Council can also ask for more assistance, including space, if required. Members noted that one of the key issues to responding to an event would be staffing and capacity but that the Emergency Planning Team would be able to find resource and support. It was highlighted that, whilst it could not be relied upon, it was very likely that there would be significant community support and rallying around in the event of an emergency assistance.

Harry stated that the main support they might require from local councils would be providing or helping to source volunteers, or providing building space. But also, Town and Parish Councils would be key in disseminating information to residents, as well as providing local knowledge as to where support would be needed.

Following a query, Zoran confirmed that the team were planning on trying to pull together a list of organisations and volunteer groups with the aim of entering into a formal agreement which would help to provide and coordinate volunteers, were they to be needed following an emergency event. It was noted that a local Facebook group of over 1,500 people may be able to offer volunteer support if needed.

The Mayor thanked Zoran and Harry for their attendance and presentation.

38. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors D. Bragg, S. Brindley, M. Green, R. Horskins, M. Nagra, S. Rahmouni, B. Rowland and P. Wicks.

39. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest raised by Members.

40. **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 21 JUNE 2022**

The Town Mayor presented the minutes of the meeting of the Full Council held on 21 June 2022.

RESOLVED

- ◆ To approve the minutes of the Council meeting held on 21 June 2022 and that they be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Recorded: 1

41. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

41.1 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 12 July 2022**

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 12 July 2022.

Minute 43: Telecommunications Notification

In response to a comment regarding the lack of information as to the precise location of the telecommunications application, the Committee Officer confirmed that the address provided was that as contained in the notification letter received from Wokingham Borough Council.

Minute 49: Sandford Park Bailey Bridge

It was raised that this item should refer to either Sandford Farm or Loddon Park, but that Sandford Park was not an accurate description.

[C.O. Note: Correspondence from WBC refers to this particular bridge as 'Sandford Park Bailey Bridge']

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 12 July 2022.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

41.2 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 9 August 2022**

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 9 August 2022.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 9 August 2022.

Voting: For: 12 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1 No Vote Registered: 1

41.3 **Minutes of the Leisure Services Committee: 30 August 2022**

Councillor Swaddle presented the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 30 August 2022.

Minute 14: Budgetary Control

In response to a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that work on revised estimates was ongoing.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 30 August 2022.

Voting: For: 12 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1 No Vote Registered: 1

41.4 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 6 September 2022**

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 6 September 2022.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 6 September 2022.

Voting: For: 12 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1 No Vote Registered: 1

41.5 **Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee: 27 September 2022**

Councillor Baker presented the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 27 September 2022.

Minute 21d: External Auditor Appointment

Councillor Baker proposed, seconded by Councillor Anderson, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the Council continue with the SAAA sector led external auditor appointment for the next 5-year appointing period, from 2022 to 2027.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

Minute 23.1: Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Sub Committee

Following a query, it was confirmed that the three recommended changes to the Standing Orders which the Strategy & Resources Committee had requested be deferred were due to be considered by the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Sub Committee at their next meeting, due to be held on 12 October.

Councillor Baker proposed, seconded by Councillor Gilder, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To adopt the updated Standing Orders, as set out in the agenda.

Voting: For: 11 Against: 1 Abstentions: 1 No Vote Registered: 1

Minute 23.2: Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Sub Committee

Councillor Baker proposed, seconded by Councillor Gilder, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To adopt the updated Financial Regulations, as set out in the agenda.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting held on 27 September 2022.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

41.6 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 4 October 2022**

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 4 October 2022.

Minute 104: Earley Station Footbridge Update

In response to a query, the Committee Officer confirmed that a letter to Network Rail had been drafted and would be sent once appropriate contact details had been sourced.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 4 October 2022.

Voting: For: 12 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1 No Vote Registered: 1

42. **MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMUNITY YOUTH PARTNERSHIP**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the appointment of Graham Sumbler (Woodley Baptist Church) and Trina Farrance (Bulmershe Gymnastics) as voluntary sector representatives to the Community Youth Partnership for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

43. **AUDIT 2021/22**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented the audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2021/22.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the external auditor's opinion on the audit of the 2021/22 Annual Governance and Accountability Return.

Voting: For: 11 Against: 0 Abstentions: 2 No Vote Registered: 1

- ◆ To adopt the audited Annual Governance and Accountability Return for 2021/22.

Voting: For: 12 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1 No Vote Registered: 1

- ◆ To note that the Notice of Conclusion of Audit had been displayed on public noticeboards at the Oakwood Centre and on the Council's website from 21 September 2022.

44. **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

Councillor Baker confirmed that, in the interest of time, he would not be providing a statement.

45. **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL SURVEY**

The Mayor set out the agenda item with regards to Wokingham Borough Council's Independent Remuneration Panel survey.

In response to a query, it was confirmed that a response had been provided to WBC that the Town Council provides £1,000 for the Town Mayor, but that this was a budget to cover expenses and not an allowance. A concern was raised that the response indicated that an allowance was paid to the Town Mayor, which was not the case, and that the response should've made clear that the £1,000 was to cover expenses.

Members debated whether an allowance and / or expenses should be paid to Town Councillors. A number of Councillors were against the idea, and it was noted that this would take money away from the tax payer. Others were in support of paying expenses, especially if this would help encourage a more diverse range of people to consider becoming Councillors by removing potential barriers, such as costs associated with childcare or caring for relatives.

It was suggested that, if what is being discussed is the payment of expenses, and not an allowance which would be subject to tax and national insurance, then this matter could be considered by the Strategy & Resources Committee, or an appropriate sub committee. Members highlighted that, when reviewing the financial impact on Town Councillors, every Councillor should be asked to feedback as every Councillor will have their own individual circumstances.

Councillor Baker proposed, seconded by Councillor Jewell, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the response provided to Wokingham Borough Council's Independent Remunerational Panel Survey, as set out in the agenda.
- ◆ To not provide any further response to Wokingham Borough Council regarding questions 2 to 4 on the survey.
- ◆ To ask the Strategy & Resources Committee to further consider the matter of paying expenses to Members, ensuring that all Councillors feedback into any discussion and consideration.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

46.1 **CIVILITY & RESPECT PLEDGE**

Members discussed the merits of signing up to the Civility & Respect Pledge, instigated by the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC), and One Voice Wales (OVW).

Whilst most Councillors commented that they were either in favour in principle of signing up to the pledge, whilst acknowledging that further work would be needed to expand and support it, a small number were against signing up.

46.2 It was proposed by the Mayor, seconded by Councillor Al-Sanjari, and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That as the business would not be completed by 10pm, the meeting continue until 10:30pm in order to complete the business set out in the agenda.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

46.3 In response to a query regarding the budget available to support potential training of Councillors and staff, as recommended by the pledge, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that some budget is available, and future budget provision was being looked into as it was acknowledged that training was an area which had not been given much attention previously.

A comment was raised regarding the benefit of signing up to the pledge, suggesting the Council's existing Code of Conduct should be sufficient to cover this. Members noted that the Council may not be as robust as it could when covering this matter and it was suggested the Code of Conduct could be reviewed.

Councillor Jewell proposed, seconded by Councillor Baker, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To review the Council's existing Code of Conduct.

Voting: For: 13 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Registered: 1

- ◆ To sign up to the Civility and Respect Pledge, including agreeing and committing to the eight statements included in the agenda.

Voting: For: 10 Against: 1 Abstentions: 2 No Vote Registered: 1

47.1 **OUTSIDE BODIES**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note that Cllr Rahmouni has stepped down as the Town Council's representative to the Robert Palmer's Almshouse Charity.

47.2 Councillor Baker proposed, seconded by Councillor Swaddle, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To appoint Cllr Bragg as the Town Council's representative to the Robert Palmer's Almshouse Charity for the remainder of the 2022/23 municipal year.

Voting: For: 11 Against: 0 Abstentions: 2 No Vote Registered: 1

47.3 Councillor Jewell advised that Councillor Rowland is stepping down as one of the four Town Council representatives to the Poor's Land Charity. Nominations for this position would be deferred until the next meeting of Full Council.

47.4 **RESOLVED:**

- ◆ To note the following written reports which were included with the agenda:
 - Poor's Land Charity – Cllr Cheng
 - ARC – Mrs S Flower
 - Citizen's Advice Bureau – Cllr Jewell

48. **TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Members noted the details of the events which both the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor had attended since the last Full Council meeting, as provided in the agenda.

The Mayor reminded Members that her charity afternoon tea, in aid of Keep Mobile, is due to take place on Sunday 23 October, and pleaded with Members to support the event by booking tickets and promoting it to friends and relatives.

49. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no suggestions for future agenda items.

50. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

A request was made for the Council to again publicise the matter of dangerous cycling within the town precinct.

Meeting closed at 10:19 pm

TOWN FORUM**11 October 2022**

5 members of the public attended the Town Forum.

One member of the public raised a concern regarding the usage of Woodford Park for events. She stated that the park provides local residents with fitness and mental health benefits, however areas of the park had recently been inaccessible due to the park hosting an inflatable theme park, which was situated on the park for more than three weeks. She highlighted that the lorries used to power the inflatables had caused excess noise and pollution, as well as churning up the ground. Grass had also been killed off, and there was an excess amount of litter, as well as a skip left on the park. She advised Members that, in response to a query she had raised, she had received a response from the Town Council to state that one benefit of holding such events was to bring more people into the town. However, she highlighted that this event had caused issues with parking in local streets, pollution and litter. The member of the public then asked how her feedback would be taken into account by the Council.

Councillor Baker responded to confirm that Councillors were not involved in the authorising or administering individual bookings, and deferred to the Deputy Town Clerk to provide a response. The Deputy Town Clerk thanked the member of the public for raising the query. He advised that this was the first time this event had been held, and the Council had learnt from the experience, especially regarding the duration and the impact on the park itself as well as local residents. He noted that the event had been well attended, which was a positive, but that there needed to be a balance. He advised that a new booking process had now been put in place when considering booking these types of events, which included undertaking a full impact assessment for the proposed events, along with a full discussion between the Deputy Town Clerk, Amenities Manager and Bookings Manager. The Deputy Town Clerk also confirmed that the skip was paid for by the hirers, not the Town Council.

Another member of the public raised a concern regarding the dangers caused by cyclists to pedestrians in the town. He noted that this issue had been raised and minuted at a recent meeting, and was shocked to read that there would need to be a by-law for the precinct to be made a no cycle area, stating that he believed the town centre was already a no cycle area with signage stating as such. He suggested that Community Police Officers needed to do more to tell people to get off their bikes, and asked if anything could be done to protect pedestrians. He also raised a concern with litter in the town centre, particularly the town centre walled garden and, again, asked if anything could be done.

Councillor Swaddle advised that the issue of dangerous cycling had been raised at the Borough Council. She advised that the Leader of Wokingham Council had advised that there was a Traffic Regulation Order covering Woodley town precinct which states there should be no cycling, and that it was for police to enforce this. Councillor Swaddle said the Borough Council would be speaking to the police regarding this matter.

In response to the concern raised about littering, Councillor Jewell highlighted that she was a member of the Woodley Adopt a Street Project (WASP), whose members take part in litter picking across the town. She also advised that the Town Centre had recently been awarded the Silver award at the Thames & Chilterns in Bloom Awards, suggesting it was well looked after.

Members agreed that there was significant concern for pedestrians in light of dangerous cyclists, especially in the town precinct. Councillor Doyle suggested that, whilst we have spoken to the police about the matter, the Town Council needed to do more on this issue. He advised that he was intending to meet with the Town Centre Manager to discuss what could be done in the precinct to stop cyclists, and stated he would be asking whether it would be possible to put up barriers to make it difficult for cyclists. However, Member noted the barriers may well present issues to disabled residents, especially those in wheelchairs.

Councillor Baker suggested that anyone who witnesses an accident or near miss should write directly to the Chief Constable or Police & Crime Commissioner to raise the matter as the more contact they receive the more pressure they will be under to do something about it.

Councillor Al-Sanjari asked whether it would be possible for Council staff to patrol the Town Centre to track when incidents were occurring, but the Deputy Town Clerk advised that Council staff did not have the capacity to do this. Councillor Al-Sanjari also suggested it may be helpful to get schools involved and, following a discussion, Members agreed that contact should be made with schools asking them to raise this issue with their children.

Councillor Anderson suggested it might be helpful to do a sign campaign to raise more awareness about the town centre being a no cycle area. She suggested people can become blind to existing signage where it has been up for some time, and placing additional signs up in different locations for a short time may attract more attention.

Councillor Chadwick raised a concern with the ventilation in the meeting room and the Deputy Town Clerk agreed to consider purchasing a carbon dioxide monitor for meetings.