

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 7 February 2023 at 8 pm**

Present: *Councillors J. Sartorel (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; J. Anderson;
A. Chadwick; J. Cheng; M. Doyle; D. Errawalla; M. Forrer;
K. Gilder; M. Green; A. Heap; R. Horskins; C. Jewell; M. Nagra;
R. Skegg; D. Smith; B. Soane; A. Swaddle; P. Wicks;*

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

Also present: *Jake Morrison – Citizen’s Advice Wokingham
4 members of the public*

66. *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**.*

67. *Jake Morrison – Citizen’s Advice Wokingham – provided members with a presentation on the work of Citizen’s Advice and the current cost of living crisis.*

68. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors K. Baker, D. Bragg, S. Brindley, V. Lewis and B. Rowland.

69. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest raised by Members.

70. **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 6 DECEMBER 2022**

The Town Mayor presented the minutes of the meeting of the Full Council held on 6 December 2022.

RESOLVED

- ◆ To approve the minutes of the Council meeting held on 6 December 2022 and that they be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Recorded: 3

71. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

71.1 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 3 January 2023**

Councillor Wicks presented the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 3 January 2023.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 3 January 2023.

71.2 **Minutes of the Leisure Services Committee: 17 January 2023**

Councillor Smith presented the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 17 January 2023.

Minute 44: Community Youth Partnership

A query was raised as to why, if the Council is now considering the potential of partnership working with Earley Town Council with regards to the provision of youth services in the area, the Council could not revisit the idea of utilising space at Woodford Park Leisure Centre to provide a Café which could be used by young people in the evenings. Councillor Smith advised that the suggestion of a Café was included for consideration when the Youth Strategy document was developed but that other options were pursued. He confirmed there was another opportunity now to reconsider this, and other options, following the failure to secure a provider in the Youth Services tender.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that discussions were taking place between the Youth Services Working Party and Earley Town Council as to any potential joint working opportunities, and that there were also plans to discuss possibilities with potential providers. He advised that any possible options would come back to the Strategy & Resources Committee for consideration. Councillor Smith confirmed he was keen to progress the discussion, and the Deputy Town Clerk advised that a formal meeting of the Youth Services Working Party would be announced shortly.

It was highlighted that one problem has been that the Youth Services Working Party reports to the Strategy & Resources Committee, whilst the Community Youth Partnership reports to the Leisure Services Committee, and it was suggested that the Working Party and Partnership would benefit from reporting into the same Committee.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 15 November 2022.

71.3 **Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee: 24 January 2023**

Councillor Wicks presented the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 24 January 2023.

It was highlighted that the font used in the Budget Appendix, provided at the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting, was too small and unreadable for some Members. This was noted by Officers.

Prior to Full Council considering the recommendations from the Strategy & Resources Committee, Councillor Swaddle proposed, seconded by Councillor Soane, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To undertake a recorded vote on each of the recommendations, in line with Standing Order 18.1.g.

Voting: For: 11 Against: 0 Abstentions: 6 No Vote Registered: 1

Minute 67.1: Risk Management Strategy

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To adopt the updated 2023/24 Risk Management Strategy.

Voting:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAINED
N. Al-Sanjari		
J. Anderson		
A. Chadwick		
J. Cheng		
M. Doyle		
M. Forrer		
K. Gilder		
M. Green		
A. Heap		
R. Horskins		
C. Jewell		
M. Nagra		
J. Sartorel		
R. Skegg		
D. Smith		
B. Soane		
A. Swaddle		
P. Wicks		
For: 18	Against: 0	Abstentions: 0

Minute 67.2: Risk Register

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the Risk Register Full Council Overview.

Minute 72 a): Leisure Services Charges 2023/24

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the charges for Leisure Services for 2023/24, as set out in the Proposed Charges 2023/24 Appendix.

Voting:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAINED
J. Anderson		N. Al-Sanjari
A. Chadwick		M. Nagra
J. Cheng		
M. Doyle		
M. Forrer		
K. Gilder		
M. Green		
A. Heap		
R. Horskins		
C. Jewell		
J. Sartorel		
R. Skegg		
D. Smith		
B. Soane		
A. Swaddle		
P. Wicks		
For: 16	Against:	Abstentions: 2

Minute 72 b): Oakwood Centre Charges 2023/24

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the charges for the Oakwood Centre for 2023/24, as set out in the Proposed Charges 2023/24 Appendix.

Voting:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAINED
J. Anderson		N. Al-Sanjari
A. Chadwick		M. Nagra
J. Cheng		
M. Doyle		
M. Forrer		
K. Gilder		
M. Green		
A. Heap		
R. Horskins		
C. Jewell		
J. Sartorel		
R. Skegg		
D. Smith		
B. Soane		
A. Swaddle		
P. Wicks		
For: 16	Against: 0	Abstentions: 2

Minute 74c): Budget and Precept 2023/24

Concern was raised by some Members that the Youth Services budget had only been increased by £1k, especially in light of the fact that the Council had been unable to secure a provider, and it was suggested the budget should've been increased in line with inflation. Comments were made that setting this budget would potentially tie the hands of the new Council, when elected in May, and also show a lack of support for the youth in Woodley. It was noted that this concern was discussed and minuted at both the meeting of the Leisure Services Committee and Strategy & Resources Committee in January, and that it had been advised that, should the the proposed youth service being developed require additional funds, this would be fully considered by the Strategy & Resources Committee. It was noted that, at the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting, the Chairman had indicated that "Whilst he could not commit to a future decision ... he hoped any increased amount would be made available" (S&R 24 January 2023 – minute 74 b)).

Following a query regarding the reserves level, the Deputy Town Clerk advised there was no legal requirement for a Council to maintain a particular level, but that custom and practice suggests a reserve level of around 3 months operating costs to be appropriate. Whilst he did not have this figure to hand, he advised that the budgeted reserve level at the end of 2023/24 would be within this level.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the budget for 2023/24, as presented in the Budget 2023/24 Appendix.

Voting:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAINED
J. Anderson	M. Doyle	N. Al-Sanjari
A. Chadwick	A. Heap	
J. Cheng	C. Jewell	
M. Forrer	M. Nagra	
K. Gilder	R. Skegg	
M. Green		
R. Horskins		
J. Sartorel		
D. Smith		
B. Soane		
A. Swaddle		
P. Wicks		
For: 12	Against: 5	Abstentions: 1

Councillor Jewell stated she was disappointed that the proposed reduction in the precept level would require the Council to dip into its reserves. She highlighted that the Council would be exposed to external forces, such as salary scales, which could reduce the reserves further, and suggested that if the precept level had been kept at the current level this would've kept reserve levels, whilst still offering a real terms reduction in precept level for residents.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve a precept level of £1,195,649 for the 2023/24 financial year, as presented in the Budget 2023/24 Appendix.

Voting:

FOR	AGAINST	ABSTAINED
J. Anderson	N. Al-Sanjari	A. Heap
A. Chadwick	M. Doyle	C. Jewell
J. Cheng	M. Nagra	R. Skegg
M. Forrer		
K. Gilder		
M. Green		
R. Horskins		
J. Sartorel		
D. Smith		
B. Soane		
A. Swaddle		
P. Wicks		
For: 12	Against: 3	Abstentions: 3

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the minutes of the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting held on 22 November 2022.

71.4 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 31 January 2023**

Councillor Wicks presented the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 31 January 2023.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the minutes of the Planning and Community Committee meeting held on 31 January 2023.

72. **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

As Councillor Baker was not in attendance, the Mayor read out a statement on behalf of the Leader of the Council, as included at **Appendix B**.

73. **CO-OPTION**

73.1 The Mayor advised Members as to the process which would be followed at the meeting to consider those candidates who had applied to be considered for co-option onto the Council. Members noted that each vacant position would be voted on separately, with a candidate requiring an absolute majority of votes (over 50% of those voting) to be successfully co-opted.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the written applications for the office of Town Councillor, which were provided to Members as part of the agenda.

73.2 The Mayor invited those candidates in attendance to speak to the Council to introduce themselves and set out why they wished to be considered for co-option. Daniel Errawalla and Kester Bey spoke in person, whilst Nigel Harman spoke to the Council via Zoom conferencing. Apologies for absence were noted for Mohammed Parvaiz.

The Mayor then asked Councillors to indicate if they wished to discuss the merits of the candidates further or, if not, stated that Council would proceed straight to a vote. No Councillor indicated a desire to discuss the candidates further.

In consideration of the first of the two vacant Councillor positions, the following nominations were received:

- Daniel Errawalla - Councillor Soane proposed, Councillor Wicks seconded
- Kester Bey – Councillor Nagra proposed, Councillor Doyle seconded
- Mohammed Parvaiz – Councillor Swaddle proposed, Councillor Chadwick seconded
- Nigel Harman – Councillor Jewell proposed, Councillor Heap seconded

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To co-opt Mohammed Parvaiz to the position of Town Councillor.

Voting for:

- Daniel Errawalla – 0
- Kester Bey – 3
- Mohammed Parvaiz – 11
- Nigel Harman - 3

In consideration of the second of the two vacant Councillor positions, the following nominations were received:

- Daniel Errawalla - Councillor Soane proposed, Councillor Wicks seconded
- Kester Bey – Councillor Nagra proposed, Councillor Doyle seconded
- Nigel Harman – Councillor Jewell proposed, Councillor Heap seconded

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To co-opt Daniel Errawalla to the position of Town Councillor.

Voting for:

- Daniel Errawalla – 11
- Kester Bey – 3
- Nigel Harman - 3

- 73.3 The Mayor announced there would be a short break whilst Daniel Errawalla signed the Declaration of Acceptance, confirming that, after this, Daniel would officially be a Councillor and could partake in the rest of the meeting.

Councillor Daniel Errawalla signed the declaration of acceptance. He then left the meeting.

The Mayor confirmed that Mohammed Parvaiz would be invited to sign the declaration of acceptance at the earliest opportunity.

74. **DIRECT DEBIT MANDATES**

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the recent Interim Audit had recommended that Council should have sight of the direct debit mandates signed by the Council, and he confirmed that these would be provided to Council once a year.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the following direct debit mandates have been signed by the appropriate signatories:
 - Ecotricity – Gas supply
- ◆ To note the current direct debit mandates in place are as follows:
 - Pozitive Energy – Electricity supply
 - Merchant Rentals – Payment card terminal rental
 - Lloyds Bank – Bank charges / Card processing
 - Go Cardless – WPLC membership payments
 - Les Mill Fitness – Club membership / licence
 - B E Fuelcards – Petrol/diesel
 - Global 4 Communications – Phones/internet
 - Devonshire Trading – Gym equipment lease
 - SGW Payroll – Payroll services
 - Pitney Bowes – Franking top-up
 - Mailscoms – Franking machine maintenance contract
 - CF Corporate Finance – Copier Lease
 - Public Works Loan Board – Project loans

75. **KING'S CORONATION**

The Deputy Town Clerk set out the proposal for the installation of a new seating area by the Oakwood Centre to commemorate the coronation of King Charles III, as set out in Report No. FC 2/23.

A number of Members commented that they did not like the design of the seating. Other Members were concerned about the accessibility of the seating, highlighting that they appeared to be low and did not provide a back rest.

Some Members were also concerned with the speed with which a decision was being sought. Whilst they noted this was because a decision would need to be taken now to install the proposed seats in time for the coronation, it was suggested that more time and consultation should be undertaken to ensure a suitable memorial to commemorate the coronation is provided, and that this could be installed after the coronation.

Members did like the proposal to provide a living wall, which the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed would be funded from other budgets.

Councillor Jewell proposed, seconded by Councillor Wicks, that the recommendation be amended to state that £6,500 would be provided for "...a seating element..." rather than "...the seating element..." as set out in Report No. FC 2/23.

Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED

- ◆ To note Report No. FC 2/23
- ◆ To approve the allocation of £6,500 from the available Capital Programme funds for the provision of a seating element for the King's Coronation project.

Voting: For: 16 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0 No Vote Recorded: 2

76. **OUTSIDE BODIES**

Councillor Smith advised Members that he was a new trustee on the Poor's Land Charity. He highlighted that he had recently attended an emergency meeting regarding heating problems which had left the residents cold. He advised that a meeting was due to take place with the charity to resolve this.

Councillor Jewell advised that, as representative on the Citizen's Advice Bureau, she had recently attended a meeting with both the Town Council and Wokingham Borough Council at which discussions took place about how Councils might offer support other than just providing funding. Councillor Jewell indicated that she would take this back to the appropriate Committee for consideration.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the following written reports which were included with the agenda:
 - Poor's Land Charity – Cllr K Gilder

77. **TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

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

78. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no suggestions for future agenda items.

79. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

There were no suggestions for publicity or website items.

Before the end of the meeting, Members expressed their thanks to the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Committee Officer, and all Officers for their hard work and support during the past electoral term.

Meeting closed at 9:59 pm

DRAFT

TOWN FORUM

7 February 2023

5 members of the public attended the Town Forum, with one member going on to be co-opted as a Councillor later during the meeting.

A member of the public spoke to raise the following concern, which had been submitted in writing in advance:

"There is a real risk that Wokingham Borough Council will misinterpret the meaning of section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 when it considers for adoption the proposed off-street parking places Order 2023. This section prescribes the range of expenditures to which local authorities may apply any surplus funds that parking generates. It is not a list of the reasons for which they may make excessive charges.

Therefore, if the proposed charges are introduced in order to raise funds, for example to off-set council tax increases then the council will be acting ultra vires and leave itself open to a challenge in the courts. It is my assertion that Wokingham Borough Council has not presented a fully costed justification for the level of charges that it intends to impose, based on evidence and reasoning as to why this level of increase is necessary to relieve or prevent congestion of traffic.

Since it would be illegal for Wokingham Borough Council to set car park charges in order to provide a source of revenue for other activities, what steps will Woodley Town Council take to challenge the borough council should the proposed off-street parking places Order 2023 be adopted?"

The Mayor thanked the resident for the questioning. She acknowledged that this may be a valid question to ask of Wokingham Borough Council, but that Members of the Town Council would need to discuss this in further detail to determine whether they believed the funds being raised were indeed due to be spend unlawfully in line with the Road Traffic Regulation Act.

That Mayor recommended this be added to a future agenda of the Planning & Community Committee for consideration as and if the Order is indeed adopted.

LEADERS STATEMENT

*Cllr Keith Baker
7th February 2023*

I apologise I am not here to deliver this is person but unfortunately circumstances have conspired against me such that I cannot attend. I thank Madam Mayor for reading this out on my behalf.

So welcome to the final Full Council Meeting of this group of councillors. In May we will have a new set of councillors who I expect will be a mixture of existing and brand new councillors running this council. Several of you here tonight may well not be part of that new council for a variety of reasons. On behalf of the residents of Woodley and the Town Council can I thank all of you for the work you have put in over the last 4 years. Being a councillor is not an easy task and does take a time commitment – so thank you.

Those 4 years have been quite difficult punctured with several good times. Financially officers have been brilliant coping with significant drop in income during the pandemic years and then driving income back up over recent years. We are ending this period with healthy reserves being in excess of £1 million. Additionally at the same time we have banked over £2 million in a secure investment ready for paying off the loan on the Oakwood Centre in 2025. The town council tax has only increased by 2.85% over the period 2019 to now, the best of any town council in Wokingham Borough.

We have also recognised the importance of our voluntary organisations with a 22% increase in grants over the 4 years. Our grant to the Town Centre Management Initiative (now Partnership) has almost doubled in that period.

The Town Council capital program, although suspended during the peak of the pandemic, was restarted with some significant projects being completed. These include a new Grounds Depot in Woodford Park; Refurbishment of parts of the Leisure Centre; complete regeneration of the Lake; the new play area in Woodford Park and refurbishment of the Theatre in the Oakwood Centre.

These are only some of the things that this council has been doing over the last 4 years. There is a lot more but time prohibits further details.

Woodley Town Council remains the best Council in Wokingham Borough serving the residents of Woodley well. I am sure the new council in May will continue the great work the current administration has carried out over these previous 4 years.