

**Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council held remotely on
Tuesday 21 July 2020 at 8 pm**

Present: *Councillors D. Mills (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; J. Anderson; K. Baker; D. Bragg; S. Brindley; A. Chadwick; J. Cheng; M. Doyle; K. Gilder; A. Heap; C. Jewell; J. MacNaught; T. McCann; M. Nagra; S. Rahmouni; B. Rowland; J. Sartorel; R. Skegg; B. Soane; A. Swaddle; P. Wicks*

Officers present: *D. Mander, Town Clerk; K. Murray, Deputy Town Clerk; L. Matthews, Committee Officer; A. Basra, Finance Officer*

Also present: *Borough Councillor R. Dolinski
3 members of the public*

14. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors M. Forrer, M. Green and D. Smith.

15. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

16. **2019/20 YEAR END**

The Town Clerk presented the 2019/20 year end figures, in summary and by committee.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the 2019/20 year end figures.

17. **FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2019/20**

a) **Financial Statements 2019/20**

The Town Clerk presented the Financial Statements for 2019/20.

In reply to a question about the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Town Clerk confirmed that this had caused a significant reduction of income in the figures for March 2020. The Town Clerk informed Members that she would be meeting with a member of the Finance Team at Wokingham Borough Council later in the week to discuss possible support from the Borough Council to help with the severe financial effects of the pandemic. Following a question about the Precept Support Grant, the Town Clerk confirmed that this grant had been reduced each year since its introduction.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the Financial Statements for 2019/20 and that they be signed by the Deputy Mayor and the Town Clerk.

b) (i) **Interim Internal Audit Report - November 2019 to February 2020**

Members noted that the interim internal audit report had not been received by the Strategy and Resources Committee as the Committee had been unable to meet due to the measures put in place to limit the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Town Clerk informed Members that it was hoped that a meeting of the Strategy and Resources Committee could be arranged

before the end of August and she agreed to publish the date as soon as possible.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the interim internal audit report for the period from November 2019 to February 2020.

(ii) **Annual Internal Audit Report for 2019/20**

Members considered the annual internal audit report as set out in the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the annual internal audit report for 2019/20.

c) **Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20**

The Town Clerk explained that the Annual Governance Statement required the Council to consider the statements set out on page 4 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return and pages 19 to 23 of the appendix had been provided to help Members do so. She also explained that statement 5 had been affirmed by the internal auditor in the interim internal audit report – November 2019 to February 2020 – as shown on page 10 of the agenda, and the Council could therefore answer “yes” to statement No. 5.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2019/20.
- ◆ To approve the signing of the Annual Governance Statement 2019/20 by the Mayor and the Town Clerk.

d) **Accounting Statements for 2019/20**

Members considered the Accounting Statements for 2019/20 and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the Accounting Statements for 2019/20.
- ◆ To approve the signing of the Accounting Statements 2019/20 by the Mayor.

Following a request for an update on the effect of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Council’s finances, the Town Clerk informed Members that the Council had received very little income since the start of the 2020/21 municipal year and, although the Council had been able to furlough some staff, which had provided some income, and the gym and 3G pitch at Woodford Park Leisure Centre would be able to reopen shortly, it seemed likely that all of the Council’s general reserves would have disappeared by the end of the year. As mentioned previously, the Town Clerk would be meeting with representatives from Wokingham Borough Council later in the week to discuss the Town Council’s financial situation and possible support from the Borough Council. Members raised concerns about whether individual Councillors might be personally liable to cover any debts that might not be met by the Council and the Town Clerk agreed to clarify this situation.

The Town Clerk agreed to provide Councillors with a spreadsheet showing the estimates of projected income for the year and the calculations of potential shortfall in income, so that Members would be fully briefed on the severity of the situation. The Town Clerk stressed that the figures in the spreadsheet were estimates and the spreadsheet was highly confidential and must not be shared with anyone outside of the Town Council.

In reply to a question, the Town Clerk confirmed that the reserves earmarked for the payment of loans taken out by the Council could not be used for any other purpose. She stated that the SLCC and NALC were looking at ways of funding further loans for Councils to help them through the current difficulties, but commented that the Council might not want to take that course of action.

The Leader of the Council informed Members that he was in conversation with the local Members of Parliament, and through them with the Secretary of State, regarding help that might be available to prudent Councils who were experiencing these difficulties through no fault of their own.

18. **SECTION 106 FUNDING**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented Report No. FC 3/20, which advised Members that Wokingham Borough Council was currently holding approximately £28,000 Section 106 funding for projects in Woodley and proposed that the Town Council request this available funding be transferred to the Town Council. Members were asked to approve the allocation of £15,000 of this funding towards the Town Centre Community Garden project.

It was proposed by Councillor Jewell and seconded by Councillor Rowland that the wording of the second recommendation in the report be changed from:

“That Members approve the allocation of £15,000 of this funding towards the Town Centre Community Garden project as set out in the report”

to:

“That Members approve the allocation of funding to provide equipment and materials for the Town Centre Community Garden following consultation with the WTCMI, traders and residents”.

In reply to a question about the cost of the project so far, the Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that the construction of the garden had been funded by Wokingham Borough Council and the Town Council had not contributed to the cost. The Deputy Town Clerk did not know how much the Borough Council had spent on the project.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council had consulted with residents before the start of the project with regard to the materials to be used in the project. He informed Members that the Town Council was currently consulting with residents about what they would like to see in the new garden area and had received 60 replies so far.

In reply to a question about possible sponsorship for the Community Garden, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the Rotary Club had offered to contribute towards the cost of the garden.

When asked about the use of Section 106 funding, the Town Clerk confirmed that Section 106 funding could only be used for capital projects and could not be used to help with the budget deficit.

Following further discussion, it was

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the proposal to change the wording of the second recommendation in Report No. FC 3/20 be carried.

Members then voted on the recommendations, as amended, in Report No. FC 3/20 and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To request the transfer of all available Section 106 funding for Woodley projects to the Town Council.
- ◆ To allocate funding from the available Section 106 funds to provide equipment and material for the Town Centre Community Garden, following consultation with the WTCMI, traders and residents.

Councillor Al-Sanjari stressed the importance of consulting with disability groups before plans for the Community Garden were finalised and was asked to provide details of all the local disability groups and their contact information to officers to enable them to be contacted.

Meeting closed at 9:38 pm

Following the end of the meeting it was pointed out that Councillor Nagra had raised his hand to the camera before the end of the meeting, but had not been called to speak.