

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 25 June 2019 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; M. Forrer; A. Heap; C. Jewell; J. MacNaught; T. McCann; S. Rahmouni; B. Rowland; J. Sartorel; R. Skegg; D. Stares; A. Swaddle; P. Wicks

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

Also present: 3 members of the public

Before the start of the meeting a maximum of 30 minutes was set aside for members of the public to pose questions to the Council in the Town Forum. As there were no members of the public wishing to address the Council the Town Forum did not take place.

24. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Gilder, Green and Nagra.

25. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

26. **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 14 MAY 2019**

The Deputy Town Mayor presented the minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 14 May 2019.

In response to a question about the weighting of age groups of those responding to the Residents Survey the Town Clerk confirmed that she would invite Helen Masey of HMR to the next meeting of the Council where this and any other matters relating to the survey could be discussed.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the minutes of the Annual Meeting held on 14 May 2019 and that they be signed by the Deputy Mayor as a correct record.

27. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

27.1 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 21 May 2019**

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 21 May 2019.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 21 May 2019.

27.2 **Minutes of the Leisure Services Committee: 4 June 2019**

Councillor Stares presented the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 4 June 2019.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 4 June 2019.

27.3 **Minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee: 11 June 2019**

Councillor Baker presented the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 11 June 2019.

In response to a question the Town Clerk confirmed that there had been no further correspondence with Wokingham Borough Council regarding their offer in respect of Malone Park because this matter, and any future action to be taken, was required to be considered by Full Council.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the offer from Wokingham Borough Council of a lease on the previous terms or a community asset transfer lease of up to 30 years for Malone Park is thoroughly unsatisfactory, and it is therefore recommended that Wokingham Borough Council be robustly challenged to transfer ownership of the land at Malone Park to Woodley Town Council.
- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee meeting held on 11 June 2019.

27.4 **Minutes of the Planning and Community Committee: 18 June 2019**

Councillor Wicks presented the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 18 June 2019.

Under this item, Councillor Jewell reported that an item on cycling facilities in Woodley, that she had proposed be discussed at a future meeting, will be considered by the Planning and Community Committee at its next meeting.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting held on 18 June 2019.

28. **2018/19 YEAR END**

The Town Clerk presented the 2018/19 year end figures. In summary, expenditure had exceeded the original and revised budgets for the year, however, additional income from activities at Woodford Park Leisure Centre in particular had meant that the Council was able to add £41,294 to reserves at the year end. Allocations from reserves were made in the year to purchase a utility vehicle and Mayoral regalia as well as transfer funds to the Building and Facilities fund. Funds held for anticipated fuel costs relating to Bulmershe Leisure Centre were released to the general reserve which stood at £467,017 at the year end.

The Town Clerk responded to questions regarding the year end figures and the reasons for these either not being met or underspends. These had mostly been the result of additional income at the leisure centre and savings from posts that had fallen vacant during the year as well as unspent staffing contingencies.

In response to a question regarding a seemingly high level of general reserves, the Town Clerk reported that there was a general requirement for councils to hold 3 months' net expenditure as a minimum. It was also explained that the precept support grant was funding provided by government when the changes made to the Council Tax benefit scheme reduced the tax base. This was paid by Wokingham Borough Council and had been gradually decreasing over the years and would no longer be payable from 2020/21.

29. **FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2018/19**

a) Financial Statements 2018/19

The Town Clerk presented the Financial Statements for 2018/19. In response to questions about the timing of the provision of the statements to councillors the Town Clerk explained that there were a series of actions to be undertaken before the document was finalised, including checks and the final year end audit report provided by the Council's internal auditor. Some members felt at a disadvantage receiving the year-end financial information only four days before the meeting and asked if this could be provided sooner. The Town Clerk said that it may be possible to provide these a couple of days in advance of the usual agenda delivery date, but this would depend on the information being ready in time and the requirements having been met and agreed by the internal auditor, who was required to confirm that the necessary checks had been carried out. The Town Clerk explained that legislation relating to the local council audit regime gave a tight timescale to be met. The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) had to be submitted by 1 July and the Council was required to consider the AGAR before the 30 June each year.

In response to a question about responsibility for approval of the Financial Statements, the Town Clerk confirmed that the Council was required to consider the approval of these. She also explained that the External Auditor had been appointed following a tendering exercise by the Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA) and that PKF Littlejohn had been appointed as the external auditor for most parish and town councils in England.

One member of Council commended the officer team for their work on the statements and the supporting information provided and confirmed that they had had sufficient time to review the documents provided.

Councillor Jewell informed the meeting that she wouldn't be voting on this item, although this wasn't a slight on the information that had been provided.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the Financial Statements for 2018/19.

For: 14 Abstentions: 5

- ◆ To authorise the signing of the statements by the Chairman and the Town Clerk.

For: 15 Abstentions: 4

b) Annual Internal Audit Report for 2018/19

The Town Clerk presented the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2018/19 and explained the role of the internal auditor in checking and reporting on the Council's financial arrangements through the year. The internal auditor had made three visits through the year. Reports in October and March had been reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2018/19.

c) Annual Governance Statement for 2018/19

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 21 and 22 of the appendix had been provided to help members do so. She also explained that statement 5 had been affirmed by the internal auditor who had carried out the financial risk assessment. Concern was expressed by a member of Council that assurances from officers was all very well but that there hadn't been enough time to scrutinise these documents properly. There was a view that the internal auditor should take responsibility in this matter and check, for example procurement practices. The Town Clerk drew members' attention to additional information provided in the appendix, the year end internal auditor's letter and financial risk assessment, that she believed would also help members consider this item.

In response to a question regarding the asset and insurance valuations the Town Clerk confirmed that items listed in the Asset Register were based on cost at the time of purchase, whereas insurance values to cover those items was reviewed and increased annually.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2018/19.
- ◆ To approve the signing of the Annual Governance Statement 2018/19 by the Chairman and the Town Clerk.

d) Accounting Statements for 2018/19

Members considered the Accounting Statements for 2018/19 and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the Accounting Statements for 2018/19.
- ◆ To approve the signing of the Accounting Statements 2018/19 by the Chairman.

30. **COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

Having been duly nominated it was

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That Councillor Rahmouni be appointed to the vacant place on the Planning and Community Committee.

31. **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader of the Council made the following statement:

We have now had our first full cycle of main committee meetings and having attended all three of them I am pleased to report that the atmosphere of working together has been quite good. The level of scrutiny has been higher than normal as new councillors of all parties feel their way. The result has been some very late committee meetings.

One area of enhanced scrutiny is the Service Level Agreement (SLA) this council has with "Just Around the Corner" or JAC, a Christian based organisation, which is due for renewal soon. The question has been asked whether they have clearly separated their religious activities from their contracted outreach duties under the SLA. The relationship with JAC started many years ago when the opposition was in total control of this council. My group have assumed that since they initiated

and supported JAC for all those years this question had been asked and answered. However, one of their councillors has legitimately raised this very question so there will be an Agenda item at the next Strategy & Resources Committee Meeting dedicated to this question.

My last statement expressed a desire to work together regardless of political allegiance and I am pleased to see Cllr Al-Sanjara offering to pick up the issue of facilities for youth on social media. This is precisely why I proposed at the annual meeting to suspend standing orders to allow her to be appointed to the Community Youth Partnership. I have offered her any assistance she needs from our group. Unfortunately, an opposition member has declined to participate in this preferring to develop their own research. Obviously, they are entitled to operate however they wish but it is a lost opportunity for all of us to work together for the benefit of our residents.

I have also asked the opposition leader, Cllr Jewell, to meet with me on a monthly basis so we can address any potential issues before they actually occur rather than after the issue has emerged.

Can I remind all councillors that it is only common decency to send apologies to Linda if you are unable to attend a meeting even if it is a last-minute notification. Several members have failed to do this recently so I hope you will take this reminder in the spirit it has been said.

It has come to my attention that Cllr Al-Sanjara has been subjected to a level of abuse that no-one should have to endure. Political banter is one thing but what Cllr Al-Sanjara has had to endure is well beyond this. As a result, I hope everyone here can fully endorse the following statement:

“Woodley Town Council aims to represent all the people in our community. We are here to serve everyone who makes Woodley a special, welcoming town for new residents and those who’ve lived here most of their lives. At times it can seem that the nation is divided but we are here to stand against all forms of discrimination. We encourage diversity in participation in the council and in the provision we offer.

We might be a small town but we are ambitious and united. I hope we can continue to show that Woodley is the kind of place where people come together, as that is the commitment from every person on the council. We are stronger and better when we work together”.

In response Councillor Jewell expressed her support of Councillor Baker's statement and agreed that no one should be subjected to abuse.

32. **CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2019/20**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented Report No. FC 4/19 and explained that the recent servicing of the boiler at Coronation Hall had identified a number of issues requiring attention at an estimated cost of £2,000. He proposed that a new combination boiler be installed to replace the old boiler at a cost of £3,500. This would remove the requirement for tank descaling and provide a more reliable and efficient hot water and heating system for the future. If Members agreed to the purchase of the boiler from Capital Programme funds the installation works could be carried out in August while other works were being undertaken in the hall.

In response to a question as to whether the new boiler would be more fuel efficient the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the proposed new boiler would be more economical to run and that the Council's maintenance contractor is

based locally, is well established and operates under an environmental and other relevant policies.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the information contained in the report.
- ◆ To approve the allocation of £3,500 from the Capital Programme to fund the replacement of the boiler at Coronation Hall, as set out in the report.

33. **OUTSIDE BODIES**

a) Following an invitation from the Sandford Farm Liaison Group to send a representative to their meetings and having been duly nominated it was

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That Councillor Chadwick be appointed as the Council's representative to the Sandford Farm Liaison Group.

b) Members noted the following written reports:

- Citizens Advice Wokingham report from Councillor Bragg.
- Poor's Land Charity report from Councillor Cheng.

Members also noted the summary of a meeting organised by the Reading Road Allotment Tenants Association on the Bee Roadzz project.

34. **TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Members noted the 4 engagements attended by Councillor Gilder as Town Mayor since the last meeting.

35. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no suggestions for future agenda items.

Meeting closed at 9.30 pm
