

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

Present: *Councillors J. Sartorel (Chairman); N. Al-Sanjari; K. Baker; D. Bragg; S. Brindley; A. Chadwick, J. Cheng; M. Doyle; M. Forrer; K. Gilder; M. Green; A. Heap; R. Horskins; C. Jewell; V. Lewis; T. McCann; M. Nagra; S. Rahmouni; D. Smith; B. Soane;*

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

Also present: *2 members of the public*

A maximum of 30 minutes was set aside before the start of the meeting 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.

74. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors J. Anderson, B. Rowland, R. Skegg, A. Swaddle and P. Wicks.

75. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

76. **MINUTES OF COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2021**

The Town Mayor presented the minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 December 2021.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that planting had commenced on the Town Centre Walled Garden today and should be finished this week, with the water supply installation to be arranged shortly. The installation should cause minimal disruption to the planting which had already taken place.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the minutes of the Council meeting held on 7 December 2021 and that they be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

Voting: For: 14 Against: 0 Abstentions: 3

Members noted that members of the public were not invited back into the meeting following their exclusion for the confidential meetings at the last Full Council meeting. The Chairman confirmed this would happen in future.

77. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

77.1 **Minutes of the Planning & Community Committee: 4 January 2022**

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning & Community Committee meeting held on 4 January 2022.

RESOLVED:

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

Voting: For: 14 Against: 0 Abstentions: 4

77.2 Minutes of the Leisure Services Committee: 25 January 2022

Councillor Bragg presented the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022.

Members noted that the answers to the questions submitted to the Deputy Town Clerk after the Leisure Services Committee meeting, which had been circulated to Members of the Leisure Services Committee already, would be formally noted at the next meeting.

In response to a query the Committee Officer advised members that, when preparing minutes, his customary practice was to avoid attributing questions or comments to individual Councillors unless it was appropriate to do so.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 3

77.3 Minutes of the Strategy & Resources Committee: 25 January 2022

Councillor Baker presented the minutes of the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022.

In response to a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that recommendations made by Standing Committees which the Council then vote on were not considered to be motions which require a proposer and seconder. Councillor Baker advised that this is the approach that has always been taken.

[DTC NOTE: Following the meeting, a further reading of the Standing Orders identified that recommendations made by Standing Committees do require a proposer and seconder. As such, the advice provided at the meeting, as minuted above, was inaccurate.]

Minute No. 38: Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party

Councillor Baker presented the draft Financial Regulations to the Council.

Following a query as to why the Financial Regulations had not been reviewed since 2015 when the Council is required to review them every 3 years Councillor Baker advised that this was an operational matter which would need to be answered by the Town Clerk, but as the Town Clerk was not at the meeting due to being on extended absence an answer could not be provided. Councillor Baker stated that the Deputy Town Clerk would look into it.

It was noted that the Financial Regulations did not cover what would happen in the event of another major incident, such as the Covid pandemic. Councillor Baker advised that the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party had agreed to set up regular, quarterly meetings to review and sweep up any omissions and issues. Councillor Baker asked the Deputy Town Clerk to make a note of the omission regarding what would happen in the event of a major incident in order that it may be reviewed at the next meeting of the Working Party.

Following further discussion regarding these queries, Councillor Baker advised that the matter was debated fully and extensively on 25 January. Councillor McCann interjected to state that he was not allowed to ask questions at any of those meetings. Councillor Baker stated that this Council is not trying to stop Councillors asking questions, but advised that there are more appropriate committees. Councillor Baker went on to state that neither Councillor Al-Sanjari nor Councillor McCann were at the Strategy & Resources meeting, and commented that they could've spent a long time asking all these questions. Councillor McCann interjected, to which Councillor Baker responded, stating that if Councillor McCann continued to interrupt and actually exhibit behaviours unfitting for a Councillor then he, Councillor Baker, may well ask for his exclusion under standing orders.

Councillor McCann proposed, seconded by Councillor Nagra, that the draft Financial Regulations be reviewed with a view to adding wording which future proofs the Council against major events which affect the Council financially.

Councillor Nagra asked for clarification under which Standing Order any Councillor was permitted to ask the Chair to exclude a Member from the meeting. The Committee Officer directed Members to Standing Orders 18 a), b) and c).

Councillor Nagra highlighted that a Councillor may only move a motion to exclude another Councillor after the Chairman has expressed the opinion that there has been a breach of Standing Order 18 a). Councillor Nagra stated that no expression had been made by the Chairman and yet one Councillor had asked the Chairman to exclude another.

Following further discussion, the Mayor adjourned the meeting to take advice from the Deputy Town Clerk on whether Councillor Baker had asked for the exclusion of Councillor McCann. Following a short adjournment, the Mayor returned to confirm that Councillor Baker was just making a comment and wasn't making a proposal to exclude Councillor McCann.

Councillor Jewell proposed, seconded by Councillor Baker, that Councillor McCann's proposal be amended, proposing that the draft Financial Regulations be approved and that the addition of wording to future proof the Council against major financial events be put to the next meeting of the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party for consideration. Following a vote, Councillor Jewell's amendment was approved.

Voting: For: 19 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

Following a vote the amended motion was approved.

Voting: For: 18 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1

The Council then voted on the motion and, following a vote:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To adopt the updated Financial Regulations, and for the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party to consider the addition of wording to future proof the Council against major financial events at their next meeting.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 4

Councillor Baker presented the draft Standing Orders to the Council.

Councillor McCann noted that, whilst the proposed Standing Orders were better, there were still matters missed off. He also raised a concern that the Standing Orders still permit Chairman to silence Members at meetings and make them sit with members of the public, as well as excluding non-sub committee Members from attending Personnel Sub Committee meetings. Councillor Baker stated that, as with the Financial Regulations, the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party will consider any deficiencies in the document.

Councillor Doyle expressed disappointment that he did not get the document until 3 days prior to this meeting, stating that he believed the document should not be voted on at this meeting and more time was needed to review it. Councillor Baker advised that there had been three meetings of the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party at which the Standing Orders had been reviewed. All Members had been invited to these meetings, as well as to a further virtual briefing. Councillor Baker put on record his thanks to both Councillor Jewell, as leader of the opposition, and Councillor Heap for their contribution to drawing up of the document, highlighting the cross party collaboration. As a point of order, Councillor Doyle stated he had not been invited to any meeting. The Deputy Town Clerk committed to investigating this.

Councillor Jewell proposed, seconded by Councillor Baker, that the Council vote to adopt the Standing Orders, but note that the document needs more work and that the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party will discuss potential omissions as the second item on the agenda of their next meeting. Following a vote, Councillor Jewell's proposal was approved.

Voting: For: 16 Against: 0 Abstentions: 3

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that all Town Council's must adopt a Code of Conduct and, by signing the acceptance of office, Members agree to abide by the Code of Conduct.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To adopt the new Standing Orders, and for the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Working Party to consider any potential omissions raised by Councillors as the second agenda item at their next meeting.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 4 Abstentions: 0

Minute No. 39: Risk Management Working Party

Councillor Green, as Chairman of the Risk Management Working Party, presented the 2022/23 Risk Management Strategy and the Risk Register to Council.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To adopt the Risk Management Strategy 2022/23.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 4

Minute No. 40: Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative

Councillor Baker presented the proposal to re-designate the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative, as set out in the agenda. He advised Members that the proposed changes will not affect the way in which the WTCMI operates, who will retain their own executive and decision making committee, and whose constitution remains unchanged.

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed he was awaiting confirmation of when it was agreed to incorporate the WTCMI's financial functions within the Council's, but believed the decision was made in January 2020, to take effect from April 2020.

Councillor McCann raised concerns with the proposal. He stated that the VAT issue could've been resolved by the Council stopping claiming the VAT and that the current proposal creates a unnecessary layer of bureaucracy, identifying that the WTCMI's biggest asset is being independent and flexible.

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed the WTCMI was not a separate legal entity. As such, the Deputy Town Clerk also confirmed that the Council does claim back VAT on WTCMI functions as it forms part of the Council's finances.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To re-designate the Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative as the Town Centre Partnership, and approve the Terms of Reference.

Voting: For: 14 Against: 3 Abstentions: 1

Minute No. 41: Charges 2021/22

a) Oakwood Centre charges

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the 2022/23 charges at the Oakwood Centre, as set out in the Proposed Charges 2022/23 Appendix.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 2

b) Leisure Services charges 2021/22

The Committee Officer confirmed that, following an email vote on the proposed Leisure Services charges, the Strategy and Resources Committee had voted in favour of the charges, with 6 votes for the charges and 2 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the charges for Leisure Services for 2022/23, as set out in the Proposed Charges 2022/23 Appendix.

Voting: For: 14 Against: 0 Abstentions: 4

Minute No. 43: Budget Estimates 2022/23

c) Budget and precept 2022/23

Councillor Baker presented the 2022/23 budget to the Council.

Councillor Baker noted that this was the first time the budget had been prepared by someone other than the Town Clerk, and thanked the Deputy Town Clerk and Officers for their efforts.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the budget for 2022/23, as presented in the Budget Appendix.

Voting: For: 16 Against: 0 Abstentions: 2

Councillor Baker presented the recommended precept level for 2022/23 to the Council.

Councillor Jewell spoke to confirm that, whilst it was usual for the opposition to abstain or oppose matters of budget setting, the Liberal Democrat group would like to support the proposal to lower the precept in 2022/23. She noted that Woodley residents would be reeling from the combined impact of soaring energy prices and inflation. Councillor Jewell also highlighted the Wokingham Borough Council draft Anti-Poverty Strategy, stating that anything the Council can do to prevent families slipping into the 'persistent hardship' category should be embraced. She also acknowledged the skill and effort of Town Council Officers in controlling costs during the pandemic.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve a precept level of £1,225,628 for the 2022/23 financial year, as set out in the Budget Appendix.

Voting: For: 18 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Strategy & Resources Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 1

77.4 Minutes of the Planning & Community Committee: 1 February 2022

Councillor Cheng presented the minutes of the Planning & Community Committee meeting held on 1 February 2022.

Members noted that this meeting had included a long discussion on the proposed one way system on Woodlands Avenue as part of Wokingham Borough Council's proposed Active Travel Route scheme, and that it was great to see so many residents coming to the meeting to make comments.

Minute No. 75: Wokingham Borough Council Active Travel Fund

Councillor Jewell identified that, in the last paragraph prior to the resolution, the minutes should reflect that the suggestion for a Wokingham Borough Council representative to attend a future Planning & Community Committee meeting was actually a recommendation.

Councillor Jewell noted that the discussion at the meeting had centred around the Woodlands Avenue one way system with other elements of the proposed cycle way had been ignored, and suggested a further Planning & Community Committee meeting might be required to consider comments. Councillor Jewell stated she would email the Chairman of the Committee regarding this proposal. Councillor Heap supported this, saying that the whole route needs to be considered and highlighting that the most dangerous part is where the route leaves Woodley and enters Earley.

Councillor Al-Sanjari asked whether there was an update on her question at the meeting as to why no Borough Councillors had been advised of the proposal by Wokingham Borough Council officers. Councillor Baker advised that the response he had received from the Director of Highways and Planning was that it was a mistake.

He advised that a root and branch review was being undertaken regarding communications as this was not the first time this had happened. Members noted that Councillors were aware of the scheme at a higher, less detailed level, but weren't aware of the specific detail of the scheme until it appeared on social media.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To receive the minutes of the Planning & Community Committee meeting held on 1 February 2022.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 4

78. **INVESTMENTS WORKING PARTY MEMBERSHIP**

- 78.1 The Deputy Town Clerk advised members that, following the resolution made at the Full Council meeting held on 7 December 2021 to sell the investment portfolio once confirmation had been received that the £2m target had been reached, fluctuations in the market had led to the portfolio value falling. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that, as of the 7 February, the value of the portfolio was just over £60k below the £2m target. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that, with £80k approved in the budget to continue with the investment, it was recommended that the investment portfolio still be sold, despite not reaching the £2m target, and for the £80k budget to then be used to top up to the target figure.

Following a query regarding whether the Council would occur fees by paying off the Oakwood Centre loan early, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that there was no plan to pay off the loan early and that the money would be stored in an appropriately rated bank until the loan was due to be paid back in 2025.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that, if a resolution was made to sell the portfolio, he could make the call the next morning. It was requested that the Deputy Town Clerk advise all Members of the exact date the portfolio can be cashed once known.

Following a query regarding the benefit of cashing in the portfolio early, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that this would be to avoid future risk. Whilst there is a risk of banks going under, the Deputy Town Clerk highlighted that holding money in cash would be safer than in Bonds which can go up and down.

- 78.2 It was proposed by the Chairman 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: 14 Against: 1

78.3 **RESOLVED:**

- ◆ That the Deputy Town Clerk instruct Rathbones to sell the Council's investment portfolio as soon as possible and place the funds into Rathbones holding account, pending transfer to a suitably rated bank account of the Council's choosing.

Voting: For: 14 Against: 1 Abstentions: 3

Councillor McCann requested that the minutes note that he voted against the proposal.

79 **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

79.1 No statement was provided by the Leader of the Council.

79.2 Under Standing Order 13 a) v) Councillor Bragg proposed, seconded by Councillor Smith, that the order of business set out in the agenda be altered to bring forward item 9, Town Electors' Meeting – Change of Dates, for immediate discussion due to the lateness of the hour and the importance of the item. Following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the order of business be altered in line with Standing Order 13 a) v), for reasons of urgency, to bring forward agenda item 9 for immediate discussion.

Voting: For: 12 Against: 1 Abstentions: 1

80. **TOWN ELECTORS' MEETING – CHANGE OF DATES**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To change the scheduled dates of the Town Electors' Meetings from 8 March 2022 / 21 March 2023 to 26 May 2022 / 25 May 2023.

Voting: For: 15 Against: 0 Abstentions: 2

81. **WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL TOWN & PARISH CHARTER**

Councillor Jewell stated the lack of communication regarding the Active Travel Route, as well as other instances, are an example of Wokingham Borough Council's treatment of Woodley. She stated that the Charter does not look after Woodley, and suggested that the Town Council should come up with additions and amendments regarding what Woodley would like to see in the Charter. Councillor Baker concurred with Councillor Jewell's comments.

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

RESOLVED:

- ◆ Not to sign up to the Wokingham Borough Council Town and Parish Charter.

Voting: For: 19 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

82. **SUNFLOWER HIDDEN DISABILITIES SCHEME**

The Committee Officer presented Report No. TC 1/22.

Following a query, the Committee Officer confirmed that the organisation operating the scheme were a limited company. He advised that the organisation had engaged a design agency to design the sunflower logo and associated merchandise for free but that, in return, the design agency had been given the exclusive rights to sell merchandise items.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that, whilst staff already receive training which includes information on hidden disabilities, and the Council is part of the Safer Places scheme, the training included with this scheme would be an extension of that.

Councillor Al-Sanjari raised a concern as to whether the Council would be tied into paying for membership in future if they signed up to a free membership now. The Committee Officer agreed to find this out.

Councillor Al-Sanjari proposed, seconded by Councillor Nagra, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To sign up to the Sunflower Hidden Disabilities Scheme on the Basic membership level, subject to there being no commitment to paying any membership costs in future.

Voting: For: 18 Against: 0 Abstentions: 0

83. **OUTSIDE BODIES**

In relation to the report submitted by Councillor Rowland regarding the Poor's Land Charity, Councillor Gilder gave a further update. She clarified that the tree which had been removed was actually a Cedar tree and not an Elm tree. She also updated Members that the Charity were looking at installing a stairlift for some residents, and that there were two flats which have become available to let this year.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note the following written reports, which were included with the agenda:
 - Readibus report by Councillor Heap
 - Poor's Land Charity report by Councillor Rowland
- ◆ To note the additional ARC report by Shelagh Flower and Citizen's Advice Wokingham report by Councillor Bragg, copies of which were provided to members at the meeting.

84. **TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

The Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor provided Members with details of the events they had attended since the last Full Council meeting.

85. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that events were being planned to celebrate the Queen's Platinum Jubilee which were due to be considered by the PR and Marketing Working Party.

There were no suggestions for future agenda items.

86. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

There were no suggestions for items to be publicised.

Meeting closed at 10:26 pm