

**Minutes of a meeting of the Leisure Services Committee held at the Oakwood Centre
on Tuesday 30 August 2022 at 8:00 pm**

Present: *Councillors D. Smith (Chairman); K. Gilder; A. Heap; R. Horskins;
C. Jewell; V. Lewis; A. Swaddle*

Officers present: *K. Murray, Deputy Town Clerk; E. Whitesmith, Leisure Services Manager;
M. Filmore, Committee Officer*

Also present: *Councillor N. Al-Sanjari (Virtual Attendance)
Councillor K. Baker
2 members of the public*

11. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor D. Bragg. It was noted that Councillor Al-Sanjari would be attending the meeting virtually. Following a query, it was confirmed that Members who attend virtually do not have permitted voting rights.

12. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

13. **MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 31 MAY 2022**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee meeting of 31 May 2022 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

14. **BUDGETARY CONTROL**

Members reviewed the Budgetary Control report.

The Deputy Town Clerk highlighted that overall expenditure was below the budgeted rate for this point in the year, whilst overall income was above. He also informed Members that a budget line in relation to the Memorial Ground, which had previously been included in Budgetary Control figures provided to the Leisure Services Committee, had now been removed. This was because, following a recommendation from the internal auditors, the accounting processes for the Memorial Ground Charity, for which the Council is the trustee, have been removed from the Council's own accounts and the annual return for the Memorial Ground Charity will be reported separately to Council.

Following a query regarding the impact of rising inflation and energy costs, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that revised estimates were already being looked at. He also noted that Officers had already witnessed a significant increase in certain regular purchases.

It was highlighted that whilst income for Woodford Park Leisure Centre looked good, it was below pre-pandemic levels. At this point of the year in 2019, income was stated as £163k whilst for the same period this year it was stated as £126k. The Leisure Services Manager confirmed that there would be a small impact to income levels due to the recent electrical works, which required the short-term closure of the Leisure Centre.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 14/22.

15. **WOODFORD PARK LEISURE CENTRE, SPORTS DEVELOPMENT AND ACTIVITIES**

The Leisure Services Manager presented Report No. LS 15/22.

In addition to the information provided in the report, the Leisure Services Manager confirmed that, as of Monday 29 August, the Sports Hall had now re-opened following the electrical works, albeit on a slightly reduced capacity whilst remaining works were being completed. It was noted that the introduction of LED lighting in the Sports Hall had made the room much brighter.

In terms of the timescale for the electrical works, it was noted that the contractors were slightly ahead of the 9-week timetable originally planned. One further day on which a full closure of the Leisure Centre will be required, during which testing will take place. A few days' notice will be given of this by the contractors, and communicating the closure to the public will be prioritised when known.

In relation to the paddling pool being opened slightly earlier, at 9:30am, during the recent heatwave, the Leisure Services Manager confirmed that it was planned to repeat this in future when there are weather warnings in relation to extreme heat, although he noted that this did require staff to adjust hours so would be dependent on that.

Members expressed their thanks to Leisure Centre staff for ensuring the paddling pool remained open and operational during the electrical works. The Leisure Services Manager also confirmed that the paddling pool would likely close for the winter in mid-September, and that the last day of operation is usually a Sunday.

Following a query, the Leisure Services Manager confirmed that there is a plan to install covers on the lighting outside the Sports Hall to protect it from footballs and potential vandalism.

The Leisure Services Manager confirmed that, following a previous decision to increase the age limit of the 'pay and play' sessions on the 3G pitch from under-16's to under-18's, there had been no overwhelming problems.

Following a question regarding gym membership levels, it was noted that Membership was still down from its peak, just prior to the first Covid lockdown, but was showing steady signs of recovery. With regards to the impact on membership from the opening of the new Bulmershe Leisure Centre the Leisure Centre Manager explained that, at the time, the budget had been amended to account for an expected drop off in membership but that this then coincided with the Covid lockdowns, meaning it was not possible to understand what the impact the opening of Bulmershe Leisure Centre had had on membership numbers. Anecdotally, he confirmed a number of previous members had left to join Bulmershe in order to access swimming facilities, something Woodford Park Leisure Centre could not compete with.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 15/22.

16. **PARKS AND BUILDINGS**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented Report No. LS 16/22.

It was noted that, during the electrical works at Woodford Park Leisure Centre, the reception had moved to work virtually from the Oakwood Centre offices, which also acted as a good test of business continuity plans.

In relation to the installation of a water tank in the Garden of Remembrance, the Deputy Town Clerk commented that the cost of purchasing a tank had doubled since a one was previously last purchased. He also advised that it was not possible to harvest rainwater due to the lack of a building near enough to the garden.

Members noted that Woodford Park had been awarded the Green Flag for the fifth year in a row, and the Deputy Town Clerk directed Members to the steady progress which had been made to the Green Flag scoring which was contained in the report. An expression of thanks was put on record to all the members of the Friends of Woodford Park for whom, without their hard work, the park would not receive this accolade.

It was noted that the bowling green at Woodley Bowls Club had been badly affected by this year's hot weather, coupled with the failure of the old irrigation system. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that a report was being put together for the Strategy & Resources Committee to consider the installation of a new, automated, irrigation system. Council Officers were also due to meet with the Buckinghamshire Bowls Association to work on getting the bowling green back up to a suitable standard as soon as possible. Members also noted that the bowling club had lost income during this time, with some teams refusing to play on the surface, which the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed the Council was aware of and were working with the bowls club to resolve.

Following a query regarding the ridge at Malone Park currently used to dissuade vehicle access, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed there is a plan to install timber bollards in future for this purpose.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the Council are still working with the Allotment Tenants Committee to convert more areas into use in order to meet the demand from those currently on the waiting list. He confirmed that the Amenities Manager is due to meet with the Tenants Committee to discuss this and drainage issues.

Following this, the Deputy Town Clerk directed Members to the next section of the report which asked for the Leisure Services Committee to appoint a task and finish working party to consider an appeal by a member of the public against the decision of the Deputy Town Clerk on a dispute; a process which is currently set out in the tenancy agreement.

It was highlighted that the tenancy agreement may need to be reviewed in light of this dispute, and other matters, to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that there was a plan to review the agreement later this year and, if determined, it would be sensible for this to also fall under the remit of the proposed working party.

Following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the terms of reference of the Allotments Task and Finish Working Party as set out in the agenda, with the addition of the requirement to review the current allotment tenancy agreement and propose changes to the Leisure Services Committee **(Appendix A)**.

Voting: For: 5 Against: 0 Abstain: 1 No Vote Recorded: 1

- ◆ To note the appointment of Councillors Bragg, Heap and Smith to the Allotments Task & Finish Working Party.

It was noted that, whilst Councillor Jewell would not be a member of the working party as she is an allotment tenant and therefore felt it would be inappropriate to be involved in determining the outcome of the appeal, she would like to be involved in discussions regarding any amendments to the existing tenancy agreement.

With regards to the planting of scented plants in the town centre garden for visually impaired residents, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that fragrant plants had been planted at either end of the garden.

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the defibrillator at Woodford Park Leisure Centre was still awaiting installation as part of the electrical works. He also advised that discussions were taking place regarding relocating the defibrillator currently located in the Town Council offices, onto an external wall of the Oakwood Centre adjacent to Woodford Park.

Members highlighted a desire to install additional picnic benches in the new play area in Woodford Park. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that one additional bench had recently been installed so there were now two, but confirmed this could be considered. Members also highlighted a desire for additional litter bins, including those which provide for split general waste and recycling. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed this was already being considered as part of a bigger project to review the litter situation in the park following the increased usage associated with the new play area. He also advised that the Council are reviewing the possibility of providing cycle and buggy parking facilities.

It was highlighted that an external water point, close to the new play area, should be considered so that users can re-fill water bottles. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the installation of drinking water points was being considered in locations around Woodley. Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk also advised that a quote had been sought to replace and improve the signage in Woodford Park, and Members noted that it would be helpful to have signs in the new play area which direct people to the nearest toilet facilities.

A query was raised regarding the impact on Park Run following the installation of the new play area. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that, following a review which took place on the first Park Run event following installation, the run is now routed closer to the skate park which is proving successful. However, he advised that problems are occurring when events are booked to use the memorial ground, such as funfairs. This is currently being considered and it is planned that in future, the boundary markings for these events will be adjusted to ensure sufficient space to accommodate Park Run.

Members noted that concerns had been raised that the gates leading into the new play area open outwards, onto the path and potentially into walkers and cyclists. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the gate installations follow the ROSPA guidance that gates should only open into play areas when there is a significant reason for them not to open outwards. However, he confirmed the situation was being monitored.

Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the remembrance plaques in the Rotary Garden were managed by Rotary and not the Town Council. He advised that the installation of plaques was managed by Rotary, and were connected to the planting of a rose, and that there was no plan for the Town Council to take over the management of this.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 16/22.

17. **COMMUNITY YOUTH PARTNERSHIP**

The Chairman invited Councillor Gilder to provide an update on the meeting of the Community Youth Partnership which took place on the 13 July 2022.

Councillor Gilder stated the meeting was largely positive, with the exception of the obvious dissatisfaction with the length of time the Council is taking to resolve the matter of appointing a youth service provider. Following a query regarding the notional timings for this, Councillor Gilder advised that the Council was due to meet with those who had submitted an expression of interest in providing the service, and the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that he was awaiting Member availability to arrange these meetings.

A concern was raised regarding the fact that a Chairman was not appointed to the Partnership. Councillor Gilder advised that the intention was for Sam Milligan (Just Around the Corner) to continue as Chairman as he had previously chaired the Partnership, however Sam was late joining the meeting and, in the absence of anyone else willing to be appointed permanently as Chairman, it was agreed to appoint a temporary Chairman for this meeting only.

Members also noted their dissatisfaction with the length of time it was taking to appoint a service provider, highlighting that the youth of Woodley deserve better. The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the Council had had to seek expressions of interests for a second time as insufficient responses had been received at the first attempt.

Following a concern which was raised that the Service Level Agreement had yet to be determined, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that a draft SLA had been written, but that the plan was that members of the Youth Service Working Party would meet with those who had submitted expressions of interests and discuss the potential service which could be provided in order to help better inform the contents of the SLA. He confirmed that the final SLA, as part of the tender document, would be circulated to the Strategy & Resources Committee for information.

It was suggested that the Council might wish to consider spending the Youth Services budget on funding the employment of its own Youth Worker to provide outreach work, rather than outsourcing this. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this was not the in line with the Council's Youth Strategy which had been determined in 2021 following a lengthy process. It was also noted that one member of staff in house would not be able to provide the type of service an external specialist provider could.

Members suggested it would've been helpful if a Member of the Youth Service Working Party had been invited to attend this meeting of the Leisure Services Committee to provide an update. The Committee Officer advised that the Youth Service Working Party report to Strategy & Resources, not Leisure Services. It was also noted that Councillor Gilder was herself a Member on the Youth Service Working Party. Following a query, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed the Youth Services Working Party had met again at the end of July, as had been planned. Members asked the Deputy Town Clerk to provide updated timescales for the procurement process ahead of the next Leisure Services Committee, indicating a notional start date for the new service.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To note Report No. LS 17/22 of the Community Youth Partnership meeting held on 13 July 2022.

18. **GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE**

The Deputy Town Clerk presented Report No. LS 18/22.

Members discussed the Council's current policy of charging a 10-year renewal fee for the continued citing of plaques on sleepers in the Garden of Remembrance, as previously by the Council, and removing plaques where the renewal fee is not paid.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the on-going cost for maintaining plaques was minimal, and that it was believed there was no concern regarding future capacity were all plaques to be retained as there was sufficient space for additional sleepers.

Along with the three proposed options contained within the report, Members also suggested an additional option to remove the 10-year renewal fee but increase the initial fee by approximately £50 to account for this. Concerns were raised as to whether such an increase would simply be seeking to profit from the Garden of Remembrance, highlighting that the current fee is more than sufficient to cover the cost of a plaque and any on-going maintenance costs, which were deemed to be negligible. Some Members felt this was not the case, highlighting that the budgeted expenditure associated with the Garden of Remembrance far exceeded the budgeted income, and stating that fees were also used for the general maintenance of the garden and not just the plaques themselves. It was also suggested that an earmarked reserve would be set up, into which any fees would be put, to ensure that these would be used on maintaining the garden and no other Council project or activity.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that a decision about changing any renewal fee did not have to be made at this meeting as any proposal to adjust the charge could be considered as part of the normal proposed charges process later in the year.

A member of the Friends of Woodford Park in attendance at the meeting stated that the group had received numerous complaints regarding the recent removal of plaques. He stated that this was not necessarily from friends or relatives of those whose plaques had been removed, but also from other residents in the community who use the garden as place for remembrance and are unhappy with the removal of plaques. He also suggested the Friends of Woodford Park would be happy to recruit additional volunteers in order to allow the community to be responsible for maintaining the garden.

Councillor Swaddle suggested the security of the garden needed to be considered at a future meeting, with the potential installation of an automated gate considered to stop the garden being used for any anti-social behaviour. The Chairman stated that he felt locking the garden was not reasonable, and that if anyone wanted to enter the garden when it was locked they would anyway, so this would not resolve the issue.

The Chairman moved to vote on the options being proposed in the report. Prior to doing so, he invited Councillors to formally propose any additional options however no additional proposals were proposed. Following a vote on the options contained within the report in order, it was

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To reject Option 1 - "Continue charging the renewal fee and removing un-renewed plaques".

Voting: For: 0 Against: 2 Abstain: 4 No Vote Recorded: 0

- ◆ To approve Option 2 - "Continue charging the renewal fee but leave un-renewed plaques in situ. This would likely be considered unfair to those who have paid for the renewal".

Voting: For: 5 Against: 2 Abstain: 0 No Vote Recorded: 0

Councillor Horskins proposed, seconded by Councillor Smith, and following a vote it was:

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To retain plaques in the Garden of Remembrance for a period of 75 years.

Voting: For: 4 Against: 0 Abstain: 2 No Vote Recorded: 1

The Chairman did not put Option 3 to a vote as a majority had voted in favour of Option 2. Option 3 was "Remove the renewal fee and continue to maintain all plaques in situ indefinitely. Those plaques already removed could be reinstalled and renewal fees refunded to those who have already paid".

Councillor Jewell expressed concern that the result of the vote had been skewed due to the order in which the three options had been voted on, and stated that the Chairman should've asked if any Councillor wished to propose the options.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed he would hold discussions with the Friends of Woodford Park with regards to the possibility of the organisation taking on responsibility for maintaining the Garden of Remembrance.

19. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

Councillor Heap requested that a future agenda item be included to consider the placement of seating and benches around Woodley. He highlighted that there was a budget for seating but that, as far as he was aware, the matter had not been discussed during his time on the Council. Councillor Heap also advised that he had previously undertaken an audit of seating across Woodley and had provided a map of seating locations, which he was happy to update. He stated that the Council should consider whether to place seating to fill any gaps, citing an elderly relative who walks a longer route than necessary into the town centre because there are suitable benches to rest on.

Councillor Jewell reiterated Councillor Swaddles request from earlier in the meeting to include an item providing an update on the Youth Services progress.

Councillor Horskins requested an update on the potential placement of a plaque to remember the victims of the Loddon Bridge Disaster, which he had raised in a previous meeting.

Councillor Swaddle requested an item which provides an update on Loddon Mead.

20. **PUBLICITY AND WEBSITE**

Councillor Gilder suggested publicising the bouncy play event taking place in Woodford Park.

Councillor Jewell suggested publicising the new decision on plaques in the Garden of Remembrance, and to remind those purchasing plaques that there is a renewal fee after 10 years.

The meeting closed at 9:28 pm

ALLOTMENTS WORKING PARTY

| VERSION | DATE | AMENDED? | COMMENTS |
|---------|----------|----------|--|
| 0.1 | 11.08.22 | No | Original Draft |
| 1.0 | 31.08.22 | Yes | Approved by LS Committee (30/08/22) with the addition of requirement to review and recommend amendments to the current tenancy agreement and ability to meet virtually for this purpose. |
| | | | |

1. TYPE OF COMMITTEE => Task and Finish Working Group

2. PARENT COMMITTEE => Leisure Services Committee

3. 6 MONTH MEETING RULE VALID (see 6.1.k)

a. YES

4. SIZE => 3 Councillors;

5. DUTIES AND POWERS

5.1 OVERALL PURPOSE

- a. To make a determination in relation to an appeal received from an allotment tenant against a decision of the Deputy Town Clerk.
- b. To review the existing allotments tenancy agreement and make a recommendation to the Leisure Services Committee regarding any proposed changes.

5.2 MEETINGS

- a. Meetings of the working party shall take place as and when required.
- b. Officers will attend the meetings of the working party, as appropriate.
- c. Meetings will take place in person as where a formal determination must be made in relation to the appeal.
- d. Meetings will take place virtually when reviewing and considering amendments to the current allotment tenancy agreement.

5.3 TERMS OF OPERATION

- a. To consider the appeal from an allotment tenant in respect of a decision given by the Deputy Town Clerk regarding a complaint made against another tenant, in accordance with clause 4(v) of the allotment tenancy agreement.
- b. The working party has delegated authority from Leisure Services, on behalf of the Council, to make a formal determination regarding the outcome of the appeal.