

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Town Council held at the Oakwood Centre on
Tuesday 25 June 2013 at 8 pm**

Present: *Councillors W. Soane (Chairman); K. Baker; T. Barker;
A. Chadwick; P. Challis; J. Cheng; N. Cox; R. Duncan;
B. Franklin; K. Haines; L. Hayward; L. Higgs; M. Holmes;
C. Lawley; D. Mills; R. Neall; S. Outen; S. Rahmouni;
E. Rowland; D. Smith; M. Storry; M. Walker; M. Willson*

Officers present: *D. Mander, Town Clerk; K. Murray, Service Support Manager;
J. Smith, Senior Committee Officer*

Also present: *Alan Harland, Internal Auditor
Three members of the public*

24. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors A. Downes and K. Gilder

25. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

26. **MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING OF 14 MAY 2013**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to approve the minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 May 2013 and that they be signed by the Mayor as a correct record.

27. **MINUTES OF THE PLANS COMMITTEE: 21 May 2013**

Councillor Cheng presented the Plans Committee minutes of the meeting of 21 May 2013.

28. **MINUTES OF THE LEISURE SERVICES COMMITTEE: 28 May 2013**

Councillor Franklin presented the Leisure Services Committee minutes of the meeting of 28 May 2013.

29. **MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE: 4 June 2013**

Councillor Hayward presented the Community Services Committee minutes of the meeting of 4 June 2013

Minute 5: Woodley Town Centre Management Initiative

In response to a question regarding a car park refund for shoppers using Lidl Councillor Hayward reported that she had followed this up with Wokingham Borough Council and she understood that the scheme needed final approval and would be up and running from September 2013.

Minute 6: Youth Working Party

Councillor Rowland expressed concern that Woodley was not as far advanced in the plans in response to the reduction in funding to the youth service as other parishes. She would be proposing to the Youth Working Party which met the following evening that a public meeting be called to which all the existing users of the two youth centres be invited to discuss how universal youth services could continue to be developed in Woodley and identify volunteers to do this. A plan needed to be put before the borough council and there was a need for urgency on this matter.

Minute 8: Street Lighting at South Lake

It was noted that there was no update on this at present.

Minute 13: Community Refuse Vehicle

In response to a question the Town Clerk explained that some of the amenity skip hours at other parishes were paid for by parish councils. It was agreed to seek information about what hours were funded by parishes.

30. MINUTES OF THE STRATEGY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE:**11 June 2013**

In presenting the minutes of Strategy and Resources Committee meeting on 11 June 2013 Councillor Baker thanked officers for the format of the minutes and the additional information provided.

Minute 3b: Payments

Councillor Challis said that in his opinion the minute 3b regarding payments had not accurately reflected the concern of the Liberal Democrat Group that signatories from that group were signing cheques without a councillor from the Conservative Group first seeing these. His view expressed at the meeting was that the responsibility to monitor payments in this way fell to the council's administration and that Councillor Baker had agreed to this.

The Town Clerk agreed to amend the minutes accordingly for the committee's approval at the next meeting.

31. MINUTES OF THE PLANS COMMITTEE: 18 June 2013

Councillor Cheng presented the Plans Committee minutes of the meeting of 18 June 2013.

Minute 7: Representation at Wokingham Borough Council Planning Committee

Members considered the recommendation from the Plans Committee that:

Representations by the Town Council on planning applications being considered by Wokingham Borough Council be undertaken by a town councillor from the ward in which the application was situated and that if this was not possible a member of the Plans Committee make the representation.

Concern was expressed that where the Town Council making a representation on a planning application was the opportunity to put forward the town's view and that a ward member might not be aware of planning matters and not do the best for the town.

Councillor Baker responded and recognised that there could be an issue of inexperience. He had arranged for a Wokingham Borough Council planning officer to provide some training on making representations of this nature. With borough and a town council representations totalling six minutes there would be the opportunity to get a lot of good points across to the planning committee.

On being put to the vote it was

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to approve that representations by the Town Council on planning applications being considered by Wokingham Borough Council be undertaken by a town councillor from the ward in which the application was situated and that if this was not possible a member of the Plans Committee make the representation.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to receive the minutes of the Plans Committee held on 21 May 2013.
- ◆ to receive the minutes of the Leisure Services Committee held on 28 May 2013.
- ◆ to receive the minutes of the Community Services Committee held on 4 June 2013.
- ◆ to receive the minutes of the Strategy and Resources Committee held on 11 June 2013.
- ◆ to receive the minutes of the Plans Committee held on 18 June 2013.

32. **FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND ANNUAL RETURN 2012/13**

Financial Statements for 2012/13

The Mayor welcomed Alan Harland, the Council's internal auditor.

Mr Harland explained his role through the year which involved the detailed checking of financial systems as well as corporation governance, receipts and payments and payroll. The Council agreed his programme of work each year and a reported is provided to Council at the year end detailing any matters that require addressing.

Mr Harland was pleased to report that over his years as internal auditor there had been a steady improvement in the quality of accounting and discipline within the council's financial functions. There had also been improvement in the controls and in his opinion this was a tribute to the staff under the guidance of the Council's accountant and the stability of the staffing structure and staff members' willingness to learn and be trained in good practice.

Mr Harland then explained that he also had a role with regard to the Annual Return and had reviewed the Financial Statements. He had provided a letter, provided in the agenda, which confirmed that his review had not discovered any matters to bring to the Council's attention.

Mr Harland responded to questions on asset valuations and explained that depreciation was applied over the estimated lifetime of the asset. He was also asked about the valuation of assets and, as this hadn't been done since 2007, whether this should be carried out regularly. Mr Harland replied that standard procedure was that the council didn't need to do it at all and that, under the guidance, the normal concept of depreciation didn't apply.

Councillor Rowland thanked the Town Clerk and the staff team for keeping the accounting records in good order and also thanked Mr Harland and the Council's accountant, Mr Kemp, for their help year on year and through all the changes over the past few years.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to approve the Financial Statements for 2012/13 and that they be signed by the Mayor and Town Clerk.

Annual Return - Accounting Statements for 2012/13

Members considered the Accounting Statements for 2012/13 as set out in the Annual Return. The table setting explanation of the significant variances between 2012/13 and 2011/12 was noted.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to approve the Accounting Statements for 2012/13 and that they be signed by the Mayor.

Annual Return - Annual Governance Statement for 2012/13

Members considered the statements as set out in the Annual Return and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to approve the Annual Governance Statement for 2012/13 and that this be signed by the Mayor and Town Clerk.

33. **LEISURE SERVICES AND PLANS COMMITTEE**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ that Councillor Cox be appointed to the Leisure Services Committee.
- ◆ that Councillor Cox be appointed to the Plans Committee.

It was also proposed and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ that Councillor Willson be appointed to the Leisure Services Committee in place of Councillor Soane.
- ◆ that Councillor Willson be appointed to the Plans Committee in place of Councillor Franklin.

34. **COUNCIL SEAL**

RESOLVED:

- ◆ to approve the use of the Council Seal for the lease with Thames Valley Police for the use of the office at the Oakwood Centre by the Neighbourhood team.

35. **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS –
PUTTING COMMUNITIES FIRST CONFERENCE**

Members noted the report of the Putting Communities First Conference provided by Councillor Cheng.

In response to a question the Mayor explained he had been unable at the last minute to attend the conference.

36. **REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE BODIES**

- a) It was proposed by Councillor Walker, seconded by Councillor Haines and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To appoint Councillors Cheng and Holmes to represent the Town Council at the Wokingham Borough Council Road Works/Street Works Major Project Co-ordination Meetings as deputies.
- b) Members noted receipt of the Poor's Land Charity audited accounts for the year ending 31 December 2012.
- c) **ARC** (written report provided)
Mrs Flower reported that the ARC Annual General Meeting held on 1 May 2013 at the Oakwood Centre was well attended with a presentation from pupils at Leighton Park.

Concerns still remain about future funding given the increase in the demand for the services for emotional support and self harm. ARC is trying to provide extra training for counsellors and school staff to deal with the latter. The proposed cuts in funding for youth services is also giving rise to concerns. ARC is writing to Wokingham Borough Council with regard to this.

Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum

Councillor Mills reported that he had attended a meeting of the Mid and West Berkshire Local Access Forum on 29 May 2013 and that his representation onto this forum had to be formally approved at their next meeting. The meeting had focused on issues in West Berkshire and that the next meeting would cover Wokingham matters of access. He informed the meeting that Wokingham would only be represented on the forum for another year as the borough council would be withdrawing. From this first meeting Councillor Mills had the impression that the advice of the forum was bound to be followed by the appropriate councils regarding matters associated with rights of way.

37. **LEADER'S STATEMENT**

The Leader of the Council made the following statement. The statement was requested to be included in the minutes in full.

It is just over a month since the Conservatives took control of the Town Council and we are already making changes to improve the transparency of this council. The leader of this council is the political head of an organisation with a turnover of about £2 million. In my memory the leader has never been called to inform councillors and residents as to what they have been up to. This statement addresses that deficiency and brings a degree of accountability of the Leader to this council.

Another change is that for the first time all agendas are now on the website for residents to see. Prior to this the only way a resident would know what was coming up at a meeting was to turn up on the night. A simple but significant improvement of transparency for our residents.

For the first time the future program of changes was distributed to all councillors for comments rather than a single party calling all the shots. I thank the Liberal Democrat group for embracing this approach. In my opinion this is a step towards minimising party politics which can only be good for our residents.

As a direct result of this we have been able to review all sub-committees, adopt the concept of an annual report from those members who represent the council on outside bodies and adopt a protocol for ward based town representation at

the Borough's Planning Committee. Recommendations for changes on the sub committees will now be passed to the standing committees to progress.

Another example of working together is the chairman and vice chairman roles of the plans committee being occupied by members of both political parties. This is the first time ever that any of the standing committees have been chaired in this cross party way.

Councillor Haines and I have started on a round of open meetings with staff where they can get to know us and ask any questions they want to. After 40 years of one party rule there are bound to be many concerns, issues and questions following the change in control. Believe me they have been quite lively.

Councillor Franklin has also been highly active in conversations with managers in his capacity of Leisure Services Chairman. On this vein, together with Councillor Franklin, I am actively reviewing the whole pricing structure within this service area. This will result in a future proposal on rationalisation which will eventually be brought to the Leisure Services Committee to review.

The other area which I am concentrating on is the Budget setting process. For far too long I have believed that the whole process of setting the budget has been too secretive. I have been reviewing how it is done at this council and comparing it to the way others do it. I do feel that there is a lack of transparency and cross party involvement in the past. I will be putting together a proposal to address both these issues directly which will come to the Strategy and Resources Committee for review.

I hope the councillors opposite will appreciate this drive for further transparency and will continue to work with us for the benefit of all our residents.

38. **OPEN SPACE, SPORTS AND RECREATION STRATEGY**

The Chairman invited comments on this strategy and the following points were made by Councillor Challis:

- that the strategy didn't include the important role that town and parishes play in providing sport and recreation and partnership working, nor did it include private provision of sports facilities or sports clubs;
- the focus of the strategy is on the SDLs and didn't include Woodley where at least new homes were going to be built;
- reference to existing outside sport clubs excluded the leisure centres in Woodley;
- that for Woodley with additional homes being built in the town and where new sports and recreation facilities were unlikely because of space the strategy should include the enhancement and upgrading of existing facilities;
- that the country park at Sandford Farm was not included in the document.

Councillor Smith agreed that the document didn't meet the needs of Woodley and that the Council may have been in a better position to respond if there had been a sports development plan for the town, which he believed was an important piece of work to be done.

There was general agreement that a response be made to Wokingham Borough Council. In order to do this it was proposed and

RESOLVED:

- ◆ that Councillors Challis, Outen, Smith and Willson be delegated to prepare and agree a response to the consultation document.

39. **ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY COVENANT**

The Chairman introduced this item and explained that the Council had been invited to be a signatory to Wokingham Borough Armed Forces Community Covenant which was part of a nationwide initiative to encourage local communities to support Armed Forces Personnel living in their area. It was noted that Wokingham Borough Council was the last borough in Berkshire to sign up to the Community Covenant. The Mayor reminded Members that although areas in Wokingham and Arborfield had more connection with the armed forces at present Woodley had a long history with the former Woodley Airfield and the present commitment to provide a public war memorial in the town.

There was general agreement that local authorities should support the armed forces and their families although it wasn't clear what this would mean to the town in practice. In response to a question about whether the Town Council could allow free swimming for service personnel and their families Councillor Baker explained that the parishes had been invited to be co signatories without financial commitment and that Wokingham Borough Council's plans with regard to support would evolve. The Town Council could look at what it might do as these plans became clear.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ that the Council be signatory to the Wokingham Borough Armed Forces Community Covenant and that the Mayor sign this on the Council's behalf at the ceremony on 18 July 2013.

40. **TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

The Town Mayor informed the Council of the six events he had attended since the last meeting. He said that he and his wife, Hilary, had thoroughly enjoyed meeting people and going to places that they had never been to before. He also said that the volunteer centre is struggling to find drivers.

The Deputy Mayor and Mayoress had attended the Woodley Sports Week a week of festival and sports and reported on what a marvellous week it had been. A total of 140 medals and trophies had been presented by the Deputy Mayor over the week.

41. **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

There were no items for inclusion in the next Council agenda.

Meeting closed at 9.20 pm
