

FLEET TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

held on

Wednesday 6th December 2023 at 7.00pm

PRESENT

Councillors: R. Schofield (Chairman), G. Chenery, K. Cottrell, P. Einchcomb, S. Engström, L. Holt, A. Hope, E. May, A. Oliver, R. Richmond, S. Tilley, D. Taylor, G. Woods and P. Wildsmith

In Attendance: Rochelle Halliday – Executive Officer
Councillor Steve Forster – HCC
Councillor Stephen Parker – HCC
Councillor Adrian Collett – HCC
Louise Rogers – Administration Support Officer
Friends of Oakley Park Representative

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 1

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Fang, Robinson and Willcocks.

Cllr Krishnmurthy was absent.

Cllr Wildsmith notified his late arriving.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 2

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made for any item on the agenda.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 3

QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 4

CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Schofield reported his attendance during the period as follows:

- 6th November- Together with the Facilities and Open Spaces Manager met with Rejuvo to carry out a final inspection of the cemetery paths. Rejuvo agreed to carry out remedial work to all identified faults.
- 11/12th November- Attended Remembrance ceremonies at the War Memorial and the Parade from Church Road to Gurkha Square. The Sunday ceremony was well attended despite the inclement weather. A thank you to the Officers who helped with all the preparations and to those Councillors with their family members who provided the teas, coffees and squash to a larger than normal gathering of residents who came in from the cold.

- 15th November- Together with the Executive Officer, attended meetings with Hart's Environmental Officer regarding the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme submission, in particular the quality of the Structural Survey of the Harlington roof was questioned. It is now a case of wait and see.
- 16th November - Together with the Executive Officer, Facilities and Open Spaces Manager, and Cemetery Clerk met with the Ecology consultants to affect the filling in of the badger sub-setts within the cemetery. The Ecologist would not contemplate filling in the second damaged grave as the EA's license was only for one instance. The full-scale closure of the sett was not possible as the mesh placed to prevent the badgers re-entering the dig must be laid over an area of 5m from the access point. This is impossible with the proximity of adjacent graves. The sett has therefore been refilled with soil but remains vulnerable to possible re-entry by the badger's next spring.
- 16th November - Together with the Executive Officer and Cllr Woods met with representatives of HCC Transport Services and RVA to receive an update on the Fleet Connect Bus Service (was Fleet Link). The number using the service has recovered to near pre-Covid levels and several new users have signed up to the service. It is still being used by residents over 80 years of age.
- The weekly trip to the Meadows is popular and oversubscribed but the capacity of the bus is restricted by the number of shopping trolleys and wheelchairs. A comment was made that having to meet a service schedule inhibits the use of the bus.
- Hampshire County Council Officers are concerned that potential further budget cuts by HCC could see the withdrawal of County support for local services like Fleet Connect. The Officers are carrying out a study to demonstrate the much broader benefits of the service beyond just being a transport service.
- 22nd November- Attended the Fleet Christmas Festival and the turning on of the Christmas lights. It was another hugely successful event, and many thanks must go to Cllr Tilley for her sterling efforts to bring this event forward every year and to all the Council Officers and Harlington Staff involved in making this such a hugely successful event.
- 28th November - Along with Cllr Cottrell attended the Greening Pillar session for Warmer Homes. The meet the expert sessions have been coordinated by the Projects and Committees Officer.
- 2nd December - Attended the unveiling of the plaque to celebrate Cllr Sharyn Wheale's contribution to the residents of Fleet. The plaque was unveiled by Cllr's Wheale's daughter. Special thanks to the Facilities and Open Spaces Manager for supporting the event despite his other duties and to Cllrs Tilley and Woods for their contribution in ensuring the event took place and was carried off successfully.
- 4th December - Together with Members of the Lease Working Group and the Executive Officer met with representatives of Fleet Town Football Club to discuss finalisation of the new lease on the Calthorpe Park site.
- 4th December - Attended the Fleet BID Board Meeting.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 5

HCC/HDC ANNOUNCEMENTS

The following reports were received from Hampshire County Council.

Cllr Stephen Parker (HCC)

- The Hampshire County Council budget issues are affecting all services due to funding centrally. Hampshire County Council will use reserves to keep essential services going.
- The application for school admissions is available on the Hampshire County Council website.

- The County has received funding of £132m, to be spread over 10 years, for potholes and road repairs.
- Details of waste prevention grant is available on the Hampshire County Council website.
- Thousands more trees are set to be planted across Hampshire as a permanent reminder of His Majesty King Charles III's Coronation. Trees have been planted in the Havant and Hedge end areas.
- There is a new County Council app which can be used for services such as reporting potholes.
- The Police and Crime Commissioner consultation on precept closes on the 10th December 2023.
- Sites identified for pedestrian crossings have now been validated for Velmead Road and Florence Road. Schemes are currently being designed.

Cllr Forster (HCC)

- The Hampshire County Council Leader has raised an issue with the government minister of extra funding for services and more local decision making. More social care needs mean cost increases without additional funding.
- Thank you for the success of Fleet Christmas Festival. Fleet Lions are no longer able to insure the road closures. Hampshire County Council are unable to step in to support this.
- There was an accident on Upper Street due to speeding issues. The s106 funds are to be used for signage improvements initially and then will work on planning further measures.
- A second safety audit has been completed on the Hitches Lane remodelling and the works are compliant, however, a further safety evaluation is planned.
- The Hartland Village bus service is due to be tendered to link key sites in and around the town at key times of day.

Cllr Collett (HCC)

- There are parking issues on Dexter Road and Old Cove Road due to unclear road markings. Enforcement action will be taken.
- The Blackwater Valley bus tenders have been completed and have been renewed for one year only.
- Awaiting news from the Government on funding, settlement figures which were released in December.

A Member asked a question regarding the pension surplus for the Local Government Pension Scheme. Was there any scope to reduce employer contributions to save costs? Cllr Parker asked if the member could forward the full question to him so that it can be put to the Chair of the Pension Fund.

Cllrs Forster, Parker and Collett left the meeting at 7:40pm.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 6

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The minutes of the Council meeting held on 1st November 2023 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

The Council received and noted the minutes of the following committees:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| • Establishment Committee | 8 th November 2023 |
| • Development Control | 13 th & 27 th November 2023 |

Cllr Peter Wildsmith arrived at 7:41pm.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 7

FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

Members noted receipt of:

- a) The bank reconciliation and a list of payments for October 2023.
- b) A statement from the Executive Officer that Councillor Robinson has verified and signed off the bank reconciliation and verified and schedule of payments for October 2023 with no qualifications.

RESOLVED

- 1) To receive and accept the bank reconciliation and list of payments for October 2023.
- 2) To accept that Councillor Robinson has verified and signed off the bank reconciliation and list of payments for October 2023.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 8

INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT

Members received the internal audit report following the Internal Auditor's visit in November 2023 and the interim audit actions report.

Members discussed that some comments have not been raised previously regarding the publishing of public information. It was explained that this is likely due to issues coming to light at other Councils as part of the auditor's work.

It was noted that the Council has a policy of retaining three months of expenditure in the current account along with an additional £50k contingency retained for The Harlington operating costs. The Executive Officer is in the process of transferring surplus funds from the current account into an instant access account with interest.

RESOLVED

- 1) To note the internal audit report.
- 2) To approve the interim audit actions report.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 9

EARMARKED RESERVES

Members reviewed the earmarked reserves and the proposed reserves movement from General Fund to a new reserve for the Edenbrook Parks Commuted Sum. Originally this sum was in an earmarked reserve but was then moved to the general fund. It is now proposed that the residual balance is reallocated to a specific earmarked reserve for clarity.

RESOLVED

To approve moving £81,160 from the General Fund to a new Edenbrook Parks Commuted Sum earmarked reserve.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 10

UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND BID

Members received the report from the Executive Officer to endorse the grant submission from the Hart District Council UK Shared Prosperity Fund for a community garden at Ancells Farm, as recommended by the Parks and Open Spaces Working Group.

One Member asked if the location of the project had been adequately considered. It was confirmed that, should the grant be successful, the precise location could potentially be reviewed, although the intent was to rejuvenate a piece of wasteland.

It was noted that the Ward Councillors for the area where a project is likely to take place would normally be included in any discussions. The very limited time available for this particular grant application made this more difficult than it would usually have been.

RESOLVED

To approve endorsing the grant submission to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund for a community garden at Ancells Farm.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 11

COUNCIL AND HARLINGTON WEBSITES

Members received the report from the Projects and Committees Officer and Marketing and Box Office Manager for the contract to create new Fleet Town Council and The Harlington websites.

Members discussed the three quotes received and whether the recommended contractor is likely to result in unbudgeted costs. The Executive Officer confirmed that she met with all three companies. The recommended contractor provided the most comprehensive quote, has the widest range of experience in both the Council and entertainment / commercial sectors and is likely to be able to evolve the website in the future, as required. Any additional work will be picked up by Officers to ensure the project does not exceed the quote and the £10k budget.

RESOLVED

To appoint Cosmic (company B) to complete the new websites work for Fleet Town Council and The Harlington at a cost of £9,500 for development and design plus an additional £500 for content input, totalling £10,000.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 12

COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP- ESTABLISHMENT COMMITTEE

Members received the report from the Executive Officer to appoint a new member to the Establishment Committee.

RESOLVED

To approve the appointment of Councillor Ellie May to the Establishment Committee.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 13

COUNCIL MEETING DATES

Members received a draft copy of the meeting dates for 2024/25.

It was noted that two committee meetings were scheduled on the 6th November 2024 at 7pm and, therefore, the date of the Establishment meeting needs to change.

It was proposed to change the date of the Annual Residents meetings to 12th March 2024 and 11th March 2025, so that it does not clash with the pre-election period.

The meeting calendar will also be re-confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council in May.

RESOLVED

- 1) To approve the proposed change to the Annual Residents meeting in March 2024 and 2025.
- 2) To change the dates for the Establishment meeting in November 2024.
- 3) To approve all other meetings dates, as proposed.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 14

DRAFT BUDGET AND PRECEPT FOR 2024/25

Members received a summary of the draft budget for the next financial year and discussed the following:

- The proposed draft precept equates to a 6% increase in the Town Council's element of the Council Tax, calculated with the new tax base, and is aligned to inflation.

- That for the first time an inflationary increase has been applied to The Harlington development precept. In times when inflation is high, this is essential to ensure the fund keeps pace with inflation.
- That re-allocating The Harlington precept to fund operational projects and expenditure for one year only, as suggested by a Member, would put the development fund at a disadvantage and is not what the public were advised the money would be collected for.
- The draft budget enables the Council to maintain the current level of support and services, against a climate of high inflation whereas other higher tier Councils have reduced their service but still increased their budget requirements.
- That Members support, in principle, the draft budget and draft precept for the 2024/25 financial year as proposed, without further amendment.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 15

COMPLAINTS

No new complaints have been received since the last meeting.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 16

EXECUTIVE OFFICER'S REPORT

Members noted the Executive Officer's report.

Cllr Schofield is unable to volunteer at the FTC market stall on Saturday 9th December. Another volunteer is required.

Cllr Richmond is stepping down from the Fleet Market CIC and Cllr Taylor will be officially taking on the role.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 17

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

Members noted the time and date of the next Council Meeting to be held on Wednesday 3rd January 2024 at 7pm in The Harlington.

Friends of Oakley Park representative left the meeting at 8:50pm.

FC DECEMBER 2023 ITEM 18

THE HARLINGTON LEASE

Confidential contractual papers were circulated for this item, however, as no members of the public were present the meeting was not closed for public admission. The confidential report and draft lease for The Harlington were discussed.

It was noted that the sub-lease for the former coffee shop area and the leased land area details will need to be finalised before signing the lease.

Members were made aware that there may be some other minor text changes during the finalisation of The Harlington lease, but the Council will be informed if there are substantial changes proposed.

RESOLVED

- 1) To approve the draft lease for The Harlington, subject to a small number of minor changes that might arise during finalisation with Hart District Council.
- 2) To authorise the Chairman and the Executive Officer to progress completion of the lease negotiations, subject to their being only minor text changes to the agreement that have no material impact.

The meeting closed at 8:55pm.

Signed.....
Chairman

Date:.....