

10th December 2024

Minutes of the proceedings of the **TOWN COUNCIL** held in the Main Hall, Town Hall, Market Place, Wokingham on 10th December 2024 from 7.30pm to 8.12pm

PRESENT:

Chairman: Cllr R Comber (Mayor)
Cllrs: B Alvi, A Betteridge, R Bishop-Firth, B Callender, S Cornish, A Croy, P Cunnington, W Dixon, A Domingue, A Fraser, M Fumagalli, M Gee, S Gurney, A Jones, T Lack, K Malvern, M Malvern, A Mather, A Medhurst, N Nagella, H Richards, I Shepherd-Dubey and L Timlin.

IN ATTENDANCE:

Katy Hughes – Town Clerk
David Dunham – Mayor's Attendant

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr C Jamthe.

MEMBERS' INTERESTS (Agenda Item 2)

There were none

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL OR PUBLIC (Agenda item 3)

There were no questions raised.

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Agenda Item 4)

It was proposed by Cllr L Timlin and seconded by Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey and the following was

**RESOLVED
30965**

that the Minutes of the proceedings of the Council Meetings held on 15th October 2024 (pages 17076 to 17081) be accepted as a true and correct record and that they be signed by the Chair.

A vote was taken and it was unanimous.

MAYOR'S COMMUNICATIONS (Agenda Item 5)

- a) The Mayor drew members' attention to the following engagements, which were a selection of those carried out since the last council meeting:
- a. The Wokingham Fireworks event, which raised £41,500 for local charities, and including a donation to both the Town Mayor and the Borough Mayor's charities
 - b. Attendance at an event celebrating a King's Award for Enterprise awarded to a local business, Bexpert.
 - c. A Crowthorne Symphony Orchestra concert at All Saints Church
 - d. The very impressive Annual Toy Run, which saw over 1,300 motorcycles and trikes and more than 1,600 riders involved.

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- e. The town council's Dressing the Christmas Tree event, which sees pupils from local schools present handmade decorations to the Mayor, for decorating the town Christmas tree.

The Mayor reminded members that festive drinks provided by the Mayor are being served after the meeting in the Annexe, and all are invited.

The Mayor reported that Cllr Alwyn Jones has resigned from the Labour party group on the town council and is now sitting as an independent member.

- b) The Mayor's list of engagements since the last council meeting was received.

AMENITIES COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 6)

Cllr T Lack expressed concerns that the Finance and Personnel Committee had rejected one budget request from the committee.

Cllr M Gee, as Chair of the Finance and Personnel Committee reported that the F&P Committee has delegated authority for managing the council's finances and that this same process was undertaken annually, and cited a previous example of a budget request from the Amenities Committee which had been scaled back by the Finance and Personnel Committee. Cllr M Gee noted that the final decision on the budget and setting of the precept sits with the Full Council and that members can challenge the recommendation of the Finance and Personnel Committee if they disagree with it's recommendation.

It was proposed by Cllr N Nagella and seconded by Cllr S Cornish and the following was

**RESOLVED
30966**

That the approved minutes of the proceedings of the Amenities Committee held on 10th September 2024 (pages 17051 to 17053) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous

Cllr T Lack reported on the meeting of the Amenities Committee held on 5th November. He reported that the committee considered a request from the Amenities Officer to be able to draw on the play park reserve if additional funds are required in-year for the repair of playground equipment.

Cllr T Lack reported that he has stepped back from graffiti clearance work now that Cllr A Croy has taken on the role.

Cllr T Lack reported on the successful resurfacing of the playpark at Barkham Park, which was jointly funded between the town council, from CIL reserves, and the borough council.

ARTS & CULTURE COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 7)

The approved minutes of the meetings of the Arts and Culture Committee held on 2nd September 2024 (pages 17040 to 17042) were proposed by Cllr A Jones and seconded by Cllr P Cunnington and the following was

**RESOLVED
30967**

CHAIR INITIALS _____



That the approved minutes of the meeting of the Arts and Culture Committee held on 2nd September 2024 be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous

Cllr B Callender reported on the meeting of the committee held on 4th November. He reported that the meeting had been busy, reviewing the financial numbers for the Finance and Personnel committee.

He reported that the committee had agreed to hold the ticket price for the Children's Book Festival for 2025 but had reduced the budget for the event. He noted that although More Arts, who sponsor the outreach part of the event, were ceasing to operate from the end of March 2025, funds would be transferred across to the town council to cover sponsorship for the October 2025 event.

Cllr B Callender reported that the committee had agreed to plan a summer tabletop takeover event, to build on the success of the two annual events held in March and November. He noted that the event is particularly popular with teenagers.

Cllr B Callender reported that the committee had made the difficult decision to cancel the Sunny Saturdays and Chalk About It events going forward.

CIVIC COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 8)

It was proposed by Cllr K Malvern and seconded by Cllr A Betteridge and the following was

**RESOLVED
30968**

that the approved minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 23rd September (pages 17054 to 17058) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Cllr K Malvern reported on the meeting of the committee held on 25th November. He reported that the committee had recognised that the closure of the Morearts organisation would impact the delivery of the Christmas Music event which they have supported the delivery of for the last two years.

FINANCE & PERSONNEL COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 9)

Cllr M Gee reported on the meeting of the committee held on 23rd July 2024 (pages 17031 to 17039) and noted that the committee had reviewed a request from the Wokingham Horticultural Association for funding to support the refurbishment of their building at the Ormonde Road allotment site.

Cllr M Gee reported on the meeting of the F&P Grants Committee held on 12th November 2024. She reported that the council had received requests for funding exceeding £177,000 which far exceeded the budget available to the committee, so some challenging decisions had been required. Cllr M Gee expressed her thanks to the committee members for their diligence in reviewing each of the applications.

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Cllr M Gee reported that the committee had agreed to budget £15,000 in the 2025-26 financial year for the Culture and Community Grant Fund, an in-year funding pot to support grants for new events.

Cllr A Croy asked whether this would be an accrual. Cllr M Gee confirmed that this was part of the budget for 2025-26 and any unspent funds would be returned to reserves at the end of the financial year.

It was proposed by Cllr M Gee and seconded by Cllr A Alvi and the following was

**RESOLVED
30969**

That the approved minutes of the meetings of the committee held on 23rd July 2024 (pages 17031 to 17039), on 24th September 2024 (pages 17059 to 17070) and on 12th November 2024 (pages 17089 to 17092) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

Cllr M Gee reported that the minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 3rd December were yet to be circulated and will be received at the next Full Council meeting in January 2025

She reported that the committee had discussed the budget and asked the Town Clerk and RFO to work to a maximum precept increase of 5%. Cllr M Gee noted that the full budget recommendation will come to the January Full Council meeting.

Cllr R Comber noted receipt of the interim reported from the council's Internal Auditor, following an audit visit undertaken on 11th and 12th November 2024.

PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (Agenda Item 10)

Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey reported on the meetings of the Planning and Transport Committee held on 8th October and 19th November.

Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey reported that the meeting held on 8th October had been Chaired by Cllr N Nagella. She reported that the committee had discussed the damage to the bus shelter on Wellington Road and the proposal for street naming for a new development in Wescott Ward, off London Road, for which the town council has received confirmation that the roads will be named after former town mayors Robert (Bob) Wyatt and Marion Fergusson-Kelly.

Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey reported that at the meeting of the committee held on 19th November, many of the committee had declared an interest in one application which was for the proposed redevelopment of Indigo House off Molly Millars Lane, which is the headquarters of the local Liberal Democrats. She reported that the building was being proposed for conversion to residential accommodation.

Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey reported that the committee had objected to the proposal for Ascot House, for a conversion to residential with a proposed increase in the building's height.

Cllr I Shepherd-Dubey reported that the damaged bus shelter on Wellington Road is due to be replaced on 6th January 2025.

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Cllr A Domingue asked why the committee had not submitted a comment on the proposals for Indigo House, given the limited infrastructure locally to support additional residential accommodation. Cllrs I Shepherd-Dubey and A Betteridge reported that conversions from office to residential fall under permitted development rights which reduces the grounds over which objections that can be made.

It was proposed by Cllr H Richards and seconded by Cllr W Dixon and the following was

**RESOLVED
30970**

That the approved minutes of the meeting of the committee held on 8th October 2024 (pages 17071 to 17075) be adopted.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

STRATEGY WORKING PARTY (Agenda Item 11)

Cllr A Domingue gave a verbal report on the meeting of the Strategy Working Party held on 6th November. She noted that the working party reviewed information relating to the upcoming Community Governance Review (CGR) for which there is a meeting on MS Teams on the evening of 11th December at 7pm, to which all councillors have been invited.

Cllr A Domingue reported that the Strategy Working Party responded to a borough council survey on youth provision, and requested the Amenities Committee to consider improved signage at the town council's parks to indicate local public toilets nearby.

Members noted the revised date of the next meeting, which will be held on 5th February 2025.

STANDING ORDERS (Agenda Item 12)

Cllr A Domingue spoke in support of the recommended changes to the council's adopted Standing Orders, which were laid before the council at the 15th October meeting.

Cllr A Domingue reported that the proposed changes:

- Resolved inconsistencies with wording
- Increased the transparency of elections for the Mayor and Deputy Mayor
- Allowed the council to ensure it still abided by the requirement to formally elect the Chair / Mayor at the Annual Meeting (known as Mayor's Sunday)
- Introduced party proportionality on the Strategy Working Party
- Granted additional authority to the Town Clerk in the recruitment of staff.

Cllr A Domingue thanked the Town Clerk for the work undertaken to revise the Standing Orders.

Cllr W Dixon requested to invoke Standing Order 7(n) to request leave to withdraw his proposed amendment to the recommended changes. As this item was yet to be seconded, the item, and therefore the Clerk's report 31/2024 was withdrawn.

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**RESOLVED
30971**

It was proposed by Cllr A Domingue and seconded by Cllr M Malvern and members

To adopt the changes to the council's adopted Standing Orders as recommended by the Strategy Working Party.

A vote was taken and was unanimous.

EXTERNAL REPRESENTATION (Agenda Item 13)

Cllr S Gurney reported on her attendance at a recent Berkshire Association of Local Councils (BALC) AGM.

Members noted the need for additional Executive Members for BALC, which has a capacity for 25 but currently only has 12 appointed. Cllr A Croy expressed an interest, and the Town Clerk will put him in touch with the BALC Executive, to find out more.

The Mayor thanked members for attending and closed the meeting at 8:12pm

CHAIR

CHAIR INITIALS _____

