



Buckinghamshire Council

High Wycombe Town Committee

Minutes

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 9 JUNE 2020 IN VIA VIDEO CONFERENCE, COMMENCING AT 7.05 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 8.38 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT

K Ahmed, Z Ahmed, M Asif, H Bull, L Clarke OBE, M Clarke, M Davy, R Farmer, T Green, M Hanif, M Hashmi, D Hayday, A Hill, A Hussain, M Hussain, M Hussain JP, M Knight, W Mallen, B Pearce, R Raja, S Raja, D Shakespeare OBE, N Teesdale and J Wassell

OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE

J Durkan and L Hornby

Agenda Item

1 ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

The Clerk to the Committee requested nominations for the position of Chairman.

Councillor Tony Green proposed Councillor Sarfaraz Raja for the position of Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Matt Davy.

Councillor Julia Wassell proposed Councillor Matt Knight for the position of Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Brian Pearce.

Following a vote it was agreed that Councillor Sarfaraz Raja be elected as Chairman.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Sarfaraz Raja be elected as Chairman of the High Wycombe Town Committee for the ensuing year.

2 APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

The Chairman proposed that Councillor Nigel Teesdale be appointed as Vice-Chairman, this was seconded by Councillor Harry Bull.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Nigel Teesdale be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the High Wycombe Town Committee for the ensuing year.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Sebert Graham, Maz Hussain and Andrea Baughan.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Hashmi declared an interest as the Chairman of Wycombe Humdard Foundation a non-profit voluntary organisation that deals with burials in the High Wycombe area.

Councillor Green declared an interest as the Chairman of the High Wycombe Town Twinning Association.

Councillor Zia Ahmed declared an interest as a Trustee of Sands Village Hall.

Councillor Sarfaraz Raja declared an interest as a member of a self-help organisation that help with burials.

Councillor Pearce declared an interest as a Trustee of Booker Memorial Hall.

It was noted that all declarations of interest should be noted and available on the website.

5 SPECIAL EXPENSES OUTTURN 19/20

Anne Begley, Interim Finance Business Partner presented a report to the Committee which set out the details of the 2019/20 outturn position and the impact on working balances at the year end. It was noted that there was an over spend of £15,939 on a total budget of £385,050. All other areas with the exception of cemetery all activity areas reported an underspend position. The main variations are set out in the report.

The following main points were noted:

- There was an overspend of £15,939 on a total budget of £385,050.
- All areas except for the cemetery had reported an underspend.
- The Cemetery overspend was £76,040.
- During the year additional expenditure had been approved for 66 additional burial vaults at £45k and the installation of an additional terrace at £76k.
- The overspend was offset by a rates rebate of £13k, recalculated management fee charges and an overachieved income of £27k.
- There was an underspend of £15k on grants to voluntary groups and savings of £2k in WDC Management Charges.
- There was an underspend of £20k on recreation grounds due to savings on maintenance costs and WDC Management Charges.
- There was also an underspend of £15k for Community Centres due to Castlefield Community Centre accessing grant support direct from Wycombe District Council.
- Working balances during 2019/20 at 1 April 2019 was £-1,095,791. With the movement of reserves during the year of £107,086 the working balance carried forward on 31 March 2020 was £-988,705. This was an improvement on the forecasted balance of £-947k.
- There was expected to be significant expenditure during 2020/21 with an estimated balance of £378k assuming that the £547k funding from Special Expenses for the new cemetery was spent in full.

Members raised a number of points and received responses in respect of various questions. The main point were as follows:

- The contractors were on site and work had begun on the road system, drainage and the main building. Work was progressing well despite the current restrictions. The landscaping would begin during October time and the project was progressing well.

- Details would be provided to members regarding financial assistance provided to voluntary groups. It was reported that just under £10k had been paid out in grants from the HWTC support and community's grants.
- The existing Snowdrop Garden was still being used as there were spaces. The new children's cemetery was not yet completed however members were assured that there was capacity at the moment in the Snowdrop Garden.
- There were plans to increase the space near the terraces so that there was a wider access near to graves for disabled access.
- It was noted that any further spend would impact on the budget and reduce the special expenses budget.
- It was suggested that unallocated monies from the COVID 19 Crisis Fund be allocated to community buildings. It was noted that these funds were allotted as per the Community Board areas and all the monies had now been allocated. There would be opportunities for groups to access funds from the Community Boards later in the year.
- Regarding costs for Saturday burials it was noted that the £300 cost was based on actual contractor and officer costs. This had been agreed by the Committee to provide the option of Saturday burials.
- Concern was raised by a member that over half the Special Expenses expenditure was being spent on the cemetery and there was an overspend on the cemetery and underspend on other areas. In response it was noted that any underspends would affect the balance of the budget. Consideration could be given to increase funeral charges to cover costs and a review could be considered.
- It was reported that grant allocations would be dealt with by the localism team and there were questions on how the Committee would like this to be supported by the new council going forward.
- A member suggested that the criteria should be reviewed and to roll forward any underspend.
- It was suggested that many local voluntary groups did not know that grants were available and consideration should be given to making grants easier for organisations to access.
- Members were reminded that they can inform local groups to apply for grants.
- It was noted that if funds were rolled over then this would increase balances.
- It was noted that the COVID 19 epidemic would be effecting local groups and during this time funds should be rolled over to help support voluntary groups next year.
- It was suggested that some families were unable to afford the cost of burials in High Wycombe.
- Officers confirmed that there was capacity at the existing cemetery before the new site would be ready.
- Concern was raised that the criteria for grants was not easy to access and the rules were too strict for voluntary groups to access. The criteria should be reconsidered and advertised better.
- It was noted that the grant applications were approved by officers and criteria was set by the High Wycombe Town Committee and had been published on the website. New community boards would have budgets for grants which would have different criteria.
- It was noted that the costs of burials had been agreed by the Committee previously to be cost neutral and to have costs as low as possible.

Councillor Matt Knight seconded by Councillor Julia Wassell, proposed that the £17,000 Financial Assistance to Voluntary Groups be rolled over to the next year's Special Expenses budget. After being put to a vote this was agreed by the majority of the Committee and recommended to Cabinet.

It was advised that all underspends and overspends were carried forward, any increase to the budget would need to be referred to Council/Cabinet for approval.

It was requested that a review of the criteria be undertaken for the financial assistance to voluntary groups and this be added to the High Wycombe Town Committee work plan.

Regarding the Special Expenses balances and the new Buckinghamshire Council it was noted that the balances were ring-fenced as Special Expenses.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That that the £17,000 Financial Assistance to Voluntary Groups be rolled over to the next year's Special Expenses budget.

6 WORK PROGRAMME DISCUSSION

The Committee's draft work programme looking ahead to March 2021 was presented for review.

Members requested that the following items be added to the work programme:

- Review of the criteria for the awarding of the support and facilities grant.
- Review of the High Wycombe Town market to support local providers and the changes in retail.
- Information regarding CIL allocations for the High Wycombe unparished area. (September)
- An update on the Park and Ride at Handy Cross regarding operational changes and to provide views. (September)
- To understand the social deprivation in black and minority ethnic communities in the town with regards to the increased death rates regarding COVID 19. To understand the level of social deprivation in the town and for the Council to improve the situation. The Chairman confirmed that this would be discussed with officers, however it was noted that this matter could be more relevant to the Heath and Adult Social Care Select Committee. A proposal could be put forward to the Committee. It was suggested that this could be a county wide problem.
- It was noted that there had been some positive ideas regarding the market ahead of the COVID 19 pandemic and it was suggested that these could be investigated.
- An update regarding allotments.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending the meeting.