



# Buckinghamshire Council

## High Wycombe Town Committee

### Minutes

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HIGH WYCOMBE TOWN COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 19 JANUARY 2021 VIA MS TEAMS, COMMENCING AT 7.00 PM AND CONCLUDING AT 9.30 PM**

#### **MEMBERS PRESENT**

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

#### **OTHERS IN ATTENDANCE**

J Durkan, J Ford, D Harvey, T Lloyd-James, Ramesh Prashar J Shaw and I Malik

#### **1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Councillor S Graham

#### **2 DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

#### **3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the last meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee held on 24 November 2020 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

A Member commented that he was disappointed that no action had taken place pending the presentation received on climate change at the last meeting. He also highlighted that the despatch of hard copies of the agenda was not a positive move in the right direction. It was confirmed that the environment Sub Groups of the Community Boards were scheduled to consider the matter in more detail.

Members also agreed that the policy to send blanket hard copies would be reviewed. The Chairman stated that he would collate the preferences of individual members when these had been emailed directly to him.

#### 4 SPECIAL EXPENSES BUDGET

A report was submitted which outlined the proposed budget for Special Expenses for the year 2021/22 and its likely impact upon the precept. A summary of the budget for the ensuing year was attached at (Appendix A).

Members were requested to note the decrease in Council Tax for Band D and to recommend to Cabinet a precept for High Wycombe Town at £12.13 which would provide the same amount of precept as in 2020/21. The report also proposed that fees and charges attached at (Appendix B) be increased by 3% which would generate an estimated additional income of over £5k.

The Presenting Officer drew Members` attention to table 1 of the report and asked that it be noted that the estimated forecast for 2020/21 would in fact be £10k less than specified due to a purchasing order error.

Members considered the report before them in some considerable detail and a number of questions were raised.

These included a query as to how the situation had come about whereby the Council Tax Base for Band D equivalent for 2021/22 had decreased to 600.6 especially as there had been an increase in the number of households in the unparished area. It was explained that this was a complex issue and that it was partly contributable to the numbers of people in receipt of some form of Council benefits or tax rebates, and due to the exemptions that were applied to members of the Armed forces or the Clergy. A further question was raised about the increase proposed of 31p per band D property which represented a 2.6% rise on the amount charged for 20/21. Was it legal to have a rise of more than 1.99%

Further questions were posed to the Presenting Officer regarding financial assistance to voluntary groups and why the management fee formed more than 25% of the money earmarked for grants. Another area of concern related to the Allotments management fee of £8600 despite the outsourcing of a contractor to grounds maintenance. Currently there was no expenditure on the new cemetery as these costs had not yet been transferred

Some Members felt that in future a more diligent and proactive approach should be adopted with regards to the budget, whereby a cross party group should be formed in collaboration with officers well in advance of being required to make a decision.

Following a recorded vote as to delaying a decision on the budget due to the number of unanswered questions, it was

**RESOLVED:** That

- (i) The item be deferred and a Special meeting be held to clarify issues of concern
- (ii) All questions to be addressed be emailed to the Chairman in advance.

## 5 HIGH WYCOMBE MARKET UPDATE

A report was submitted which provided as an update to the High Wycombe market report presented in September 2020. It focused on activities undertaken before and after the second lockdown in November. It also outlined the next steps with respect to strategic market management and the development of a Market Strategy for Buckinghamshire.

The presentation provided information on reimagining the market place and issues such as branding and awareness raising. Creating new business, street scene improvements and strategic direction for future markets and delivery options.

Members considered the report before them and asked questions. One query related to the continued presence of a charity stall, which historically had been permitted free of charge. The Presenting Officer would enquire and provide a response in due course. One Member raised concern over the number of hot food stalls currently operating within the market, and its effects on restaurants and takeaway businesses in the area who were required to pay a substantial level of rates. Another query related to the future management of the contract and the likelihood of Buckinghamshire Council taking control. He was informed that Members would certainly be consulted and kept informed when the future strategic direction was scheduled to be determined.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (i) The report be noted
- (ii) The officer be congratulated and thanked for all the good work undertaken so far

## 6 CHILTERN RANGERS UPDATE

A verbal update on the work undertaken was provided. Members were informed that autumn and winter had proved to be a busy time in preparation of the environment for the flowering and nesting seasons. Volunteering offers had temporarily been suspended due to Covid but were to resume in mid- February.

A variety of projects were underway including the continuing work in woodland areas and with schools. Future work on the River Rye was planned, including a new garden in the area. Chiltern Rangers were working with a range of community boards and were awaiting the outcome of a funding bid. Furthermore at High Wycombe hospital a new internal garden was to be constructed for the benefit of stroke patients.

Mr Shaw highlighted the seriousness of the problem of fly tipping in the woods which remained consistent and substantial. He appealed to Members for their support in resolving the issue. It was unanimously agreed that this matter needed to be addressed and members wished to explore ways of contributing financially towards keeping the environment clean.

**RESOLVED:** That

- (i) Mr Shaw be thanked for his report
- (ii) A member of the waste team attend the next meeting to provide funding options for the general upkeep in the whole of the unparished area and to give an update on bin collections.

## **7 WORK PROGRAMME**

The programme of work for the High Wycombe Town Committee to be carried out between March 2021 and January 2022 was considered.

**RESOLVED:** That the following items be added to the work programme for consideration at the March meeting,

- (i) Market Sub Group; and
- (ii) Change of a Road name.

## **8 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** That the next meeting of the High Wycombe Town Committee be held on Tuesday 9 March at 7pm.