

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 11 September 2023 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Vince Parker, Jeff Streets, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd (*Chairman*)
In attendance: District Cllr J Morgan
Meeting opened 19:30

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs Martindale and Read.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

Cllr Layland declared an interest in item 11.2. Cllr Compton declared a non pecuniary interest in item 7.1.1 as Secretary to the Rugby Club.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:30 Meeting closed.

No Members of the Public or representations from members.

19:30 Meeting reopened.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 03 July 2023 (2023-009/01-06)

Resolved: that the minutes of the Town Council meeting held on 19 June 2023 be duly signed by the Chairman of the meeting as a true and accurate record of the meeting; pages 2023-009/01-06.

5 To receive County and District Councillor Reports

5.1 County Councillor

County Councillor Margot McArthur provided an update on the asylum issues, Kent County Council (KCC) currently had 661 asylum children, of which 490 are unaccompanied. Only 136 of these have been transferred out to the county. This was disproportionate and KCC are unable to meet its statutory requirements or discharge to other counties, it puts a huge strain on the services. Social workers already had 70 case loads each and there was no accommodation across the county. Cllr McArthur referred to the Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) reported in school buildings, there were no schools in Kent closed, six had been identified prior to the summer holidays and work arrangements put in place.

5.2 District Councillors

District Councillor McArthur updated Members on the developments for Sptitals Cross estate/Farmstead Road which had been reviewed due to increasing building costs. The Swan Lane public house was currently closed awaiting a new licensee. Disposable vapes was not a significant issue in the district compared to other areas. The household free deliveries of the clear and rubbish bags, was behind its distributions, this was due to staff shortages but the waste management team now had extra temporary staff and delivery routes were recommencing.

District Cllr Layland mentioned as Chairman of Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) he had been invited, along with Cllr Bob Todd (Chairman ETC), to the opening of Airborn new offices. Airborn were now the largest employer in Edenbridge, with facilities of the most advance technology manufacturing connectors and parts for aircraft, space, telecommunications, defence and more.

District Cllr Baker said there had been several meetings including Development Management Control (DMC).

District Cllr Morgan provided a report on issues he had been dealing with including complaints about the delayed delivery of the waste bags. Waste Management team had been short by 16 staff over the summer period, he had been given reassurances that deliveries had started in the town. The Fairmead Road development costs had risen by 30% and re-examination of the development was needed. He added that the level of affordable housing for this development had been disappointing, but the Quakers had confirmed they would be purchasing a couple of units to make affordable. He also mentioned that he would like SDC to have more discussions regarding project surpluses and community engagement.

19:45 Cllr Morgan left the meeting.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning & Transportation Committee meeting 17 July 2023-011/01-04; Planning Committee meetings: 14 August 2023-014/01-03; 04 September 2023-014/01-04

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the meetings and numbered - Planning & Transportation Committee meeting 17 July 2023-011/01-04; Planning Committee meetings: 14 August 2023-014/01-03; 04 September 2023-014/01-04.

6.2 Open Spaces Committee meetings: 12 June 2023-006/01-06; 10 July 2023-010/01-03

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the meetings and numbered - Open Spaces Committee meeting 12 June 2023-006/01-06; 10 July 2023-010/01-03.

6.3 Finance Committee 24 July 2023

Noted: Finance Committee meeting 24 July - minutes were awaiting publication, to be presented to the next full Council meeting for approval.

6.4 Norman Foundation Charity 24 July 2023-013

Noted: Norman Foundation meeting 24 July - minutes were awaiting publication, to be presented to the next full Council meeting for approval.

6.5 Personnel Committee 05 September 2023-016/01-03

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the meeting and numbered - Personnel Committee 05 September 2023-016/01-03.

7 To receive reports and any recommendations from working groups; delegated reports; clerk's and officers' reports

7.1 To note delegated decisions from Planning Committee (August)

7.1.1 Pavilion: Internal reconfiguration permitted to the Rugby Club for expanding the female changing facilities within the Pavilion

Members received the report from the Planning Committee meeting 14 August, and noted the delegated decision, unanimously,

Ratified: supported and consent given to the Rugby Club for the above work as a redesignation of the rooms and space within the Pavilion.

7.2 To receive recommendations from the Personnel Committee 05 September

7.2.1 To support the proposal for Personnel Committee meeting papers/report to remain confidential circulated to Personnel Committee members only

Members received the Committee's recommendation for Personnel Committee meeting papers to be circulated to committee members only, mindful that papers can have sensitive information that

just committee members should be privy to this information. Under s101, LGA 1972 the council can arrange for the discharge of any of its functions by an officer as well as by a committee. Resolutions (Standing Orders provide provide for decisions to be delegated). The Council's Terms of Reference outline delegated authority for committees, the Personnel Committee has delegated authority to make a number of staffing decisions. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support circulation of Personnel Committee meeting papers/reports to committee members only.

7.2.2 To adopt the updated Employee Handbook

Members received the recommendation from Committee to adopt the reviewed and update Employee Handbook which had been overseen by Worknest and now included corrections to reflect paternity leave (as approve May meeting) and other regulatory updates. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to adopt the updated Employee Handbook.

7.2.3 To support new office hours

Members received a report from Committee which had noted the staff hours evaluation, spanning over an 87 week period (January 2022 to 31 August 2023). This supported the excessive additional hours office staff are working, and rarely leaving before 6.00 pm (sometimes as late as 9/10.00 pm). A summary of daily/weekly visits to the office noted weekly totals ranged from 84 to 122 visitors. People access the office for a wide range of reasons not just Town Council services, but also matters relating to other agencies and councils, mental health issues, environmental and more. Members noted, the work and expectations of the Council had changed over the years, the diverse range of activities and projects of the Council, its meetings, the buildings and open spaces management, emails, social media and an open office, meant there was a lot going on, and the cumulative effect of addressing issues which required immediate attention was impacting on managing staff hours and resources.

Members received the recommendation and voted 10:1,

Resolved: to change the office hours 'open to the public' to Monday to Thursday 9.00 am to 3.30 pm; closed Fridays to the public. This would allow uninterrupted work time for other office operations/tasks (Monday to Friday 9.00 am - 5.00 pm). To allow nine-day work fortnight for the Town Clerk and RFO.

7.2.4 To approve staff remuneration in view of additional work loads/hours

Members received the recommendation to acknowledge the extra work for the Planning and Administration Officer, and unanimously,

Resolved: to support the remuneration for the Planning and Administration Officer.

8 Council Casual Vacancy

Members noted two vacancies. 1) following the resignation of Steve Taylor in July, there had been no call for a by-election therefore the Council may consider filling this vacancy by co-option; 2) following the resignation of Andy Eyre, in September, the Notice of Casual Vacancy had been published, SDC would advise if a by-election is called after 26 September. Members discussed the best route to fill both vacancies under the co-option procedures. Members voted,

Resolved: to advertise inviting candidates to apply, but to wait until the outcome of a possible call for by-election before advertising. Applicants will be considered at the next Council meeting.

9 To receive reports and any recommendations from working groups; delegated reports; clerk's and officers' reports

9.1 Clerk's Report

Clerk's report was received. Cllr Todd asked for a letter to be sent to Father Stephen, who was retiring after 33-years service to the residents of Edenbridge and who had been a part of the

community working with a number of voluntary organisations. He would be greatly missed.

9.1.1 To note: Tender Notice for the Replacement window frames and glass, with new shutters was published on the Contract Finder (and Council's website) 21 August, closing date 22 September

Members noted the tender for the replacement windows at the Pavilion and new shutters had been published on the Contract Finder site and the Council's website, closing date 22 September.

9.1.2 To approve the office Christmas working arrangements

Members unanimously,

Resolved: Christmas closure from Friday 22 December, 1.00 pm, reopening Tuesday 2 January.

10 Matters arising from the minutes for report and not elsewhere on the agenda

10.1 To receive an update on the case for the unauthorised access gate at the Recreation Ground

Nothing to report, the matter remained with the Council's solicitors.

10.2 Thursday Market: To consider allocating a budget of £300 for activities for December; and £300 for additional general advertising boards/banners

Members unanimously,

Resolved: a budget of up to £300 for expenditure on Christmas Market activities; and a further £300 to trial additional market signage/boards and new banners.

10.3 To receive an update on maintenance work for Rickards Hall

Members received an update, as reported in the meeting papers, on the quotes obtained for the building repairs for Rickards Hall and quote for a surveyor to help prioritise the works and prepare a new 10-year maintenance plan. Quotes for the works ranged from £10k to £20k, and a surveyor ranged between £1k to £2k. The Town Clerk had appointed a surveyor who was due to attend mid September. Members unanimously,

Ratified: the appointment of surveyor to include a 10-year maintenance plan and the expenditure of £1,000.

10.3.1 To approve instruction for external building repair works to Rickards Hall following receipt of the surveyor's report and advice, thus permitting works could commence this autumn

Members unanimously,

Resolved: subject to the surveyor's recommendations for essential external works that needed to be carried out this year, for officers (the Town Clerk and Building Manager) along with the Cllr Baker, could obtain revised quotes for these works and then engage with a contractor that is a) able to attend to these works this autumn and b) offered best value, so as to ensure the necessary works were addressed as soon as reasonably practicable.

10.4 Annual Community Event - to receive an update

Nothing to report currently. A budget would be recommended by Forward Planning Steering Group (FPSG).

11 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision

11.1 To ratify the Energy renewal agreement for 01 February 2025 to 29 September 2027

Members received the Clerk's report, noting that in July Total Energies had advised that businesses were encouraged to consider their renewals - energy firms now had an obligation to provide best advice and opportunity for businesses to budget. Market prices were changing daily with prices expected to increase a further 20-22%. Whilst it was difficult to predict charges for 2025, the

strong advice was to proceed asap to lock prices for the 2025 renewal. Current charges Gas: 0.04p per/kWh with no standing charge Electricity: 00.1511p per/kWh standing daily charge 25.1564p. Following further research and discussion with Cllr Compton (Vice-Chair of Finance Committee), the RFO and the Town Clerk, they agreed to a new fixed agreement:
Gas: 0.095p per/kWh with no standing charge Electricity: 00.28p per/kWh standing daily charge £1.15p. Based on consumption estimates the extra cost was estimated £353 over a 27 month period.

Ratified: the new energy agreement for 2025 for 27 months at the above prices.

11.2 To consider free hire for Rickards Hall for a fundraising event for the Museum hosted by Cllr Alan Layland (Chairman SDC) on evening Friday 22 September

20:12 Cllr Layland left the meeting.

Members noted Cllr Layland's request asking to waive the hall hire costs for Rickards Hall, as his SDC Chairman's event was to showcase the Museum and raise needed funds for it. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to waive the hall hire fees for Rickards Hall as this was a fund raising cause for the Eden Valley Museum.

20:13 Cllr Layland rejoined the meeting.

11.3 Bonfire Society: To approve the expenditure for this year's annual clean-up of c. £1,200

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the expenditure for this year's annual clean-up of about £1,200 (as budgeted).

11.4 Edenbridge Remembrance Sunday 12th November 2023

Members noted a meeting had been arranged with community groups and partners to discuss plans and preparations for this year's service. The outcome of the meeting would be reported to Council at its October meeting.

11.5 Proposal to cancel CIL Board meeting 13 November; next meeting February 2024

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to cancel the CIL Board meeting 13 November; noting the next meeting would be February 2024.

11.6 To approve the expenditure of c.£1,025 for a replacement cooker for Rickards Hall

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the expenditure of up to £1,025 for a replacement cooker for Rickards Hall.

11.7 To approve a budget of £600 for investigation into the rates paid for the Market Yard Car Park and Toilets (£5,364 pa)

Members noted the Clerk's report: Business Rate relief had abolished rates on public toilets but had not been applied to the Council's public toilets despite raising this with SDC and NALC. The trainer for the Visioning session, was surprised not only that the toilets were still charged business rates, but also the car park as free car park was not also exempt. The Council currently pays for the Market Yard Car Park and toilets, £5,364 pa; in addition a further £1,571.85 for the market. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to approve a budget of £600 for a consultant to investigate the rates paid for the Market Yard car park and the public toilets.

11.8 SDC annual Liaison Meeting – Thursday 02 November (10.00 am) – proposed agenda items

Members were asked to email the Town Clerk if they had any suggestions. The Clerk would also

email items for the agenda based on current joint issues, projects and other local matters.

11.9 **Cyber Insurance**

Members received the information in the Clerk's report: The Council's insurance company had recently advised that the Council should consider taking out a Cyber Insurance policy; quotes ranged from £614 to £807. In March, the Council had considered a new fully managed IT support complete with cyber security and compliance service. Whilst several improvements had been made, including the integration with Microsoft 365 and Sharepoint, this did not provide enhanced cyber and compliance service e.g. 24/7 eye on screen monitoring, rapid detection for response to cyber-attacks, managed risk and compliance with wide range of global standards and early detection reducing response time and reputational losses. Following a recent conversation with PS Technology, they confirmed that the current level of cover was adequate, but recommend that with rapid advancements in technology and cyber-attacks, Council should consider enhancing its cover to a fully all encompassed IT Managed service to meet full cyber protection and compliance. An audit through signing up to the .gov Cyber Essentials Scheme was recommended. To achieve cyber security/cyber safe there are three levels:

- 1) IT support services (PS Technology), Sophos security and Microsoft 365 licenses, Sharepoint - in other words, basic cover - *The Council was already at this level*
- 2) Improved security services with a 'fully managed system' (as previously considered) and includes in additional cyber awareness training for all staff and councillors; phishing protection, PS Tech checking latest MS security updates implemented accordingly for council (currently optional for users), help with achieving Cyber Essentials accreditation certificate
- 3) Cyber insurance as well, but would need to complete step 2 to be compliant.

Members discussed, and agreed that currently its systems were above satisfactory, but that it should work towards improvements and carrying out an appraisal of its IT security. Members voted, and unanimously,

Resolved: not to do anything immediately, but to put to the FPSG to consider including an appraisal and moving to the full managed IT support service, as part of the Forward Plan projects.

12 **To approve the proposed Council and Committees Meeting schedule for 2024**

Members received the proposed meeting dates for 2024 and unanimously,

Resolved: the meeting calendar dates for meetings 2024.

13 **FORWARD PLANNING STEERING GROUP (FPSG) – the next meeting is 23 October – are there any specific future projects Members would like to be considered by the FPSG and as part of the the new visioning for this Council**

Members asked for the following to be including on the FPSG agenda for consideration: annual community event; cyber security appraisal; skatepark proposal; Neighbourhood Plan; Band Stand; sounds system for Rickards Hall.

14 **Consultations**

14.1 **Kent & Medway Partnership Domestic Abuse Strategy 2024-2029 - Public consultation opened 24 July - Closes 9 October 2023**

Noted.

14.2 **Kent Family Hub Services - Opened 19 July closes 13 September**

Members were asked to each respond to this individually.

14.3 Kent Mineral Sites Plan: Second Call for Sites - Hard Rock - closing date 12 October 2023

Noted.

15 To receive reports from councillors who have attended meetings of outside bodies

Cllr McGregor mentioned the Twinning Associations last trip to Mont St Aignan weekend of 22 September.

16 To consider any press releases

None.

17 Matters for future agendas

None.

18 Date of next meeting - 30 October

Noted.

Meeting closed 20:31