

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 4 December 2023 at 7:32 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Stuart McGregor, Vince Parker, Angela Read, Bob Todd (*Chairman*)
In attendance: Town Clerk, minutes clerk, one member of the public.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received, noted and accepted from Cllrs McArthur, Streets, and Sumner.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

None.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:33 *The Chairman adjourned the meeting for item 3.*

Cllr Baker joined the meeting.

There were no questions or statements.

19:33 *The meeting reopened.*

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 30 October 2023-024/01-07

Resolved: that the minutes of the Council meeting held on Monday 30 October be duly signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record (23-024/01-06).

5 To receive County and District Councillor Reports

5.1 County Councillor

No report.

5.2 District Councillors

Cllr Layland highlighted the forthcoming public consultation at the Eden Centre (6 December) on the proposed Sevenoaks District Local Plan, at which residents could attend to find out more about the proposals for Edenbridge and how to make their responses.

Cllr Baker mentioned that the company which had taken over management of the Leisure Centre in the summer had reported on their first months of operation which was very positive. The investigation into the previous management was still on-going.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning Committee meetings 06 November 2023-025/1-3; Planning & Transportation 27 November 2023-030/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Planning Committee meeting 06 November 2023-025/1-3; Planning & Transportation 27 November 2023-030/1-3.

6.2 Finance & Governance Committee 09 October 2023-020/1-3; Finance Committee 20 November 2023-028/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Finance & Governance Committee 09 October 2023-020/1-3; Finance Committee 20 November 2023-028/1-3.

- 6.3 Personnel Committee meetings 19 October 2023-022/01-02; 27 November 2023-29/01**
Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Personnel Committee meetings 19 October 2023-022/01-02; 27 November 2023-29/01.
- 6.4 Open Spaces Committee meetings 18 September 2023-18/1-4; 06 November 2023-026/1-5**
Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Open Spaces Committee meetings 18 September 2023-18/1-4; 06 November 2023-026/1-5.
- 6.5 Forward Planning Steering Group 23 October 2023-023/01-06**
Resolved: to adopt the minutes of Forward Planning Steering Group meeting on 23 October 2023-023/01-05.
- 6.6 Grants & Charities 13 November 2023-027/1-3**
Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Council's Grants and Charities meeting on 13 November 2023-027/1-3.
- 7 To receive recommendations from Committees**
- 7.1 To receive recommendations from Personnel Committee 27 November 2023**
- 7.1.1 To ratify the appointment of the Open Spaces Officer - Maria Marto**
Members noted the appointment of the new Open Spaces Officer who started on 14 November, and
Ratified: the appointment of Maria Marto as Open Spaces Officer.
- 7.1.2 To increase the staff budget for 2024-25 to £469,607.**
Members were advised that October Personnel Committee meeting had recommended a staffing budget of £464,096, but subsequently the National Joint Council (NJC) for Local Government Services had reached an agreement on rates of pay from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024. The impact on the 2024-25 budget was an additional £5,511. Committee members had agreed it would be better to amend the staffing budget to allow for what was known/expected. This did not allow for any potential contribution rate increases to Kent Pensions or Employer NI. After some discussion and voting 8:1 in support, councillors
Resolved: to support increasing the staffing budget to £469,607 for 2024-25.
- 7.1.3 To confirm a one-off remuneration pay to the Town Clerk in view of the additional work load and hours during recent staff shortages period**
19:41 The Town Clerk left the meeting.
Members supported the the recommendation from Personnel Committee, and
Resolved: to pay the Town Clerk a one-off remuneration of £1,000 in recognition of the additional workload and hours during the recent period of staff shortages.
19:42 The Town Clerk rejoined the meeting.
- 7.2 To receive recommendations from the Finance Committee 20 November**
Finance Committee had considered the draft budget proposals for 2024-25. These were received and considered by Council under agenda item 9.
- 7.2.1 To increase the fees and charges, including the cemeteries charges, for 2024 in line with the RPI rate 6.1% (as published October)**

Council's fees and charges increase each year usually in line with inflation measured by the Retail Prices Index (RPI), taking the RPI rate for September which generally coincides with meetings. The RPI for September 2023 was 8.9%, but as October's rate was known at the time of the Finance meeting in November, and at 6.1% was lower than the September rate. Members agreed the October rate should be used - noting everyone was feeling the impact from the past year's higher inflation rates. Members

Resolved: to support the October RPI rate of 6.1% across Council's fees and charges.

7.2.2 **To confirm the Service Level Agreements for HOUSE (was £8k, budgeted £9k); and Museum £6,500**

This year, Council had two Service Level Agreements (SLAs). Finance Committee supported the SLAs as budgeted: Eden Valley Museum £6,500 and HOUSE £9,000. HOUSE had been hit with funding cuts and had previously requested an increase from £8,000. A meeting with HOUSE was arranged for 8 January. It was unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the continuation of the two SLAs in the budget for 2024-25.

Resolved: to support an increase to the SLA agreement for HOUSE from £8,000 to £9,000 in the new budget.

7.2.3 **To confirm the Lease rents for 2024**

Leases for each of the three sports Clubs differ slightly, but each was based on RPI at the review dates. Actual invoicing changes were effective from 1 April due to the invoicing dates in two equal payments. It was unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the rent increases by 6.1 % (RPI as of October).

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

8.1 **Clerk's Report**

Members noted the Clerk's report covering 17 items, including the following:

Bonfire Society's annual parade & litter clean-up The street clear-up following this year's bonfire parade through the High Street, was funded by the Town Council and carried out by SDC on the Sunday morning. There had been several comments of praise and appreciation.

Car parking issues in Council car parks: Both Market Yard (MYCP) and Blossoms Park car parks had abandoned vehicles. The abandoned vehicle in MYCP was preventing a streetlight repair. Following a car parking management company assessment of the sites, a meeting of the Parking Working Group would be arranged for January to receive feedback and suggestions.

Cemeteries: letters had been sent to holders of the Grants of Right for 20 burial plots in cemeteries three and four, as the plots were not compliant with the cemetery regulations, having variously expanded the space permitted for Memorials, as well as placing unauthorised additional memorials, memorabilia and artificial flowers. Several others were due to receive letters. Some residents had rectified the issues, others would be receiving a second letter. After that, for those that had not complied, officers would make the necessary arrangements to remove the additional items, kerbing and/or loose stones. The Open Spaces Committee would receive an update at its next meeting.

Edenbridge Community Christmas Association: The ECCA had again this year provided a display of Christmas lights for the High Street.

Market: The market was doing well, November peaking with 16 traders in one week. A newsletter to all traders was issued mid-November, advising what the Council was doing to support them, to encourage traders to have some promotions, and Christmas activities planned. This included a table to 'write your letter to Santa', with a post box to the North Pole available for three weeks, and in week four – 21 December – Santa and his elves would be at the market with

a gift to those who sent letters.

Meeting dates 2024: the meeting dates programme is published on the website under meetings.

Post Office: the post office at Paydens closed on 2 November. Tom Tugendhat MP and the Town Council had both expressed to the Post Office that it was a great loss, and hoped that it can find a solution soon.

9 Budget 2024-25

Members had received a report on the Finance Committee's consideration of the draft budget proposals for 2024-25. This included recommendations from the Forward Planning Steering Group, Personnel Committee, Open Spaces Committee, and Council 3 October. The current reserves position and view at the end of the financial year, as well as the proposed budget and impact, were also considered. The conclusion and recommendation from Committee was to support a balancing budget, not to draw down on the reserves which had taken several years to strengthen and bring back to a stable level, and to Precept for the difference between expenditure and anticipated income.

9.1 To receive an update on the Council's Earmarked Reserves and General Reserves

Members had received a copy of the Consolidated Balance Sheet up to 30 September 2023 (period end), providing a summary of the financial assets, 5-months into the financial year spend, and the current Earmarked Reserves position (EMR).

9.2 To consider the full draft budget for 2024-25

Members considered an updated report on the full draft budget.

Each cost centre had been scrutinised by the Town Clerk and Finance Committee. We know utilities would increase, and the 10-and-30-year maintenance plans varied each year depending on planned works. These plans had been reviewed last year, and Council had agreed for Doggetts Barn, Church House, Rickards Hall, and the Pavilion to all have new 10-year plans. These would be available for next year's planning (2025-26).

Personnel: Salaries overall budget (includes wages, National Insurance, pension, medical, P11) and along an estimated pay award at 4%, £469,607 (8.6% on 2023-24).

Open Spaces: Running costs for the open spaces and vehicles were similar to current year, with increases for streetlight energy increases (currently, ave. £1,600 pcm); streetlight column replacement programme has one of its larger amounts in the 30-year plan £45k; and a small increase has been included for other utilities. Budget request £436,084. (14.9% on 2023-24.)

Other expenditure previously supported for the new budget included:

- Providing for professional services to help make recommendation for draft Local Plan
- Annual community event budget
- Buildings surveys for Church House and Doggetts Barn
- Insurance - increase premium is a result of index linking of the current sums insured currently 10% for Buildings and 8% for Contents but could change for renewal July 2024
- Legal fees had budgeted £5k, but as could be seen this year can be higher with unauthorised access issues, new lease Agreements. The Lease review for the Museum was due March 2025, and of course unauthorised encampments were unknown
- Rickards Hall required some external and internal repairs. EMR has £9k, but we know that the likely costs will be more
- Elections, for 2024-25 had been put to '£0'. Whilst there was always a risk of a by-election, £5k unspent in current budget can be moved to EMR. As the May election was uncontested (this would have cost est, £15-16k), this puts EMR Elections to £20,500; it was recommended Council maintains funds to cover elections

Total budgeted expenditure was £863,575; known budgeted other income £113,390; Precept income needed £750,185 to achieve a balanced budget.

One Member proposed that the sum budgeted for community events next year be reduced from £10,000 to £5,000 to help towards minimising the increase of the Band D Council Tax residents would pay. Members discussed the budget and proposal at length. Members voted 7:2 in favour, and

Resolved: to reduce the funding for events budget from £10k to £5,000.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to confirm the draft budget expenditure for 2024-25 at £858,575.

9.3 **To consider the Precept for 2024-25**

Members were reminded that at the time of preparing the budget each year the tax base was not known, as Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) did not issue this until some time during early December. Therefore, Council could only make its best estimated calculations when considering the Precept and Band D calculation at this stage.

Having received and discussed the Finance Committee's recommendation, and confirmed the draft budget at Item 9.2 above, assuming the current tax base for 2023-24 of 3891.91 remained the same, with the above proposed Precept (reduced to reflect £5k saving) now £745,185, this would take a Band D tax level to £191.47, an £11.04 per year increase (or £0.92p per month). Should the tax base increase the Band D tax would decrease.

Members voted eight in favour and one abstention, it was

Resolved: to set the Precept for 2024-25 at £745,185, an increase of 6.11% resulting in an additional £11.04 per year for an average Band D property.

The draft budget for 2024-25 would be published on the Council's website following Council's recommendation and resolution on the draft budget. This will be represented to the January Council to confirm the Precept and Band D payment.

9.4 **To confirm the recommendation for the Earmarked Reserves for 2024-25**

Having considered the budget, members reviewed the ear-marked reserve levels for 2024-25. They noted these might change, with projects not completed in 2023-24 and the spend carried over in to the following year added to the EMRs.

Members noted the current projected Council Reserves position at the end of 2023-24 with movement:

General Reserves £312,213

Earmarked Reserved £416,922

CIL allocated funds £72,263

CIL unallocated funds £22,971

Total of GR, EMR, and CIL reserves (above) £824,369

Having Precepted to achieve a balanced budget for 2024-25, and not to draw-down on reserves, this should maintain a projected total reserves (GR, EMV and CIL) of £824,369.

Resolved: to confirm the earmarked reserve levels for 2024-25, £416,922; total reserves £824,369.

10 **Draft Local Plan - Regulation 18 consultation (23 November 2023 to 11 January 2024).**

Members noted that Council worked with a planning consultant in January 2023 to respond to the initial draft Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation. SDC's Development and Conservation Advisory Committee meeting 31 October confirmed the second phase Reg 18 consultation on the draft Local Plan, which now also included the development numbers and locations. Council had supported engaging a consultant to help ensure the best possible response, as well as further support throughout the full Plan consultation period. Meetings would take place with the consultant to discuss the Plan and responses over December and early January.

Members noted SDC 'Pop-up' session (mentioned under item 5.2), on Wednesday, 6 December 2023, 4.30pm to 7.30pm at the Eden Centre. The Town Council was also hosting two further

opportunities for residents in Rickards Hall on 12 December and 4 January 3-7pm.

10.1 To appoint a Working Group to work with the Town Clerk and Consultant with preparing and confirming the Council's response to the second Reg 18 consultation

Members considered appointing a Working Group and giving delegated authority to prepare and confirm Council's representation on the draft Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation.

Resolved: to appoint Cllrs Aldridge, Baker, Gemmell Smith, Layland, Parker, Read, Streets and Todd with delegated authority to prepare and confirm Council's representation on the Draft Local Plan.

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

11.1 To receive an update on maintenance work for Rickards Hall

It was noted the surveyor's report was still awaited, unfortunately delayed due to other commitments. Once received building maintenance could be prioritised, with some being commissioned by the Town Clerk, Buildings Manager and Cllr Baker as previously agreed by Council, to facilitate the more urgent works. The recommendations from the surveyor would be reported to Council and Finance Committee for the maintenance plans.

The Fire Risk Assessment earlier this year identified that a new automated shutter was required between the kitchen and hall. A quote for £3,072 had been received, and a 13amp fused spur would also be needed, installed within one metre of the motor by an electrician. Once works were prioritised, decision could be made whether to fund the shutter installation through the sums transferred to EMR, or contingencies.

11.2 Edenbridge Remembrance Sunday 12th November 2023

Members noted the Remembrance wreath laying service at the War Memorial was very well attended, and the parade from Leathermarket car park to the hospital, and back again, went well. Thanks were due to the Bonfire Society for organising the road closure marshals and barriers, Cllr Layland for submitting the road closure, the Scouts for providing the lead bus, and everyone who was involved with the parade. Also to Barry Batchelor for organising the RBL and wreaths, to Terri Scanes for ensuring the Church service continued, and to the Town Band.

11.3 SDC Annual Liaison Meeting - amended date - Thursday 18 January

It was noted the annual liaison meeting scheduled for 2 November had been rescheduled to Thursday 18 January, 10.00 am. This would be a meeting with SDC and ETC officers, the Leader of SDC and ETC Councillors to raise any issues and discuss Edenbridge matters.

11.4 To receive an update on Train Station noticeboard tourism poster and reconsider the station waiting room project possibly redirecting the £1,500 budget

Members received a report on the origin and progress to date of two existing, but delayed projects, to create displays at the train stations, promoting aspects of Edenbridge heritage to showcase the town with a tourism angle. A budget of £1,500 was approved for the Town station waiting room, and has since been moved to EMR. Both projects linked with Sussex Community Rail Partnership, but had met with a variety of hold-ups and was no looking like this had fully fallen to the Town Council. Following a re-think, it was suggested to simplify, and combine both projects to produce an information board poster based around a map design that highlights points of interest for visitors. A further suggestion was to create a tie-in with the ongoing Local Walks project. Members unanimously,

Resolved: to redirect the £1,500 already allocated, to produce a poster for the station notice board, which could be edited and displayed at both stations, with the potential of a version in the waiting room at a later date, and to tie-in with the Local Walks project.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision**12.1 Neighbourhood Plan: To consider if Council would like to establish a Working Group to investigate the cost and outline draft and Plan for producing an Edenbridge Neighbourhood Plan**

Members discussed the *pros* and *cons* of creating a Neighbourhood Plan for Edenbridge - the amount of work and commitment required, and the costs, to develop a Neighbourhood Plan, balanced against its potential to give a local council and the community the chance to play a greater role in determining the future of the area. A Neighbourhood Plan can help identify priorities, allocate land, and also help create partnerships which will assist in progressing some of these ideas and priorities. The Forward Planning Steering Group had placed the Neighbourhood Plan as a medium term project, in the absence of a confirmed Sevenoaks District Local Plan currently undergoing public consultation. Members discussed, and in view of the current emerging Local Plan, Members voted eight in favour, one abstained, it was

Resolved: to develop a Neighbourhood Plan once the Sevenoaks Local Plan had been established.

12.2 Rickards Hall: To approve the expenditure of up to £500 for a replacement dishwasher

Resolved: to support the expenditure of up to £500 for a replacement dishwasher required for Rickards Hall.

13 Health & Safety Audit: To receive a report and note actions following recent audit by Worknest

Members noted the outcome of the recent Health and Safety Audit on 15 November, a positive meeting with several helpful pointers and advice. The report was fair and identified a number of actions, but none requiring immediate attention. The assessor visited the open spaces, depot, stores, Rickards Hall, and the Office. The officers would be working through the advice over the coming months.

14 Consultations**14.1 Local Plan 2040 Regulation 18 consultation (Part 2) - opened 23 November 2023 closes Thursday 11 January 2024.**

Members noted SDC had published its second phase Reg 18 consultation on the Local Plan. Members had met to consider a response and would be working with a consultant to ensure the best representation made for Edenbridge.

14.2 Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2024-34 - closes 30 January 2023

Resolved: to include this on the January Council agenda.

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

Cllr Baker reported that she had attended the AGM of the local Citizens Advice.

16 To consider any press releases

Two items were identified for publicity: the Town Council's budget proposals, and its engagement of a consultant to prepare its own response to the District Local Plan.

17 Matters for future agendas

Kent's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy 2024-34 consultation.

18 Date of next meeting - 15 January 2024

Noted.

2023-031/08

Meeting closed 8.35pm