

Minutes of the Meeting of Full Council held in Rickards Hall on 4 March 2024 at 7:30 pm

Present: Cllrs. Jon Aldridge, Angela Baker (*Vice-Chairwoman*), Sarah Compton, Michael Gemmell Smith, Alan Layland, Margot McArthur, Stuart McGregor, Angela Read, Stephen Sumner, Bob Todd (*Chairman*), Vince Parker

In attendance: Town Clerk; Bill Cummings, Careyann Jacques, Michael Stockdale; no members of the public, no press.

Meeting opened at 7:30 pm.

1 To Receive Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received, noted and accepted from Cllr Streets.

2 Declaration of Interests or Predetermination

None.

3 Public Questions and Statements

19:32 Meeting was adjourned for agenda item 3.

Three candidates for co-options (item 8) were received in alphabetical order; each were asked to speak on why you would like to be a Town Councillor and what you feel you can offer the community. All candidates were Edenbridge residents and spoke about what the town means to them, other groups they are/or have been involved with, skills they can bring to the council and aspirations for the town.

19:42 Meeting was reconvened.

4 To receive, adopt and sign the minutes of the Council meeting held on 15 January 2024 (2023-034/01-05)

Minutes of the Council meeting held 04 December 2023 were received, and Members

Resolved: to accept the minutes of Council meeting held 15 January 2024 and that the Chairman should sign them as a true and accurate record of the meeting (034/01-05).

5 To receive County and District Councillor Reports

5.1 County Councillor

Cllr McArthur provided a report on Kent County Council's (KCC) Children's Services following an Appeal, where the High Court found the original findings (July 2023 report) unfair in its criticisms towards KCC, and placed the issues with decision-making process for the National Transfer Scheme (NTS). It said the court found that the NTS and its management were inadequate and for large periods was unlawful, and that the Home Office must resolve this and ensure that it works fairly and sustainably, and that it had not grasped the the scale of the problem with unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in to Kent. Currently, Kent has 2000 looked after children, 540 asylum-seeking, and 1500 in need of care. KCC is working with the Home Office to accommodate these children and address the issues.

She went on to talk about the bus service with private operators withdrawing or reducing its services despite funding support. The issue was that bus companies say the services are not sustainable as usage was lower than pre pandemic.

5.2 District Councillors

Cllr Layland provided an update on the funding Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) provided the Citizen Advice (CAB). It had been working to providing external funding support, including an extra £40k which had been secured for the coming year. He also mentioned Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) were required to undertake a review of the electoral

arrangements for Sevenoaks District, but did not expect this to impact of Edenbridge electoral boundaries.

Cllr McArthur said that the review of waste management services and savings not providing residents with the plastic waste bags were £100k on black waste bags, and £130k on the clear recycling bags; total saving £230k annually. Residents would receive the new recycling 'bag for life' over the summer months, together with an education programme. SDC opted for the new reusable bags, over plastic bins. To have the plastic bins, SDC would need to replace its fleet of waste vehicles costing £280k each, and would not be able to maintain the weekly collections which they are keen to keep for residents.

Cllr Baker added SDC were working with Everyone Active to ensure good Leisure facilities.

Cllr Morgan had sent his apologies.

6 To adopt the following reports/minutes of meetings

6.1 Planning & Transportation Committee meeting 05 February 036/1-4; Planning Committee 26 February 039/1-2

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Planning and Transportation Committee meeting held on 05 February 036/1-4; and Planning Committee 26 February 039/1-2

6.2 Finance & Governance Committee 29 January 035/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Open Spaces Committee 12 February 035/1-3.

6.3 Open Spaces Committee 12 February 035/1-3

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the

6.4 Personnel Committee 26 February 038/1-2

Resolved: to adopt the minutes of the Personnel Committee 26 February 038/1-2.

7 To receive recommendations from Committees

7.1 Personnel Committee Recommendations

7.1.1 To award the annual pay increments for staff

Members received the Personnel Committee recommendation and unanimously,

Resolved: the award the annual pay increments for staff.

7.1.2 To continue with nominal monthly payment to one officer for additional work hours during current staff shortage

Members unanimously.

Resolved: to continue with nominal monthly payment to one officer for additional work hours during current staff shortage.

7.1.3 To continue sick pay for one employee

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support the continuation of sick pay for one employee (under its right to consider exception circumstances).

7.1.4 To receive the recommendation to move staffing surplus 2023-24 to staff reserves (est.£11k) and for Finance Committee to advise and consider actual final amount transfer

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to move any staffing surplus 2023-24 to staff reserves (est.£11k) and for Finance Committee to advise and consider actual final amount transfer at its March meeting.

7.1.5 To confirm the continuation of the Temporary Minutes Secretary

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the continuation of the Temporary Minutes Secretary for the foreseeable future during the staff shortages.

7.1.6 To confirm the appointment of temporary finance/office support

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the appointment of temporary finance/office support person for the foreseeable future during the staff shortages.

7.1.7 To confirm the drawdown on Staffing Reserves to fund the additional nonbudgeted costs for 7.1.5&6 (as needed)

Members unanimously,

Resolved: support to drawdown on Staffing Reserves to fund the additional nonbudgeted costs for 7.1.5&6 (as needed).

8 Co-options for Councillors (there are three seats vacant)

The Chairman said that there had been six applications following the recent advertisement for councillor candidates; of which one had formally withdrawn and two had not responded to attending the evening's Council meeting or submitted a statement to be read out on their behalf. He thanked the three candidates in attendance for their applications and earlier presentations (item 3). There was three vacancies for consideration under the co-option procedures. To remind Members, he referred to the co-option procedures (provided with the meeting papers): where there is more than one vacancy and the number of candidates equals the number of vacancies, all the vacancies may be filled by a single composite resolution; all applicants were listed on the ballot form and Members had up to three optional votes to exercise. The person(s) co-opted must receive an absolute majority vote of the councillors present and voting (Local Government Act 1972 Sch 12, para 39). The candidates present were Bill Cummings, Careyann Jacques, and Michael Stockdale.

8.1 To receive co-option applications and vote to fill the vacancies

Members voted and by majority ballot vote,

Resolved: to fill all three vacancies by co-option; successful candidates appointed by co-option to the Council were Bill Cummings, Careyann Jacques, and Michael Stockdale.

8.2 To receive the Councillor(s) Declaration of Acceptance of Office

Bill Cummings, Careyann Jacques, and Michael Stockdale all signed the Acceptance of Office book as Councillors of Edenbridge Town Councillor, and signed before the Town Clerk (Proper Officer).

9 To receive reports and recommendations from the Town Clerk and Officers; Working Groups; and Delegated Reports

9.1 Clerk's Report

Members noted the Clerk's report as presented with the meeting papers.

10 Draft Local Plan - update

Members noted the meeting papers and recent meeting which Cllrs Aldridge, Baker, Layland, McArthur, Todd, the Town Clerk and Planning and Admin Officer had met with two of the SDC Planning Policy Officers to discuss the draft Local Plan and concerns with it, in particular, the site allocations. It was fairly disappointing in that SDC confirmed for sites to be removed from the Plan, there would need to be sufficient new evidence to justify withdrawing a site. The site housing numbers used in the consultation were those submitted by the developer and may not be the limit to any potential application. Discussing the Infrastructure Development Plans it was agreed that town and parishes should have a say with these going forward and the Officers would make this recommendation. The Town Strategy and vision for Edenbridge High Street was also raised and it was agreed that the Council could submit amendments for consideration. The Planning Committee had since appointed a small working group and a meeting had taken place to review this and would be meeting with SDC later that month.

Other matters raised included education for the Sevenoaks district, Highways, Gypsy and Traveller site allocations, as well as concerns with the extent of the proposals for Edenbridge and the pressures this would have on existing facilities and infrastructure, despite new policies, on flooding, drainage and utilities, which would need to be addressed in the planning applications.

11 Matters arising from the minutes for report and not elsewhere on the agenda**11.1 Games Club and Involve Kent - contract renewal up to 31 March 2024 £3,000**

Members noted Involve Kent had confirmed the continuation of the contract for Games Club in the short term and the grant of £3k subject to new attendees and positive outcomes to the Games Club. Looking at 2024-25 KCC wellbeing funding cuts were expected to be 40%.

11.2 Annual Community Event - D-Day 80th Anniversary 6 June update

Members received an update on the D-Day 80th Anniversary commemorations and the Beacon Lighting at Stangrove Park on Thursday 6 June. The event supports the official event guide with lighting a beacon, bell ringing, and it was hoped to have a fish & chip van to coincide with the National Federation of Fish Friers, who have teamed up with the Pageantmaster of the D-Day 80th Anniversary to mark the important role the fish and chip industry played in feeding the nation throughout the war.

The plan for Edenbridge is to hold an evening picnic in Stangrove Park with music and the beacon lighting at official time of 9.15 pm. The Church bells will be ringing as people arrive from 6.45pm. Music at the Stangrove Park will start at 7.15/30 pm. Events will conclude with the lighting of the beacon. Local organisations are being encouraged to be part of the event, and details will be published in due course.

The office had also applied for a grant with a view to enable an event on 5 June for the older members of the community and Games Club members who may not want to be out in the evening, but would like to be involved in the D-Day 80th Anniversary commemorations. This would be similar to the community cohesion event held last year.

11.3 SDC Annual Liaison Meeting - Thursday 18 January: to receive a report

Members received the minutes from the recent SDC Liaison meeting attending by the Leader Cllr Julia Thornton, and the CEO Dr Pav Ramewal, and the Chief Officer Finance & Trading Adrian Rowbotham). Matters discussed included the Local Plan, planning challenges and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023, some local planning applications and enforcement matters, budgets, and the Leisure Centre.

11.4 Annual Town Meeting - Monday 11 March

The Chairman reminded Members the Annual Town Meeting was 11 March, and all Members were expected to attend. This agenda was published on 27 February and included Council reports, as well as reports from the KCC County Councillor, Leader of SDC, Police and local groups focusing

mostly on youth group and activities provisions.

12 OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision

12.1 EDGE Year-end support: To ratify the expenditure of £420 for online support with Financial year-end processes

Members unanimously,

Ratified: the expenditure of £420 for online support with Financial year-end processes.

12.2 Citizens Advice Edenbridge & Westerham branch: To note recent funding cuts from SDC

Members were aware of cuts in the SDC budget to its funding for Edenbridge and Westerham Citizens Advice (CAB), but were pleased to hear that recent efforts had secured £40k.

Members agreed CAB was a much valued free service to residents proving services to help with with any number of problems. The Town Council already provides an annual grant (through its grants programme) and does their payroll each month.

12.3 To receive requests from Community Groups for funding support:

12.3.1 Edenbridge Community Christmas Association: request for funding, staff resources and high street cleaning after community event

Cllr Cummings declared an interest in the ECCA.

Members received a letter from the Edenbridge Community Christmas Association (ECCA) requesting financial and manpower support to help with bringing back the Edenbridge Community Christmas Extravaganza event to the High Street during November. The ECCA had organised an event and publicity to recruit more volunteers. They had also hired Rickards Hall which they have been invoiced for, but requested for consideration to waive the hall hire fees. Members discussed at length. Cllr Baker said that she had been in touch with the group offering support providing a list of potential funders. She had also advised they apply to the Council's grants scheme (awards issued November). Members were unanimous in wanting to support the group and asked the Town Clerk to arrange a meeting.

Members did not support or agree to free hire of Rickards Hall on the grounds that it receives several requests from community groups, and the ECCA does raise money to cover its costs.

12.3.2 Eden Twinning: To receive a request for £1,300

Members received a request from Eden Twinning, a newly formed group looking to continue the work of the Edenbridge Twinning Association. They were requesting a grant from the surplus SLA funds returned by Edenbridge Twinning. Members discussed and were pleased that there was new interest to continue the relationship with Mont Saint Aignon. It was also noted that the SLA agreement (£500pa) had ceased when the ETA wound-up last year at its 50th Anniversary and that the return funds (£1,300) had been expected as the ETA had not used all of the additional funds awarded for the 50 years celebrations. Members discussed and concluded there was no detail on how a grant would be used or benefit the group, and they could make an application in the usual way to its annual grants programme later in the year. Members voted,

Resolved: not to award a grant from the returned SLA funds, and to advise they make a grant application to Council's Grants Committee (November meeting).

12.4 Cabinet for replacement for IT and electrical equipment: To consider the expenditure of £900 to include new purpose cabinet, removal of old equipment and routers and reconnections.

Members unanimously,

Resolved: the funding for a IT/electrical equipment cabinet, and reconnection costs of £900, using remaining £500 from the SharePoint project towards this.

12.5 To confirm Chairman's Reception 2024

Members unanimously,

Resolved: to support a Reception for 2024.

13 Consultations

13.1 Sevenoaks District Leisure Facilities Survey 2024

Noted.

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

None.

15 To consider any press releases

New co-opted councillors.

16 Matters for future agendas

None.

17 Date of next meeting - Annual Meeting of the Town Council - 13 May 2024

Noted.

Meeting closed 21:10.