

**Town Council**  
**21<sup>st</sup> January 2019 at 7.30pm**

Present: Councillors: K Wattingham  
D Abbott  
J Carroll  
Ms L Ellaway  
D Dixon-Wilkinson  
Mrs Y Farrell  
Ms J Hillyard  
M Kennedy  
Mrs T McMahan  
C Slough  
AS Swain  
Mrs S Thorne  
T Welch

Officers: Clare Evans Town Clerk  
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 0

**9745 APOLOGIES**

None.

**9746 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

A question from a member of the public was raised through Cllr Hillyard. The Heritage Society were concerned over the length of time renovations to Red House were taking. The question to Town Council was how do the Town Council feel about Red House as a historic building within the town, would Town Council offer any protection on Red House?

It was requested that this be placed onto the next Town Council agenda.

A question from a member of the public was raised through Cllr Dixon-Wilkinson. A member of the public had been named to the external investigator by an unnamed councillor, the member of the public would like to know the identity of the councillor who named the member of the public and their allegations to Mr Brown. There was some debate over this, however no definitive response was provided.

**9747 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

None.

**9748 MINUTES**

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To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

Matters arising from the Minutes:

Members were specifically referred to the following:

Minute 9719 from Town Council on 10<sup>th</sup> December

This item was deferred but no timescale was given on when the matter should be represented for consideration. Members were reminded that the cheque received in relation to the incorrect legal advice received as part of the claim against the council needed to be banked within 6 months of receiving it (end of February). Members instructions were requested.

It was decided that the cheque would not be banked until the outcome of the external investigation was received.

Concerns were raised regarding officers being asked to leave a previous meeting leaving no note taker present. It was suggested that measures were put in place to prevent this from happening at future meetings. During the time that officers were not present, an allegation was made relating to a report that had been submitted to council. Concerns were that there was no record of this allegation in the minutes.

It was suggested that members should have more trust in the professionalism of the Town Council officers who deal with sensitive issues regularly and suggested there was no reason to ask the Head of Democratic Services to leave as they had not had any involvement in any of the issues raised.

A review was requested of the Standing Orders to ensure officers were not barred from future meetings.

Concerns were raised regarding the suspension of Standing Orders during the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> December. It was suggested that this was actioned deliberately to prevent councillors having the proper opportunity and timescale to read and digest the information in accordance with Standing Orders.

Minute 9736 from Town Council on 20<sup>th</sup> December

An update was provided by Cllrs Abbott and Ms Hillyard on progress made to date and on the anticipated number of days the external investigation may take to complete.

Members were advised that Mr Brown had initially indicated 5 days, however Cllr Abbott and Cllr Hillyard had agreed to 5 days plus an additional 5 days if required. He had received nine questions from councillors.

Members were advised that two days had already been taken, and there were three individuals who needed to be interviewed.

Some members felt this should not have been agreed without knowing how long this would take.

Cllr Abbott advised members that the report should be completed by the end of January 2019, confirming that Mr Brown needed to look thoroughly at the advice received from the solicitor.

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**Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 10<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> December 2018.**

#### **9749 COMMITTEE MINUTES**

To receive the minutes of the following committees and consider any recommendations contained therein

Planning Committee      3<sup>rd</sup> December 2018, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2018

To receive the minutes of the following sub committee and consider any recommendations contained therein

Office Provisions Sub-Committee      11<sup>th</sup> September 2018

To receive the minutes of the following working group and consider any recommendations contained therein

New Cemetery Working Group      12<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

**Resolved: To receive the Minutes detailed above.**

#### **9750 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Members received a verbal report from the Town Mayor on events that had been attended.

The Mayor had attended fifteen events, highlights were Fire and Rescue Christingle and the visit to Mrs Moreton who, during the visit, was presented with a framed newspaper article that had been published in the Dunstable Gazette.

The Deputy Town Mayor had no updates.

#### **9751 REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS & ON TRAINING SESSIONS ATTENDED**

Members were advised that there were no updates on meetings attended of outside organisations or from training courses they have attended on behalf of the Council.

Members were advised that the Children's Centre Advisory Board was no longer operating. As such their details were removed from the list of Representatives on Outside Organisations. As the nominated representatives on this Board, Cllrs Swain and Welch had been advised of this.

#### **9752 DRAFT NHP**

Members received a report and associated appendices which presented to Town Council the draft Neighbourhood Plan for approval.

Members agreed to send a vote of thanks to the Neighbourhood Plan Committee.

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**Resolved: To approve the draft Neighbourhood Plan for formal consultation with Central Bedfordshire Council, other stakeholders and the public.**

### **9753 2019/20 BUDGET AND PRECEPT**

Members received a report on the precept and budget for 2019/20. Attached to this report was:

- Officer Draft Budget 2019/20
- Summary of Movements of Earmarked Reserves (EMR) for 2018/19 and Predicted Summary of Movements of Earmarked Reserves for 2019/20

The predicted spend and draft budget was based on ongoing projects, standard revenue items of expenditure, on aspirations included in the Vision and on officer recommendations.

The officer draft budget did not include a figure for the precept.

A concern was raised that the information presented could be confusing for a new council member, it was suggested that information be laid out in a clearer format, with large expenditures highlighted.

Members suggested that a list of skills could be compiled so that future councillors could be offered training, it was noted that councillors were offered budget training at the beginning of their term.

A possible error in the schedule of EMR's was noted, and members were advised that this would be looked into.

It was suggested that as there was a requirement to set the precept which had a deadline, this item should not be deferred. Members queried what would happen if the deadline was missed and were advised that Central Bedfordshire Council would set the precept on Houghton Regis Town Council's behalf.

A query was raised regarding the budget allowance for overtime expenditure. It was confirmed that the budget had been set at £5,000, this had overspent by £6,000.

Members were offered the opportunity to consider a deficit budget and offset funds. It was agreed that an extraordinary meeting would be held during standard office hours for further discussion.

### **9754 CBC 2019 BUDGET CONSULTATION**

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Members were formally advised that Central Bedfordshire Council had launched their budget consultation exercise and it was open for public consultation until 29<sup>th</sup> January.

A consultation document had been produced to summarise the key elements of both the draft revenue and capital budgets. Additionally, a questionnaire invited feedback on the savings strategy and the proposed 1% increase in council tax. The questionnaire would also test residents' response to a possible 2% increase.

Members were invited to consider the proposals and to submit their comments individually.

**Resolved: To note the report.**

#### **9755 UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENTS**

The purpose of this report was to seek agreement from members for delegated authority to be given to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Council, to instruct bailiffs to remove unauthorised encampments from town council land should the need arise.

**Resolved: To give delegated authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair of the Council, to instruct bailiffs to remove unauthorised encampments from town council land should the need arise.**

#### **9756 REPORT ON MAYORAL ROBES**

Members received a report and draft policy on the wearing of the ceremonial robes.

Members suggested that this policy goes to Corporate Services Committee before Town Council.

Members voted on the recommendation: Proposed by:  
Cllr Kennedy Seconded by: Cllr Welch  
In favour: 5  
Against: 7

Accordingly, the Ceremonial Robes Policy was not approved.

#### **9757 ELECTION PROMOTION**

Members were invited to consider a process for reviewing the 2015-2019 term of office and to present an election promotion process.

**Resolved: To support the review the 2015-2019 term of office and the election promotion process.**

**The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 9.00pm.**

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**Dated this 25<sup>th</sup> day of March 2019**

**Chairman**

DRAFT