

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

HELD AT THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, GROVE HOUSE, HIGH STREET NORTH, DUNSTABLE

ON MONDAY 3 FEBRUARY 2020

Present: Councillors Sid Abbott (Town Mayor), Liz Jones (Deputy Town Mayor), Wendy Bater, Lisa Bird, Mark Cant, Alan Corkhill, Philip Crawley, Greg George, Pamela Ghent, John Gurney, Peter Hollick, Gloria Martin, Cameron Restall, Gladys Sanders and Johnson Tamara

In Attendance: David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Lucy Salim (Head of Finance and Support Services) James Slack (Head of Community Services), John Crawley (Head of Grounds and Environmental Services) and Sharon Long (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies: Councillors Kenson Gurney and Lee Roberts

Public: Three

Before the commencement of the meeting, the Mayor's Chaplain, Dr Johan Schoeman led the Council in prayer.

31 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting of the Council held 2 December 2019 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

32 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific declarations of interest.

33 TOWN MAYOR'S REMARKS

The Town Mayor referred to the report detailing his attendances at a variety of events since the last meeting of the Council. He also remarked on how much he and the Mayoress had enjoyed the Christmas Charity Concert at St Mary's Church on 21 December on behalf of Noah Enterprises, the opening night at the Saracens Head on Christmas Eve and the Dunstable and District Local History Society event on 14 January.

The Town Mayor also mentioned his forthcoming charity events, namely his Quiz Night on 21 February at the Dunstable Conservative Club, his Civic Service on 8 March and his Dinner and Dance at the United Services Club on Friday, 18 April.

34 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

There were no questions put to the meeting.

35 QUESTIONS UNDER STANDING ORDER 16

There were no questions put to the meeting.

36 DUNSTABLE JOINT COMMITTEE

Councillor John Gurney indicated he had several comments on the accuracy of the minutes of the Dunstable Joint Committee meeting held on 9 January. It was agreed this would be dealt with in email correspondence with Councillor Jones, the Vice Chairman of the Dunstable Joint Committee.

Councillor Martin also requested that if in future there are addendums, that these come out at the same time as the main body of the minutes.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Dunstable Joint Committee held on 9 January 2020 be received.

37 COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Community Services Committee held on 6 January 2020 be received.

38 GROUNDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

John Crawley, the Head of Grounds and Environmental Services, gave an update on the archaeological dig that had been undertaken outside Grove House in conjunction with the works to extend the car park. The written report from the archeologists was expected shortly and would be circulated to Councillors and the public via Facebook and the Council's website.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee held on 13 January 2020 be received.

39 FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

a) Budget Proposals 2020/21 and Town Council Precept 2020/21 (Minute 24/2020)

The Chairman of Finance and General Purposes Committee, Councillor Peter Hollick, was pleased to move that the budget recommended be adopted.

He noted that 2019/2020 has been a year of staff changes. Rosemary O'Sullivan retired from her role as Head of Finance and Support Services and Responsible Financial Officer. The Council welcomed Lucy Salim in her place. Michele Markus, Democratic Services Officer, left the Council and in her place, Sharon Long had been recruited in a redefined role. The Council also welcomed two new Administrative Assistants, Helen Martin and Anne Harding.

Councillor Hollick explained that local elections were held last May. Twelve Members left the Council and nine new Councillors had been elected. The difference in figures resulted from reducing the number of councillors from 21 to 18.

He commented that this last year has seen several achievements – the Adventure Play area was opened by the Mayor and Councillor Dalgarno from Central Bedfordshire Council. Creasey Park has had a new irrigation system installed. The Jacobean Room in Priory House

has been refurbished and opened as a wedding venue. New events have been offered on the extended Ashton Square. The craft, farmers' and themed markets have seen numbers of stall holders increase. The town's success in Anglia in Bloom not only saw the Town win a Gold award for the best large town in the Anglia Region, but has seen it entered for Britain in Bloom. This latter achievement is an example of how volunteers are working with the Council to help improve the environment in which we live.

He further explained that residents voted to have a Town Council in 1985. The Council only have a duty to provide allotment gardens if the demand is unsatisfied and if reasonable. Otherwise the Council has the power to do many other things, which it does. It prides itself nonetheless on providing a range of quality services for the young (Grove Corner, activities during school holidays and a toddlers group), for the elderly (Lunch Clubs, Coffee Mornings and the Big Summer Lunch and entertainment), and for Dunstable residents generally through the Council's extensive Events Programme.

Councillor Hollick commented that none of the above happened without the input and imagination of the Councillors and the energy of the Officers delivering the services and the Council's aspirations, as set out in the Corporate Plan. He thanked the Mayor, and the support he has had from his Mayoress, the Committee Chairmen and their Deputies and Councillors for their service to the Council and their communities. He also thanked David Ashlee, The Town Clerk and Chief Executive, and the Heads of Service - Lucy Salim, James Slack and John Crawley (and Becky Wisbey who is on maternity leave) and all the other Officers who have 'made it all work'.

He explained that the Council needed money to run it, staff to keep an eye on the finances, to seek and apply for grants, staff to design and deliver the programme of events, deliver services and to maintain the gardens and floral displays.

He commented that the Council had the ability to punch above its weight in the Town and Parish sector. The High Street Heritage Action Zone (HSHAZ) grant is an example of what it was capable of doing, as well as illustrating the Council's ambition for the Town. The Council looks after two of the most important buildings in Dunstable, but it also has a shared interest with its residents to improve other buildings, such as those in Middle Row.

He explained that in deciding the budget for 2020/2021 to accomplish the Council's vision for the town, the Council are rightly looking for efficiencies. It also looked for appropriate growth which will benefit its residents. The Council's income comes from the precept, monies it earns from various activities and grants it secures. While on the one hand the Council wishes to keep its precept low, it also wants to continue to deliver the services its residents have come to expect and expand them where appropriate. It also needed to keep an eye on those areas where it gets income having set income targets. It wanted to be circumspect when considering any rise in the Dunstable council tax charge.

Councillor Hollick noted that the Council's finances continue to be in good order. The external auditor has not seen it necessary to make any recommendations. However, it did not know at this stage the outcome of the local government pay settlement. In light of this, the Council had budgeted for an overall 3 per cent increase in its wage bill.

He commented that Members in the main committees had had the opportunity to discuss, question and offer comment on those aspects of the budget pertinent to those areas, including fees and charges. Those budgets have been recommended to the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The budget now comes to full Council. The proposal is to raise the Council tax charge by just £1.79 per annum or 0.034p per week on a Band D property. Those in Band A, B or C properties will pay slightly less. This will result in issuing a precept

upon Central Bedfordshire Council of £2,369,323 which itself results in a DTC tax (Band D) at the rate of £181.11 p.a. which works out at £3.48 per week.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: i) that the budget for 2020/21, as recommended by Finance and General Purposes Committee, be approved

ii) that the Town Clerk and Chief Executive be authorised to incur the various items of expenditure detailed in the budget, subject to compliance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations

iii) that the revised scale of charges, set out in the report, be approved with effect from 1st April 2020 or the start of the 2020/21 winter playing season, as appropriate

iv) that the Town Council issue a precept upon Central Bedfordshire Council in the sum of £2,396,323 resulting in a Band D Dunstable Town Council Tax at the rate of £181.11 per annum.

Action: Town Clerk and Chief Executive

b) Draft Corporate Plan 2020 to 2023 (Minute 25/2020)

Councillor Peter Hollick was pleased to move that the draft Corporate Plan for 2020 to 2023 be adopted.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that the draft Corporate Plan for 2020 to 2023 be approved.

c) Minutes

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: that the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 20 January 2020 be received.