

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE FULL COUNCIL

HELD ON MONDAY 2 DECEMBER 2024 FROM 7:00 PM

Present: Councillors Louise O’Riordan (Town Mayor), Sally Kimondo (Deputy Town Mayor), Peter Hollick, Wendy Bater, Matthew Brennan, Philip Crawley, Liz Jones, Johnson Tamara, Gregory Alderman, Trevor Adams, Mark Davis, Matthew Neall, Michelle Henderson, Nicholas Kotarski, Richard Attwell and Robert Blennerhassett, with Paul Hodson (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Georgia Pearson (Democratic Services Manager), Rev Rachel Phillips (Mayor’s Chaplain), Lisa Scheder (Head of Corporate Services and RFO), and John Crawley (Head of Grounds and Environmental Services)

In Attendance: Becky Wisbey (Head of Community Services)
(Remotely)

Public: Nil

279/24 - Apologies for Absence

Councillor John Gurney

280/24 - To agree as a correct record the Minutes of the Council Meeting held on 30 September 2024

The minutes of the meeting of the Council held on 30 September 2024 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

281/24 - Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made

282/24 - Chair's Remarks including Civic Events and Mayoral Activities

The Town Mayor update members on the events attended since the last meeting by both her and the Deputy Mayor.

283/24 - Public Question Time

There were no questions put to the meeting

284/24 - To receive reports of the following Committees:

284.1/24 - Community Services 4 November 2024

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of

the Community Services Committee held on 4 November 2024 be received

284.2/24 - Grounds and Environmental Services 11 November 2024

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee held on 11 November 2024 be received

Councillor Hollick asked officers if the damaged planters around the town would be replaced by Central Bedfordshire Council. The Head of Grounds and Environmental Services advised members that he was liaising with the highways department to clarify this.

Councillor Hollick requested an update on the phone box refurbishment project. The Head of Grounds and Environmental Services advised that officers had recently received better quotes from companies who specialise in the refurbishment of phone boxes and that that members would be given an update once a preferred option had been identified.

284.3/24 - Finance and General Purposes 18 November 2024

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 16 September 2024 be received

285/24 - Action Tracker – to review progress of previously agreed actions

Members noted that it was agreed at the September Community Services Committee to continue to apply the Council's Market Rights Policy, and the matter was now complete.

286/24 - To receive the minutes of the Dunstable Joint Committee held on 19 September 2024 - report to follow

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised members that the minutes had yet to be received from Central Bedfordshire Council. As soon as they are available the Democratic Services Manager would circulate to all members.

287/24 - Draft Budget 2025/26

The Head of Corporate Services and RFO summarised the report. Since the report was prepared an informal meeting had been held and discussions with individual Members had taken place. Members were advised that officers would provide options for discussion based on all of the correspondence received during the next round of committee meetings.

Councillor Tamara proposed an amendment to the recommendation within the report:

"That the Council agrees to reassess its reserves and spending structure to prioritise savings and reduce its financial impact on taxpayers. To this end, I recommend the following measures for discussion within the appropriate committees:

1. Reserves Adjustment Plan: The Council should agree to build its reserves over a three-to-four-year period. By phasing the accumulation of general reserves, the maximum amount needed would not be taken in the first year of the budget. This approach would reduce the precept increase in the current year and level out the financial impact over the following years.

2. Reduction in Publication Costs: The Council should reduce the number of Talk of the Town publications from three per year to two, generating a saving of £10,137

3. Review of the 40-Year Anniversary Expenditure: The decision regarding the Council's 40th anniversary celebrations should be returned to committee for reassessment. This review should focus on identifying potential savings, especially given that financial concerns were not adequately addressed in the initial committee discussions.

4. Future of Grove House: The Finance and General Purposes Committee should review whether to proceed with developing plans to raise income from hiring the Council Chamber and wedding room for general use as well as weddings, or whether the Council should just seek to lease the space out again for 2-3 years to reduce the Council's immediate liability.

These measures aim to balance fiscal responsibility with the Council's commitment to serving its community, mitigating the immediate financial impact on taxpayers while ensuring sustainable financial planning for the future."

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: to require that the 4 items listed above be discussed and considered in the next committee cycle at the relevant committee along with any other amendment requests put forward.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: to defer this item to the next meeting.

288/24 - To receive and note the outcome of the External Audit for financial year 2023/2024

The Head of Corporate Services and RFO provided a summary to members.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: to receive and note the outcome of the External Audit for financial year 2023/2024

289/24 - Annual Town Meeting

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive summarised that the report advised members of the plans for the Annual Town Meeting which will be held in March 2025.

290/24 - Mayoral Handbook

The Town Mayor summarised the report.

Councillor Crawley suggested that the formal address for a Town Mayor be amended to something that is gender neutral, in place of “His Worship the Town Mayor” for a male Mayor, and “The Worshipful, The Town Mayor” for a female Mayor.

ACTION: the Democratic Services Manager to investigate any obstacles to adopting the suggested change.

Councillor Jones asked officers if the historic element of this document could be included in the induction pack for new Councillors.

ACTION: the Democratic Services Manager to add this into the induction pack for new Councillors.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: to formally adopt the Mayoral Handbook as a Council Policy including the amendments suggested by Councillor Crawley providing no reason is found not to do so.

291/24 - Legislation Enabling Remote Attendance and Proxy Voting

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: to agree the proposed response to the current government Consultation.

292/24 - Neighbourhood plan

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive summarised the report to members. Members discussed the recommendations in detail.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: not to progress further with a Neighbourhood Plan for Dunstable at this stage.

293/24 - Watling House

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive summarised the report.

Councillors discussed the use of the building and noted that the building is not currently in use but certainly has been in the recent past by any reasonable definition. For example, the building held a strong and important role in the community during the recent pandemic and continued to be used after the pandemic

Councillor Hollick highlighted that Watling House is historic; it used to be a station with the turntable still being present within the building.

It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED: to submit the proposed response, including a clarification that the building has been used for community benefit in the recent past.

294/24 - Motion from Councillor Richard Attwell

Councillor Jones declared an interest as an employee of the Department for Work and Pensions.

Councillor Attwell proposed that:

"Given the on-going cost of living crisis which is especially prevalent during the Christmas period when additional severe strains are placed on everyone's budget and cold weather is a prominent feature, I would like to propose that we set up a special Christmas drop-in meeting for our residents specifically towards raising awareness with this Pension Credit awareness programme in mind. I would welcome as many Councillors as possible to help me with this charitable gesture. We have the posters and leaflets attached and Grove Corner or other suitable venue could be used for setting this up as a very low-cost initiative that has the potential to help so many of our most vulnerable residents during such a meaningful time"

Members decided to host a stall in the Quadrant, if possible.

ACTION: Town Centre Manager – to speak with the quadrant to seek availability.

It was seconded and

RESOLVED: to agree the proposal

295/24 - To receive reports/updates by Members of Central Bedfordshire Council on matters of interest to the Town Council

Councillor Brennan highlighted the upcoming consultation on Central Bedfordshire Council's budget.

296/24 - Date of the next meeting - Monday 3 February 2025 at 7.00 pm

The meeting closed at 8:35 PM