



**POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held remotely in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Radstock Lane, Earley, Berkshire on Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2020 commencing at 7pm.

Present

Chair – Councillor C Jones.

Councillors A Bassett, D Chopping, J Clark, J Eastwell, D Hare, R Houlbrooke, S Matthews, and A Mickleburgh.

In attendance J Friend (Town Clerk), E Carroll (Deputy Town Clerk), R Fryer (Democratic Services Officer) and Councillor T Maher.

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The first twenty minutes of the meeting were set aside for members of the public to pose questions to the Council. There were no members of the public present.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

No apologies were received.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Chopping declared an interest in Bradshaw Bridge Club should this be relevant to any discussions under agenda item 16, Radstock Social Club. There were no other declarations of interest.

**3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Councillor Clark requested an amendment be made to Minute 70, to read ‘Councillor Clark requested...’ rather than ‘Councillor Jones requested’.

Subject to the above amendment, the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2020 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

**4. NOMINATION FOR COMMITTEE VACANCY**

Members considered the nomination of Councillor Maher to fill the vacancy on the Policy & Resources Committee. It was

**AGREED** that Councillor Maher’s nomination be presented to Full Council for ratification at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

**5. COVID-19 – GENERAL**

**5.1 Town Council**



Councillors noted that the Town Council had continued to operate throughout the lockdown and that staff had been working on a rota system to enable a safe working environment. The Committee thanked the Town Clerk for the comprehensive Covid-19 Risk Assessment that had been provided to Councillors. It was noted that the Risk Assessment was a live document and would be amended as and when necessary. Councillors requested that they remain updated on significant changes and recommended that the Risk Assessment become a regular agenda item for Full Council meetings.

5.2 Help Shop

It was noted that the Earley Town Council Help Shop was currently closed to visitors in person but that staff had been available, throughout the lockdown, to assist residents by telephone and email. Staff had been advising residents in line with Wokingham Borough Council's own advice. Councillors were keen to open the Help Shop to visitors in person as soon as practicable and the Town Clerk reported that, prior to a physical reopening, a number of factors would need to be considered and addressed, including staff health and safety matters. It was recognised that until Wokingham Borough Council re-opened its cash office and resumed some form of courier service, the Help Shop would be unable to provide many of its key services. Councillor Maher agreed to make enquiries about the Borough's plans for resuming the courier service and the Town Clerk agreed to produce a report by the end of June, on a proposal to re-open the Help Shop to visitors in person.

6. **COVID-19 – FINANCIAL IMPACT**

As per the agenda, this item was considered in confidential session.

7. **FINANCIAL IMPACT LETTER FROM WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

Members considered the letter that had been received from the Deputy Leader of Wokingham Borough Council, regarding the Local Government Covid-19 funding which had been made available by the Government. Consideration was also given to the letter received from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, dated 30<sup>th</sup> April, which confirmed that both tranches of the additional Government funding to councils included an element of funds for parish and town councils.

Councillors debated how best to respond, and Members noted that the financial reports provided by the Town Clerk gave the Council a good foundation on which to provide a strongly argued factual response, setting out potential savings and likely losses. It was noted that Earley Town Council differs from many town and parish councils in the Borough in that it is usually in receipt of substantial alternate sources of income, ie hall hire, rather than just precept funding, and that these sources of income had been significantly impacted by the pandemic restrictions. Consideration was also given to the fact that the Town Council employs its own staff, rather than relying on outside contractors, and therefore the staffing bill, as furloughing is not an available option, would absorb a significant proportion of the precept funding. It was unanimously

**RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk would draft a letter of response, setting out the Town Council's position, which will be circulated to the Committee for comment before submission.

8. **CIL CO-FUNDING**



Councillors discussed the request from Wokingham Borough Council that the Town Council commit some of its CIL reserves to co-fund a flood risk management scheme. Members were mindful that this request came during a period of financial restriction and noted that CIL funds could only be used for certain purposes. The Chair reported that, in his view, an offer to support the project financially would make a tremendous difference to the success of the Borough Council's bid. The Town Clerk advised that, in recent communications, the Borough had indicated a willingness to improve communications with town and parishes, and she offered to try to arrange a presentation to the Committee on the project so they would have more information. The Chair felt this might not be possible and, although not unanimous, it was

**RESOLVED** that the Town Council should, in principle, allocate some of its CIL reserves to co-fund the Borough's flood risk management scheme.

**9. FINANCE - GENERAL**

**9.1 Berkshire Association of Local Councils Membership**

The Town Clerk reported that BALC were no longer operating and that some of its services were now being provided by the Hampshire Association of Local Councils (HALC). It was noted that membership of BALC was the only means of access to the National Association of Local Councils (NALC), and that this access was not available to Berkshire councils which join HALC directly rather than through BALC. Members agreed that, given the current circumstances, there was an increased likelihood of the Town Council needing the support of NALC. It was therefore unanimously

**RESOLVED** that the Town Council's membership of BALC be continued for a further twelve months and then reviewed.

**9.2 Precept Leaflet**

It was noted that the Earley Town Council Precept Leaflet 2020/21 had been posted on the Town Council's website and a link provided to Wokingham Borough Council as required.

**9.3 Internal Audit**

Councillors thanked the staff involved in this work, their efforts had resulted in a much improved, positive internal audit interim report, part 2. The Town Clerk confirmed that, due to Covid-19 restrictions, no date had yet been agreed for the auditor's final visit, but it would be concluded in time for the report to be provided at the Full Council meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

The Town Clerk also reported that the Senior Operations Support Officer had been training the new Finance Officer and that the Town Council was working to a high standard in relation to financial regulations. Members noted that the updating of the Council's Financial Regulations is scheduled for the near future.

**9.4 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)**

The Committee noted that, as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on local councils, the deadline for submission of the AGAR to the external auditors had been extended



to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2020, and that the Town Council's final accounts and its AGAR would be presented to Council for sign off at the Full Council meeting of 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

9.5 Bank Reconciliations

The Committee noted that the March 2020 and April 2020 Bank Reconciliations had been provided to the Chair of Policy & Resources for information.

10. GRANTS

It was noted that the grants agreed at the Council meeting of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020 had been paid, and that letters of thanks had been received from many of the grant recipients.

11. ORDERS FOR PAYMENT

Members received details of Orders for Payment since the last meeting of the Town Council (Vouchers 3137 – 3149) and Imprest Account (Vouchers 456-474).

12. PUBLICATIONS

No publications had been received.

13. PRESS RELEASES

No press releases were requested.

14. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS

There were no members of the public or press present. It was agreed that the remaining items on the Agenda be taken under Part II.

PART II

15. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

16. RADSTOCK SOCIAL CLUB

17. CENTREPOINT HIRER – AFTER SCHOOL CLUB

18. FORMER TOWN CLERK

19. STAFF MATTERS

20. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 9.26 pm.

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Chair, Policy & Resources Committee