



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Earley Town Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Radstock Lane on Wednesday 7th February 2024 which commenced at 7.00pm.

Present

Chair – The Town Mayor, Councillor C Smith

Councillors: R Ahlawat, A Bassett, A Bradley, N, Brock, R Browne, R Cook, J Eastwell, M de Jong, D Hare, T Holton, M Iyengunmwena, S Jordan, P Jorgensen, N Jorgensen, I Khayinza, G Littler, A Long, T Maher, S Matthews, A Neal, B Owen and H Sarasan.

In Attendance: J Friend (Town Clerk) and E Carroll (Deputy Town Clerk).

106. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Newton and M Smith.

107. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

108. PUBLIC FORUM

No members of the public were present.

109. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of Earley Town Council (Minutes 81 – 105) held on Wednesday 22nd November 2023 were a true and correct record and could be signed by the Chair.

110. TOWN MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION

110.1 Councillors received a written report from the Town Mayor detailing the events she had recently attended. These included JAC's AGM, Sue Ryder's "Celebrate a Life", Earley St Peter's Church Carol Service, Link Visiting's Christmas Special Event and the Service of Institution, Induction and Installation of the Reverend Kate Wakeman-Toogood at Earley St Peter's Church. The Town Mayor also thanked ETC Officers for organising the Mayor's Reception, held on 4th January 2024, an event she had very much enjoyed.

110.2 Councillors noted that the Deputy Town Mayor, Councillor M de Jong, had attended the Wokingham Borough Schools Carol Concert at Loddon Valley Leisure Centre on 10th December 2023, an event attended by many schools from across the borough.

111. COMMITTEE REPORTS

111.1 Amenities and Leisure Committee

Councillor Brock presented the draft Minutes of the Amenities and Leisure Committee meeting (Minutes 75 - 90) held on 17th January 2024. The Council received the draft Minutes.

Councillor Brock requested an update on the cemetery extension project and was informed by the Town Clerk that the Council was still waiting on communication from the Diocese before any further progress could be made. The Diocese has informed ETC that the matter is currently with the Bishop.

111.2 Planning Committee

Councillor Brock presented the Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting (Minutes 91 - 107) held on 5th December 2023. The Council received the Minutes.

Councillor Brock presented the draft Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting (Minutes 108 - 122) held on 9th January 2024. The Council received the Minutes.

111.3 Policy and Resources Committee

Councillor Hare presented the draft Minutes of the Policy and Resources Committee meeting (Minutes 80 - 94) held on 24th January 2024. The Council received the draft Minutes.

112. REPRESENTATIVES ON OTHER BODIES

112.1 Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG)

Councillors received a written report from Councillor de Jong on her attendance at the NAG meeting held on 15th January 2024.

112.2 Kenton Road Day Centre

Councillors received a written report from Councillor Bassett on her attendance at the Kenton Road Day Centre meeting held on 23rd January 2024. Councillor Bassett expressed her concern that the centre remains under used although it is trying to attract more visitors.

113. ANNUAL FEES & CHARGES REVIEW 2024/25

Members considered the recommendations of the Amenities and Leisure Committee with regards to annual fees and charges for the financial year 2024/2025.

The recommendations were discussed and Members voted (18 - for, 1 – against, 4 – abstentions) in favour of the recommendations. It was: -

RESOLVED that the following changes would take effect as of 1st April 2024, except for the changes to Culver Lane Allotment fees/charges, which would take effect as of 1st January 2025:

Mays Lane Cemetery

There will be no increase to fees/charges for 2024/2025 except for the following:

- Transfer of Exclusive Right of Burial – increase from £62 to £100
- 10-year extension to Exclusive Right of Burial – increase from £40 to £100

Culver Lane Allotments

There will be an increase of 50p/£1 to each class of plot, depending on size, and an increase of £1 to the cost of membership of the Horticultural Society. These increases to take effect as of 1st January 2025.

Hall Hire

A new 'parties' (children) charge of £22.00 per hour will be introduced. All other charges will remain unchanged for 2024/25.

Fishing Permits

There will be no increase to the charge for fishing permits for 2024/25. Councillors also noted that HMRC legislation has changed and VAT is no longer payable on fishing permits.

Sports Pitch Hire

There will be no increase to football pitch hire charges but there will be a 20% increase to charges for cricket pitch hire in 2024/25. This will bring ETC more in line with other providers and go some way to offsetting the maintenance costs of the cricket facilities.

114. BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2024/25

114.1 Town Council Budget 2024/25

Councillors considered the proposed Budget for financial year 2024/25 as recommended by the Policy & Resources Committee. Councillor N Jorgensen raised a query in relation to an income figure on the budget document and a 10-minute adjournment was agreed to allow the Town Clerk time to check the figures.

The Town Clerk left the meeting

The Town Clerk re-entered the meeting.

The Town Clerk reported that a formatting error in the spreadsheet had led to an incorrect income figure being included. This had now been rectified and Councillors were provided with amended copies of the figures.

It was **RESOLVED** unanimously that the proposed Budget 2024/25 be approved.

114.2 Town Council Precept 2024/25

Members considered the recommendation from the Policy and Resources Committee that a 0% increase be applied to the Town Council Precept for 2024/25.

It was **RESOLVED** unanimously that a 0% increase be applied to the Town Council Precept for 2024/25. The precept for 2024/25 to be set at £1,007,815.

115. CHARITY EVENT

Councillors received a written report from the Town Clerk on a request from the Link Visiting Scheme to hold a joint fundraising event with the Town Mayor, Councillor Caroline Smith in April 2024. After a discussion, Councillors agreed the request in principle but asked that Link Visiting consider reviewing the food costs and raising additional funds through a raffle. ETC would also be willing to contribute a raffle prize. Members agreed that ETC's contribution towards the joint event be funded from the Events budget. Cllr C Smith suggested that she contact the organiser directly to agree on the best way forward.

116. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2024/25

Members considered the Town Clerk’s report suggesting that committee meeting cycles be reduced from six cycles per year to five (excluding Planning Committee meetings which would continue at monthly intervals) and the number of Full Council meetings per year be reduced from seven per year to six. Councillors suggested that this reduction in the number of formal meetings held could be supplemented by updates being emailed to councillors, a practice adopted during the pandemic.

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed meeting schedule for 2024/25, including the reductions, be approved.

117. GRANTS POLICY

Councillors considered the revised Grants Policy as recommended by the Policy & Resources Committee. It was: -

RESOLVED that, with the addition of a reference to the meetings of the Policy & Resources Committee, the revised Grants Policy be adopted.

118. CIVILITY & RESPECT PLEDGE

The Town Clerk provided Members with a recap on the Civility & Respect Pledge, something the Town Council had signed up to in May 2023. It was noted that the pledge promotes mutual respect between officers, councillors and members of the public.

119. COUNCILLORS’ ATTENDANCE

Record of Members’ Attendance

Councillors noted the details of Councillors' attendance during 2023/24 at meetings of the Council and its Committees.

120. ORDERS FOR PAYMENT

Members noted the details of Orders for Payment (Vouchers 6471 – 6477, 6478 – 6532 and 6533 - 6551 and Imprest vouchers 918 - 919).

121. PUBLICATIONS

Councillors noted that the following publications had been received and are available for perusal from the Council Offices:

Friendship Alliance	E-newsletter January 2024
Involve Community Services	E-newsletter 26 th January 2024

122. PRESS RELEASES, WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

The following press releases and posts were agreed:

- New Grants Policy
- Precept for 2024/25

- Fees & Charges 2024/25

123. 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

124. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

125. COMMITTEE REPORTS

126. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 7.56pm.

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Town Mayor