



EARLEY TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Earley Town Council held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Radstock Lane on Wednesday 7th May 2025 which commenced at 7.00pm.

Present

Chair – The Town Mayor, Councillor N Brock

Councillors: R Ahlawat, A Bassett, A Bradley, R Browne, R Cook, M De Jong, J Eastwell, D Hare, T Holton, M Iyengunmwena, S Jordan, P Jorgensen, I Khayinza, G Littler, A Long, S Matthews, A Neal, S Newton, B Owen, C Smith and M Smith

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

1. ELECTION OF A TOWN MAYOR

- 1.1 The outgoing Town Mayor, Councillor Mike Smith said it had been an honour and a privilege to have served Earley as Town Mayor. He had enjoyed meeting many people and engaging with local charities and organisations, especially his chosen charity Daisy’s Dream.

The outgoing Town Mayor thanked councillors, his wife, the Town Clerk and officers for their support during his year and expressed a hope that future Mayors will continue to promote the role of the Town Mayor.

- 1.2 The outgoing Town Mayor called for nominations for the office of Town Mayor for the municipal year 2025/26. A nomination for Councillor Nicola Brock was received, this was proposed and seconded. There were no other nominations. It was:

RESOLVED unanimously that Councillor Nicola Brock be elected to the office of Town Mayor (Chair of the Council) for the municipal year 2025/26.

- 1.3 The newly elected Town Mayor signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office, received the Chain of Office from Councillor M Smith and assumed the position of Chair.

2. ELECTION OF DEPUTY TOWN MAYOR

- 2.1 The Town Mayor called for nominations for the office of Deputy Town Mayor for the municipal year 2025/26. A nomination for Councillor Melanie De Jong was received, this was proposed and seconded. There were no other nominations. It was:

RESOLVED unanimously that Councillor Melanie De Jong be elected to the office of Deputy Town Mayor for the municipal year 2025/26.

- 2.2 The Town Mayor presented the Deputy Town Mayor with the Chain of Office.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors T Maher and H Sarasan.

4. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

5. **PUBLIC FORUM**

There were no members of the public present.

6. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the Town Council meeting held on Wednesday 26th March 2025 (Minutes 105 – 127) were a true and correct record and could be signed by the Chair.

7. **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

7.1 **Planning Committee**

Councillor M Smith presented the Minutes of the Planning Committee meeting (Minutes 154 - 171) held on 8th April 2025. The Council received the Minutes.

8. **APPOINTMENTS**

8.1 **Leader of the Council**

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Leader of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 5n (v and vii). One nomination was proposed and seconded. It was:

RESOLVED that Councillor David Hare be appointed Leader of the Council. There were 4 abstentions and 1 vote against.

8.2 **Deputy Leader of the Council**

The Chair called for nominations for the position of Deputy Leader of the Council in accordance with Standing Order 5n (vi and viii). One nomination was proposed and seconded. It was:

RESOLVED that Councillor Mike Smith be appointed Deputy Leader of the Council. There were 4 abstentions and 1 vote against.

9. **STANDING COMMITTEES**

9.1 It was **RESOLVED** that the following Standing Committees shall continue in municipal year 2025/26:

- Amenities & Leisure Committee
- Policy & Resources Committee
- Planning Committee

9.2 **Membership of Standing Committees**

Members noted that in accordance with Standing Order 4(d) the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor shall be ex officio members of all Committees, this being in addition to the number of committee places fixed by Council.

Members considered the membership of the Standing Committees and it was:-

RESOLVED that

- a) the vacancy on the Policy & Resources Committee would remain vacant until after the by-election and that
- b) Councillor D Hare would become a member of the Planning Committee.

9.3 Chairs of Standing Committees

It was noted that, under Standing Order (4e.vii), the Committees would appoint their own chair at the first meeting of the committee.

10. **REPRESENTATIVES ON OTHER BODIES**

10.1 Kenton Road Day Centre

Members received a written report from Councillor Bassett on her attendance at a meeting on 2nd April 2025.

10.2 Wokingham Borough Parish Liaison Forum

Members received a written report from Councillor Browne on his attendance at the Wokingham Borough Parish Liaison Forum on 7th April 2025.

- 10.3 Members noted that Appendix D relating to the Town Council's representation on other bodies contained some inaccuracies: University of Reading – representatives being Councillor D Hare and the Town Clerk, had been omitted; Councillor M Smith and Councillor R Browne are the representatives on the Wokingham Borough Parish Liaison Forum; and the Mid & West Berkshire Local Access Forum, More Arts and the Queen Victoria Institute Fund no longer have town council representatives and are to be removed from the list. It was: -

RESOLVED that the current representation on other bodies, with amendments as noted above, be approved.

11. **DEEDS**

Councillors noted that the various deeds relating to the Council's interests in land are held by the Town Clerk as Proper Officer and are available for Members' inspection. It was noted that Councillor G Littler and Councillor S Jordan have recently carried out an inspection of said deeds.

12. **FINANCE**

12.1 Financial Statements 2024/25

Members received the financial statements prepared by the Finance Officer, 'Unaudited Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 March 2025'. Members **RESOLVED** that this document be signed by the Chair.

12.2 Internal Auditor's Report

- 12.2.1 Members received the internal auditor's written report for the year ended 31st March 2025.

- 12.2.2 Members received the internal auditor's completed Annual Internal Audit Report 2024/25, page 3 of the AGAR 2024/25.

12.3 AGAR 2024/25 – Annual Governance Statement 2024/25

Members reviewed 'Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2024/25' and agreed the entries.

It was: -

RESOLVED that ‘Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2024/25’ be completed and signed.

12.4 AGAR 2024/25 – Accounting Statements 2024/25

Members reviewed ‘Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2024/25’ and it was: -

RESOLVED that ‘Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2024/25’ be signed.

13. **COMMUNITY INFRASTRUCTURE LEVY**

Councillors noted that in accordance with Earley Town Council’s agreement to support local bus services, a third and final payment of £1,293.21 from ETC CIL funds was made to Wokingham Borough Council in April 2025.

14. **ETC STRATEGY MEETINGS**

Councillors received a written report on the first ETC Strategy meeting held on 1st April 2025 between the Chair, the Leader of the Council, Committee Chairs and the Town Clerk. Future monthly meetings will aim to improve communication within the Council and councillors may request, via a Committee Chair, that a particular matter be brought to a Strategy Meeting.

15. **NET ZERO PROJECT**

Members received a report on plans for improving the energy efficiency and reducing the carbon footprint of Maiden Place Community Centre. Councillor D Hare proposed that a Working Group be formed to work on the project and it was: -

RESOLVED that a Working Group be formed. Membership to be Councillors J Eastwell, M Iyengunmwena, A Neal and M Smith, as well as the Town Clerk and the Operations Manager. The Working Group will examine the results of surveys and other information and will recommend on a plan of action. The Group will report to Policy and Resources Committee in the first instance, it will be granted the power to spend up to £20,000 to undertake any small-scale works required to assist with its deliberations and will elect a Chair at its first meeting.

16. **COUNCILLORS’ ATTENDANCE**

Record of Members’ Attendance

Councillors noted the details of Councillors’ attendance during 2024/25 at meetings of the Council and its Committees.

17. **ORDERS FOR PAYMENT**

Members noted the details of Orders for Payment since the last meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee (*Vouchers 7657 – 7684, 7677, 7678 – 7695, 7696 – 7708, 7709 – 7739 and 7740 – 7747 and Imprest vouchers 1052 – 1060*).

18. **PUBLICATIONS**

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

Office of the PCC	E-newsletter March 2025
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MERA	Minutes of meeting 13 th March & 10 th April 2025
Involve Community Services	E-newsletter 26 th April 2025
Connecting Communities Berkshire (CCB)	E-newsletter April 2025
Friendship Alliance	E-newsletter 2 nd April 2025
Earley NAG	Agenda for meeting 19 th May 2025

19. PRESS RELEASES, WEBSITE & SOCIAL MEDIA

The following press releases/website posts were requested: -

- The election of the new Town Mayor and the new Deputy Town Mayor

20. 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

21. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

22. COMMITTEE REPORTS

23. RADSTOCK LANE COMMUNITY CENTRE LEASE

It was proposed that this item be removed from Part II and be discussed in open meeting. Members agreed and **RESOLVED** accordingly.

Councillors received a written report following communication sent by Wokingham Borough Council to Councillor Hare, at his Wokingham borough councillor email address and cc'd to the Town Clerk, regarding Radstock Primary School becoming part of the Orchard Learning Alliance Academy.

The communication stated that Earley Town Council's lease for land and buildings on the site was to be transferred to the Academy. It went on to say that this transfer would take place in early Autumn 2025. The communication claimed that it was too difficult to separate ETC's lease for the community centre from the rest of site, hence WBC's decision to transfer it all to the Academy.

Councillors were deeply disappointed that WBC had not contacted the Town Council directly to discuss any of its plans in this regard, a courtesy that should have been afforded to ETC. The correspondence to the borough councillor states that ETC will have a new landlord but there has been no attempt to provide contact details or such like. Members also expressed concerns that WBC were granting the Academy a 125 year lease on the Radstock Lane School site whereas the Town Council's lease on the community centre on that site is due to expire in 2043, what future would this well used community centre have in that scenario?

Councillors were in agreement that a strongly worded letter be written to Wokingham Borough Council and that Earley Town Council should take legal advice on matters involving its lease with WBC.

It was **RESOLVED** that: -

- Officers will write to WBC’s Chief Executive, Susan Parsonage, the Deputy Chief Executive & Director of Resources & Assets, Graham Ebers, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Stephen Conway and Head of Estates, Craig Hoggeth expressing Earley Town Council’s disgust that ETC has not been consulted or informed of the matter directly. The letter will express town councillors’ incredulity that WBC has again failed to communicate directly with Earley Town Council on serious matters which directly impact its land and assets. ETC will remind the recipients of the letter that WBC has publicly claimed that it is committed to improving working relationships with town and parish councils but has again demonstrated that this pledge is not carried through to its officer actions. The Council will express its hopes that the poor treatment of ETC during WBC’s transfer of the Silverdale building is not repeated during WBC’s transfer of Radstock Primary School to the Academy.
- Legal advice on the matter will be sought, to clarify the Town Council’s position and to seek to protect this valuable asset for the community.
- Future information on this matter will be in the open section of meetings and not in confidential session.

Confidential session resumed.

24. PLANNING ADVISOR

25. TERMINATION OF MEETING

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 8.02pm

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Town Mayor