

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held virtually via Skype at 10.30 am on Wednesday, 8 July 2020

PRESENT:

The Mayor Councillor James Scholes (Chairman)

Councillors Rutland, Atkins, Atwood, Backhouse, Barrington-King, Bailey, Bland, Bruneau, Chapelard, Mrs Cobbold, Dawlings, Everitt, Funnell, Dr Hall, Hamilton, Hayward, Hickey, Hill, Holden, Lewis, Lidstone, Mackonochie, March, McDermott, Morton, Neve, Noakes, Ms Palmer, Podbury (Vice-Chairman), Poile, Pope, Pound, Rands, Reilly, Scott, Simmons, Mrs Soyke, Stanyer, Thomson, Warne, Williams, Willis and Woodward

IN ATTENDANCE: William Benson (Chief Executive), Jane Clarke (Head of Policy and Governance), Patricia Narebor (Head of Legal Partnership) and Mark O'Callaghan (Scrutiny and Engagement Officer)

IN MEMORIAM STANLEY WARD AND LEN HORWOOD

FC1/20 The Council observed a minute silence as a mark of respect following the death of former Mayor Stanley Ward and former Mayor Len Horwood. Stanley served as a Councillor for Paddock Wood from 1983 to 2015 and was Mayor in 2002-03. Len served as a Councillor for Pantiles and St. Mark's since 1992 and was Mayor in 2018-19.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC2/20 Apologies were received from Councillors Ellis, Fairweather and Mrs Thomas.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 26 FEBRUARY 2020

FC3/20 Councillor Pound proposed an amendment to the minutes which was put to the vote.

RESOLVED –

1. That minute FC93/19 be amended to delete "Consent to the closure motion was inferred by the taking of the vote on the procedure motion" and replace with "The vote on the closure motion was inadvertently missed and the meeting moved to the procedural motion vote"; and
2. That, subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting dated 26 February 2020 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC4/20 Councillor Bruneau declared a 'Disclosable Pecuniary Interest' and recused herself from FC9/20 on the basis of her connection to Clean Slate Counselling which provided services to the Council under the Community Safety Partnership.

Councillor Hamilton noted that she was a member of Kent County Council which was a partner of the Council in respect of FC9/20 but that this did not constitute a prejudicial interest.

TEMPORARY CHANGES TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES

FC5/20 Councillor McDermott moved, and Councillor Dawlings seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

Discussion included the following comments:

- The changes set out in the report had been proposed several weeks before the meeting. Group Leaders had previously indicated their support.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED –

1. That the changes to Council Procedure Rules as noted in section 3 of the report be agreed;
2. That the Protocol for Remote Public Meetings, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be noted; and
3. That delegated authority be given to the Monitoring Officer, in consultation with the Mayor and Group Leaders, to adjust and amend the Protocol to facilitate the Council's arrangements relating to remote Council and committee meetings, when appropriate to do so.

ELECTION OF THE MAYOR AND DEPUTY MAYOR

FC6/20 The Chief Executive took the Chair for the election of the Mayor.

Councillor Scholes nominated, and Councillor McDermott seconded, that Councillor Podbury be elected Mayor.

There being no other nominations, the Chief Executive took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Podbury be elected Mayor of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells until the date of the Annual Meeting 2021.

Councillor Podbury nominated, and Councillor McDermott seconded, that Councillor Woodward be appointed Deputy Mayor.

There being no other nominations, the Chief Executive took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED – That Councillor Woodward be appointed Deputy Mayor of the Borough of Tunbridge Wells until the date of the Annual Meeting 2021.

The signing of the Declaration of Acceptance of Office by the Mayor and Deputy Mayor would take place in due course.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

FC7/20 The Mayor advised that one question from a member of the public had been received under Council Procedure Rule 8 (as amended). The question was

answered in writing.

1. Question from Mr Terry Cload, Royal Tunbridge Wells

“Cricket is an extremely important recreational summer activity for the Borough of Tunbridge Wells. Less than half the season remains. The wickets at the Nevill Ground and throughout the towns and villages of the Borough are in pristine condition screaming out for action.

Can the Council confirm that there will be not a moment’s delay on the Council’s part in facilitating the resumption of cricket at the Nevill Ground once the government gives the all-clear? Can the Council also use its good offices to assist in the rapid resumption of cricket in the towns and villages of the Borough when that happens?”

Answer from Councillor March

“Yes. We recognise the importance of sport to residents of the Borough and have continued to maintain all of our grounds to ensure that sports including cricket can resume when the various guidance allows it.

Following the government’s announcement last week recreational cricket can restart on 11 July, the Nevil Ground, for which the council is responsible, is in perfect condition thanks to the Sodexo grounds staff and we look forward to welcoming the players back.

Whilst we can’t speak for parish and town councils we do speak to them on a regular basis to offer help and advice and we will be publishing the cricket guidance when it becomes available.”

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

FC8/20 The Mayor advised that one question from a member of the Council had been received under Council Procedure Rule 10 (as amended). The question was answered in writing.

1. Question from Councillor Mark Ellis

“As the town hall is shortly to reopen, when is the council going to return to holding evening committee meetings to ensure an equitable balance between working and non-working members?”

Answer from Councillor McDermott

“To be clear, the Town Hall is only re-opening for a limited number of staff in line with government advice on workplaces. It will be some time before it is fully re-opened and before physical meetings can take place.

As for when meetings take place, I have had mixed views put to me on this. I have asked council officers to undertake a survey of members to understand when people are able to attend but we need to understand that evening meetings raise a number of issues in terms of cost and complexity and I am also conscious that officers who have been working without a break for the past 100 days often use evenings either to catch up on work or to catch up with their families.”

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2020/21

FC9/20 Councillor Mackonochie moved, and Councillor McDermott seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

The report was taken as read.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion.

RESOLVED – That the Community Safety Partnership Plan 2020/21 be approved.

NOTICE OF USE OF THE URGENCY PROCEDURES

FC10/20 Councillor Podbury moved, and Councillor Woodward seconded, the recommendations set out in the notice on the agenda.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED –

1. That the use of the Call-In and Urgency Procedure in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14 in respect of the Delegated Officer Decision: Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Covid-19) made on 14 March 2020 be noted; and
2. That the use of (a) the Special Urgency procedure in accordance with Access to Information Procedure Rule 16 and (b) the Call-In and Urgency procedure in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14 both in respect of Cabinet Decision: Affordable Housing Commuted Sums – Former Council Offices in Cranbrook made on 25 June 2020 be noted.

CHANGES TO THE POLITICAL BALANCE OF THE COUNCIL

FC11/20 Councillor Dawlings moved, and Councillor McDermott seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

Debate on the motion included the following comments:

- The Member briefings that had taken place over the last few months had been very successful. Decisions regarding topics for discussion were a matter for the Leader and the Chief Executive.
- Councillor Neve was showing as a member of the Planning Committee – this was incorrect and his name should be removed.
- Appointments to committees could be amended outside the meeting.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion.

RESOLVED –

1. That the allocation of seats on committees as set out in paragraph 2.12 of the report be approved;
2. That the changes to the appointments to committees as set out at

Appendix A to the report be noted; and

3. That the appointments to Working Groups of Cabinet and the allocation of Cabinet Portfolios made by the Leader of the Council as set out at Appendices B and C to the report be noted.

CROSS-PARTY MOTION ON NOTICE ON COVID-19

FC12/20 Councillor McDermott moved, and Councillor Chapelard seconded the motion set out in the report.

Debate on the motion included the following comments:

- The motion was moved on behalf of all political groups of the Council.
- Local Councils were among the unsung heroes of this crisis. Councils across the country had been working tirelessly to meet the needs of residents and businesses and to show how it can respond to an emergency.
- Thanks were given to officers and contractors who helped keep Council services running and to business and community group who stepped up to help the community.
- Businesses had helped support charities and voluntary groups, they now needed help from government and from people shopping locally.
- There was a need to ensure that Central Government continued to support at the local level and provide the financial assistance required.
- There had been some positives to come out of a bad situation included a willingness of people to support each other and work together. It was hoped this would continue.
- The efforts and support extended across the entire Borough with the hard work of the parish and town councils.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion.

RESOLVED – That this Council sincerely thanks all those who have helped those affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic – frontline workers in health and social care, education, businesses, voluntary and community organisations, residents, community groups and the Council’s own staff and contractors. It calls upon government to provide the Council and its partners with the resources we need to promote a safe and effective recovery and for residents to continue supporting local businesses.

URGENT BUSINESS

FC13/20 There was no urgent business.

COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL

FC14/20 Councillor Podbury moved, and Councillor Woodward seconded, the recommendation set out in the notice on the agenda.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED – That the Common Seal of the Council be affixed to any

contract, minute, notice or other document arising out of the minutes or pursuant to any delegation, authority or power conferred by the Council.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

FC15/20 The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 23 September 2020.

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at 11.30 am.