

## TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held at the Virtual Meeting - Online, at 6.30 pm on Wednesday, 21 April 2021

### PRESENT:

**The Mayor Joy Podbury (Chairman)**

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

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

### APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC69/20      There were no apologies.

### MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING DATED 03 FEBRUARY 2021

FC70/20      **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting dated 03 February 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING DATED 24 FEBRUARY 2021

FC71/20      **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting dated 24 February 2021 be approved as a correct record.

### DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC72/20      No declarations of pecuniary or other significant interest were made.

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

FC73/20      The Mayor announced:

- Details of Mayoral activities would be circulated with the Members' Newsletter.

The Mayor and Leader of the Council thanked those who would be leaving the Council at the forthcoming elections for their years of service, especially Councillors Neve, Mrs Thomas and Williams who had been councillors for a very long time.

The Portfolio Holder for Culture, Leisure and Economic Development announced:

- The Amelia Scott would benefit from Arts Council England funded commissions to elevate normal everyday aspects of the building to works of art for all to enjoy.

The Portfolio Holder for Sustainability announced:

- No idling zone signs had been installed in cooperation with KCC. Further sites were being investigated.

- The Council had received a grant from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for £103k to create digital educational materials for children on the importance of air quality.
- The electricity generation grid nationally set new records over the Easter period for renewable energy contributing to the Council's energy saving targets.

The Portfolio Holder for Finance and Governance announced:

- Covid-19 had caused extraordinary demands on the Council's staff.
- During the first national lockdown, business grants totalling £28 million were paid to small businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors.
- Following restrictions in November 2020, further targeted grants had been introduced.
- When the current allocations were complete the Council would have delivered grants to over 9,000 small businesses totalling more than £51 million.
- Mid Kent Audit Services had been shortlisted by the Institute of Internal Audit for Outstanding Team in the Public Sector. Winners would be announced on 25 June.

The Portfolio Holder for Communities and Wellbeing announced:

- Emergency housing had been provided to 140 single people or couples due to Covid-19 in addition to those with a priority need under the homelessness legislation. 119 of these had since left emergency housing and 21 single people still remain in emergency housing on a temporary basis.
- Work on six units in Crescent Road was nearing completion which would provide accommodation for those leaving emergency housing whilst finding a more permanent residence.

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

FC74/20 The Mayor advised that eight questions from members of the public had been received under Council Procedure Rule 8.

### **1. Question from Michael Tapp**

"I understand the unfortunate need for new housing in the South East but we must balance this with protecting the environment and combating climate change. Can we expect to see every new house built with solar panels on the roofs, electric charging points in the driveways and the highest standards of insulation? This will cost developers less than retrospective fitting and will help balance our impact on the environment."

### **Answer from Councillor McDermott**

"The Pre-Submission Local Plan, currently subject to Regulation 19 consultation, recognises the mitigation of climate change to be a priority when planning for future growth. The Plan incorporates strategic planning on climate change (STR7) and also has specific development management policies to cover these (EN1, EN2 and EN3). Policy EN3 in particular, incorporates specific targets regarding the provision of renewable energy technologies such as solar panels and the energy performance of new buildings. Until central government provides an uplift to current building

regulations, these policies ensure that housing is built to a far higher standard than is required. Electrical vehicle charging points are expected to be mandatory in all relevant new developments and this requirement is detailed most clearly under policy EN21. The Local Plan will also give benefits such as net gains for biodiversity, dark skies, active travel (which includes walking, cycling and horse riding), infrastructure to broadband and importantly lets people start on the housing ladder with more affordable homes or, for those wanting rent, social housing.”

### **Supplementary question from Michael Tapp**

“I have had the pleasure of perusing EN2, EN3, etc. so I was aware of much of what you said. I also did pick up the Council are going to be using a green method for carbon offsetting. Have you considered, as a Council, using the passive house standard that we have seen work so effectively across other councils (Leicester, Norwich, Fife, Lewisham to name but a few)? Essentially what that does is lowers the energy costs for residents as well as reducing the environmental impact.”

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor McDermott**

“Everything is under consideration. I can’t say exactly what we will come up with but we are looking into every detail for whatever is happening elsewhere as well as what is happening around us in Kent and Sussex.”

## **2. Question from Marieke de Jonge**

“Whereas a Citizens’ Assembly prescribes engagement of trained and impartial facilitators and includes a period of deliberation amongst participants allowing them to put their ideas forward and come to a conclusion, a Panel or a Jury do not offer this level of engagement. Instead, a Citizen’s Panel merely puts matters in front of some participants for consultation rather than seeking ideas generated by the public. Given that the original motion sets out an ambition to reduce not just the Council’s own, but the wider borough’s carbon emissions to achieve net zero by 2030, does the Full Council, who voted for a Citizens’ Assembly, not feel it is essential that a sizeable proportion of local residents put forward possible solutions so as to ensure wide consensus and public support, and therefore elect to go ahead with the full Citizens’ Assembly?”

### **Answer from Councillor Bailey**

“The cross-party Climate Emergency Advisory Panel has investigated the idea of running a Citizen’s Assembly and we will be discussing their report later in this meeting. The report goes through various options including the associated costs and presents information which was not available to councillors at the time of the climate emergency motion in July 2019. Even a large assembly, costing local taxpayers up to £100,000 would only include up to 75 people out of a borough with a population of well over 100,000. I would not describe this as a sizeable population of local residents as claimed in the question. Any assembly will come at a time when the public are already acutely aware of climate change issues and at a time when the UK is already leading the world in tackling the climate emergency. The national action by the Conservative government is having and will continue to have a huge positive impact on our borough. However, these points can be discussed by councillors from all parties representing a broad range of residents from around the borough later in this meeting.”

### **Supplementary question from Marieke de Jonge**

“Regarding a ‘sizeable proportion’ – if there is already concern (that having a Citizen’s Assembly) isn’t a sizeable proportion then surely having a panel or a jury would reduce the number of participants even more?”

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Bailey**

“It certainly is true that citizens’ panels and citizens’ juries are smaller than citizens’ assemblies but I think I worked it out earlier that having a citizens assembly would only include 0.06 per cent of the borough or to put it another way, 99.94 per cent of people would not be attending the assembly, but this is something that we will be discussing later in this meeting and we will be able to go through the pros and cons of each.”

### **3. Question from Adrian Thorne**

“21 months ago the Full Council voted to hold a Citizens’ Assembly. Nearly two years later the town’s citizens’ assembly has not even started. To give the council comparisons: Worthing Council declared a climate emergency in the same month as Tunbridge Wells - their report was fully published 4 months ago, having moved online during the Covid period. Many other councils have finished in a shorter time frame, all despite Covid. Tunbridge Wells hasn’t even started, in fact the council executive hasn’t even decided what and when to start. Given that this is an important opportunity for the public to have their say on the most pressing issue of our age, can the council Leader explain why public input is being avoided and disregarded?”

### **Answer from Councillor Bailey**

“I’m answering this on behalf of the council Leader as it falls within my portfolio. The point Mr Thorne referred to was not a standalone vote on running a citizen’s assembly, it was a declaration of a climate emergency and one small part of the motion referred to having a citizens assembly. At the time of the vote councillors did not discuss the matter in detail or see any information about different options or costs. It was decided that the cross-party climate emergency panel should undertake further research. The panel has undertaken this work and the matter is being discussed under item 10 in tonight’s agenda. In the meantime, a national citizens’ assembly on climate change was conducted in the spring of 2020 with over 100 participants and with a budget of over half a million pounds. The assembly looked at broadly the same climate issues as smaller local assemblies, such as that run by Worthing Council, and presented a detailed report in September of last year. That report was also debated in parliament and so it is not correct to say that public input on this very important matter is being regarded or disregarded.”

### **Supplementary question from Adrian Thorne**

“I’m still unclear on what exactly is the cause of the delay. You are right in saying it was only one portion of the climate declaration, but it seemed quite clear as far as I can see – we’ve had 21 months and you’re now saying that we have cost issues that need to be discussed by Cabinet. What I would like to know is how has it taken 21 months to get quotes for this project and then bring it back to Cabinet where we were nearly two years ago?”

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Bailey**

“The matter was given to the cross-party Climate Emergency Advisory Panel; by their nature cross-party panels are not necessarily the quickest way to reach decisions but it took some time for the constitution or the composition of the panel to be agreed, it then went through another process of agreeing the terms of reference. We then did have a global pandemic and the workload of the Climate Emergency Advisory Panel wasn't solely to look at the citizens' assembly – our main task was to run a carbon audit for the council and to come up with the carbon descent plan and to look at the various modelling exercises that were undertaken. It was decided that we would present the reports together, so really we have been waiting for the larger job to finish which involved waiting for a report from LASER, the external consultants that we used. There were various reasons for the delay but those were the reasons.”

### **4. Question from James Tansley**

“Please can the Council confirm or deny reports that the supplier to whom it paid £43,404 between May 2019 and February 2021 for unspecified work in relation to the Assembly Hall, and whose details the Council has not only redacted from its website, but also declined to reveal in response to a Freedom of Information request, has a family connection to a member of Council staff.”

### **Answer from Councillor Dawlings**

“The Council is not aware of any connection between the supplier you mention and any family member of the Council. The Council publishes a vast amount of data that not only meets the requirements of the transparency guidance, but in some instances it goes further, for example we choose to publish details of expenditure above £250 rather than the required £500. In some limited instances it is necessary to redact personal information and this is done with regards to the 2015 Local Government Transparency Code and Guidance, but it is also necessary to adhere to the requirements of the Data Protection Act and the Rights of Privacy. This is a balancing act, but in most instances the Data Protection Act is given more weight than the transparency guidance. It is better to be cautious and not release the information and then to consider releasing upon request where there is a legitimate reason to do so, rather than just publish and open the Council to breaches in privacy and data protection.”

### **Supplementary question from James Tansley**

“The response to my Freedom of Information request justified the refusal to reveal the information that I requested on the grounds that it could potentially breach Section 40 paragraph 2 and Section 43 paragraph 2 of the 2000 Data Protection Act. However, I am aware that the Information Commissioners Office has stated on a number of occasions, for example in relation to a similar Freedom of Information request in relation to a query to High Peaks Borough Council dated 19 February 2013 reference FS50450700 that it was unjustified for councils to decline to reveal information on commercial contracts on the grounds that the supplier is a sole trader, i.e. that that is in relation to Section 40 paragraph 2 of the Act to which I just referred or that commercial interests might be jeopardised, Section 43 paragraph 2 of the Act which I referred to earlier. In light of this, I wonder if I can be provided with a

prompt response to my Freedom of Information request and that both the nature of the work that the contractor has undertaken and his personal details can be revealed?"

The Mayor, on the advice of the Monitoring Officer, confirmed that the supplementary question would be referred to the Monitoring Officer so that the Council could properly examine whether it had correctly answered the Freedom of Information request. If the party that requested the information was not satisfied with the response that was issued following the review, then the question had to be referred to the Information Commissioners Office.

#### **5. Question from Adrian Thorne**

"Does the Council accept and understand that the three options presented in the CEAP report will provide differing results? It is not the case that they will all produce roughly the same result, but perhaps some will be quicker or cheaper. They are different processes, with different levels of public input and support. By selecting the Panel or Jury options, the council will be significantly reducing the public chance to be involved in this issue?"

#### **Answer from Councillor Bailey**

"The report at item 10 of tonight's agenda sets out the differences between a citizens assembly, panel and a jury, including differences in the process, number of participants and the cost so the Council is fully aware that the three options are different."

#### **Supplementary question from Adrian Thorne**

"Can I just ask Councillor Bailey to confirm that he will be making it clear that the outcomes from these three processes will be different – you won't get the same response from all three processes – and that if the Council chooses a particular process that you will get a specific outcome to that process."

#### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Bailey**

"The differences in outcome are listed in the report."

#### **6. Question from James Tansley**

"Please can the Council provide details of all breaches by Council officials and Councillors of the fifth of the Nolan principles of Public Life, which states that: 'Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing' in the last year."

#### **Answer from Councillor Dawlings**

"I'm not aware of any breach but if you or anyone else has any specific concerns they should take those up with the Monitoring Officer."

#### **Supplementary question from James Tansley**

"I'm very aware from previous meetings of this Council that councillors have raised a number of issues where the level of information provided to the public falls short of what they have expected. Given that they are spending

the residents' tax payers money, do you think that the threshold for being open and transparent in the way that the Council spends money is pitched too high and that the Council should be more open and transparent in the way it presents the information?"

The Mayor proceeded to the next question.

### **7. Question from Adrian Thorne**

"Can the Council provide assurance that financial resources for the citizens' assembly project will not suffer as a result of the delays of the executive. I can understand the temptation to claim Covid lockdown has made a full citizens' assembly financially difficult, however, the Council had 8 months before the pandemic when it could have acted – as many councils did."

### **Answer from Councillor Dawlings**

"Your question has been passed to me as it's a financial matter. First, no delays have been caused by the executive. The matter of the citizens' assembly is being considered by the CEAP which is a cross-party advisory panel. It is on their recommendation that Full Council are debating the options tonight. When Full Council approved the budget in February 2021 a dedicated report to make an informed decision on the type of citizens' assembly that was most appropriate for this borough had yet to be received. A budget report set out under risk factors reported that no new budget had been set out for the climate emergency. A budget report also referenced the climate emergency motion which stated that cross-party group agreed to lobby central government to provide additional resources and to grant the necessary freedoms to deliver the ambitions contained in the motion."

### **Supplementary question from Adrian Thorne**

"Can you confirm that lobbying has taken place and, if so, what the result of the lobbying has been?"

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Dawlings:**

"I haven't been involved in the lobbying but the net budget required by the Council is dependent on how successful the lobbying of central government is for new funding."

### **8. Question from James Tansley**

The questioner was no longer present to ask the question.

## **QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL**

FC75/20 The Mayor advised that two questions from members of the Council had been received under Council Procedure Rule 10.

### **1. Question from Councillor Scott**

"I would like to congratulate all those Council officers and employees who have worked hard to provide support to residents and local businesses during the Pandemic and the long periods of lockdown. Looking towards the ending of the lockdowns, I ask the Portfolio holder to advise what work is being done

by the Council, Tunbridge Wells Together and other supported organisations, to reinvigorate the town during this summer and the remainder of 2021?"

**Answer from Councillor March**

"A range of officers and volunteers across the borough have provided support to our residents and businesses since the start of the pandemic last year. The Restart grants were launched on 12 April for retail and hospitality in rateable property and the ARG restart grants to address other sectors and businesses not in rateable value property is to be launched later this week, so we would encourage businesses to check the council website for eligibility. Tunbridge Wells Borough Council is a paid-up levy member of the Business Improvement District and as part of Royal Tunbridge Wells Together we promote the reopening through the latest Royal Tunbridge Wells video, in the Welcome Back campaign, and the new loyalty scheme, which is a free of charge loyalty card with a programme funded by Royal Tunbridge Wells Together. When a customer makes a purchase, the business stamps the card with their unique code. At 10 stamps you pop the card into one of the allocated boxes around the town and once a month a winner is drawn and the prize is £100 of gift vouchers to spend in any store in the scheme. Royal Tunbridge Wells Together is also providing 'reopening kits' to businesses as well. Across the borough the 'Say Hi to Your High Street' campaign for Paddock Wood, Southborough, Hawkhurst and Cranbrook has been launched with press coverage and social media promotion. The 'Visit Tunbridge Wells' website has been revamped and recently relaunched including listings for events, attractions and accommodation across the borough. The Community Safety Unit and Environmental Health are overseeing and supporting businesses in reopening and responding to any Covid security breaches. Working with West Kent Partnership, Kent County Council and The Growth Hub on business support programmes for later in the year. Also on the High Street in Royal Tunbridge Wells there is an improved scheme of planters and parklets. The West Kent Kick Start programme, a jobs programme for 18-24 year olds already has young people recruited to Tunbridge Wells businesses. The first Kick Starter started on 25 February this year and since then another 10 have gone into the workplace. In total, 129 placements have been approved. Finally, there is wraparound training support for young people on the Kick Start West Kent scheme and this is being delivered by North Kent College."

**Supplementary question from Councillor Scott**

"I ask the cabinet member if she would join me to thank and encourage the whole range of amateur groups, businesses, individuals and other organisations who continue to put on events and other activities in the town and encourage them to continue through a full schedule to 2022 and beyond and to recognise that they are key in making Tunbridge Wells a more vibrant town in which to live, work and visit."

**Supplementary answer from Councillor March**

"I always welcome volunteers and I congratulate them on the work that they are doing as well as businesses doing their bit. There is a growing list of events being planned for this summer and autumn and looking into next year. Yesterday I attended a Safety Advisory Group meeting to discuss an event with all the interested parties, from police to parking, litter to loud noise and the Council is very much involved in making sure the events are safe and run



successfully as planned. So any events, whether professionally organised or volunteer organised, will be given the same support and advice and facilitation through the events toolkit which I know they will all find helpful because everybody uses it.”

## **2. Question from Councillor Hayward**

“In November 2020 the Audit and Governance Committee instigated a Major Project Review working group in order that we may learn for the future from the successes and failures of the Calverley Square Project. The Committee was very clear in its composition and was to include a representative from all parties. Councillors Pound for Labour, Rands for Lib Dems and myself for The Alliance were nominated by the 4 December deadline. Now that it has been officially acknowledged that the line in the minutes relating to political balance was added after the minutes were approved for submission, are you going to continue with the exclusion of Councillors Pound and myself from the Audit and Governance Major Project Review?”

## **Answer from Councillor Dawlings**

“In a statement to the November Audit and Governance Committee, I advised that I fully accepted the recommendations made in the Grant Thornton Value for Money and Governance report and planned to assemble a small reference group to take these recommendations forward. For the Council, responses to audit reports are prepared by the relevant head of service. It is squarely an executive function for the portfolio holder to lead on the response to the Grant Thornton review and the development of guidance for future projects and to report to the Audit and Governance Committee.

The agenda item was included, for the November meeting, with the agreement of the Audit and Governance Chairman but with no notice so, unfortunately, there was no Officer report or recommendations prepared. Nevertheless, when introducing the item, Acting Chairman, Councillor Reilly, stated that the aim of the group was to ‘incorporate the learning from Calverley Square into a best practice guidance document which can then provide a clear framework to bring together strategic project assessment, project management, appraisals and post audit disciplines for future business planning and project work within this Council.’ He proposed the review should be sponsored by the portfolio holder. I particularly wanted Tony Quigley, an Independent Member of the Audit and Governance Committee with wide experience in such reviews, to be involved with the reference group. I also arranged for a report from the Council drawing together reports received during the planning of Calverley Square which I hoped would be of help to the reference group. This report was prepared by Michael Josh who is the Project Management Office Lead and Project Manager of the Council’s Business Delivery Unit.

After the 30 March Audit and Governance meeting at which members hotly disputed what had been said and agreed at the November Audit and Governance meeting, I was grateful to be approached by Tony Quigley and Geoff Turner offering to undertake this review independently – very firmly they wanted to keep away from the politics. So that is what is now happening. Tony and Geoff entirely independently are preparing a draft report which they will then share with all Audit and Governance members. All input from the Audit and Governance members will be considered for their final report which will be presented to the A&G Committee in July 2021.”

### **Supplementary question from Councillor Hayward**

“Will all members of this review group have access to unredacted electronic copies of all of the GVA/Alison Young monthly project management reports from October 2018? This is so that they may compare those with what was contemporaneously reported to members of the Scrutiny Committees.”

### **Supplementary answer from Councillor Dawlings**

“All members of the Audit and Governance Committee will have access to the draft reports prepared by independent members Tony Quigley and Geoff Turner.”

## **NOTICE OF USE OF URGENCY PROCEDURES**

FC76/20 Councillor Podbury moved, and Councillor Woodward seconded, the recommendation set out in the agenda.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

**RESOLVED** – That the use of the Call-In and Urgency procedure, in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 14, in respect of the Cabinet decision: Amelia Scott Construction Delay made on 11 March 2021 be noted.

## **COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP PLAN 2021/22**

FC77/20 Councillor Mackonochie moved, and Councillor March seconded, the recommendations set out in the report.

Debate included consideration of the following points:

- Annual presentation of the Community Safety Strategic Assessment and Partnership Plan which set the priorities for the financial year.
- The assessment and plan had been discussed at the Community and Safety Partnership Board in February where the priorities for 2021/2022 were agreed.
- The reports were further discussed and debated at Cabinet Advisory Board in March where the road safety priority was strengthened before being presented to Cabinet.
- Tunbridge Wells remained the safest borough in Kent with data for the reporting period showing a nine per cent reduction in overall crime, building on the six per cent reduction reported last year.
- 2020 had brought new challenges and some of the reductions in crime were largely due to Covid restrictions e.g. reduced residential burglaries, robberies and shoplifting. Reports of anti-social behaviour increased by 58 per cent due to residents reporting breaches of Covid regulations.
- The situation in Tunbridge Wells was consistent with Kent.
- The use of Public Space Protection Orders had been successful in addressing particular issues and anti-social behaviour in St. John's Park.
- Thanks were given to the Community Safety Unit for their responsiveness this year.

- There were many good charities in the area making an important contribution and special thanks was given to Domestic Abuse Volunteer Support Service for the work that they do in making Tunbridge Wells one of the safer places to be, especially as there was a concern that the lockdown conditions would lead to a rise in domestic violence.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

**RESOLVED** – That the Community Safety Partnership Plan 2021-22 be approved.

## **REPORT OF THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY ADVISORY PANEL - CITIZENS' ASSEMBLY**

FC78/20

Councillor Bailey moved, and Councillor Scott seconded, the recommendations set out in the report. Comments included:

- a Climate Emergency had been declared in July 2019, the motion also included a recommendation to run a Citizens' Assembly as a way of involving local residents in tackling climate change.
- The cross-party Climate Emergency Advisory Panel had been formed and it was decided that this panel would undertake further research into this area.
- Following talks with providers, it had become apparent that this was a complicated field with many different options and high potential costs for Cabinet's consideration.
- CEAP also requested that its report go back to Full Council so that all councillors could examine the issues in more detail and make their own views known.
- There were three different options presented in the report: Citizens Assemblies, Citizens Panels and Citizens Juries – they all had different numbers of participants, different structures and varying costs.
- The report also contained two important caveats: the Council should explore the possibility of outside funding to pay for any such event; and prior to the Council committing significant amounts of its own resources (if indeed Cabinet chose to) that consultation should be undertaken with residents to ensure that local taxpayers were happy with any funding proposal.
- The final decision on whether to run such an event was one for Cabinet and no binding decisions would be made at this meeting.

Ms Townend (Head of the secretariat organising Scotland's Climate Assembly) had registered to speak. Comments included:

- Scotland had just concluded 7 weekend meetings and published their interim report.
- Citizens' Assemblies were a more expensive option than a consultation so would not be right for every situation but were particularly useful in addressing complex and contested questions.
- Scotland had challenging climate change targets and meeting them would require changes that impact on almost every aspect of people's lives; taking a participatory approach to decision-making should mean better, and more accepted, policy interventions.
- Independence from government and Parliament increased the recommendations' credibility.

- Members had been selected to be representative of Scotland including age, income and attitude to climate change – this gave the recommendations legitimacy.
- Participants were compensated, this helped include a wider demographic, not just the committed or the available.
- Assemblies had three parts: learning, deliberation and decision-making.
- The learning phase had over 100 speakers, but more important than the number was ensuring a range of views and options was presented and that the evidence was available through our website and social media – so the evidence was transparent.
- The deliberation allowed members time to discuss the evidence they heard and also bring their own lived experience into the debate.
- Professional facilitation of these group discussions was expensive but essential to ensure all voices were heard.
- Decision-making – Scotland’s assembly had made over 80 recommendations covering transport, diet, and work amongst others, so while the process was resource intensive, the outputs were rich.
- It was worth agreeing from the outset what would happen with the recommendations. This meant that the route to policy making was clear and justified the work of the members and the financial investment.

Having taken advice on the form of words, Councillor Holden moved, and Councillor Williams seconded, an amendment to the effect of deleting the second point and replacing it with: “Council recommends to the Cabinet that in addition to considering the three options in the report it also considered whether it will itself discharge the responsibilities having declared a Climate Emergency. Therefore, Council recommends to Cabinet that, because climate change has such wide ranging significance, a new Climate Change Committee of the council is set up to establish detailed practical action the council may take to meet the Climate Emergency. Council further recommends that any resources which might have gone to the various options in the report be assigned directly to its own action programmes through the Climate Change Committee rather than to random unelected and unaccountable bodies.” Comments included:

- There was a need for real action.
- The Council was a citizens assembly with members elected through a democratic and publicly engaged process.
- The options set out in the report were unaccountable.
- Climate change should be embedded in the policy of the Council and the Council should be the body to implement it.
- There had been sufficient public debate on the matter already, the Council needed immediate action.

Having received several requests for clarification, the Mayor, on the advice of the Monitoring Officer, determined that the amendment was in order and related only to the matter at hand.

Debate included consideration of the following points:

- The ultimate purpose of the amendment was to set up a climate change committee of the council and to redirect any resources to it.
- There was evidence of the success of Citizens Assemblies around the world, particularly to move forward potentially contentious issues.

- Citizens assemblies were established to be a representative sample of the area. Alternatives such as opening council meetings to wider public participation would be impractical.
- Local Citizens' Assemblies, despite the presence of national assemblies, were relevant in the same way that local government exists in addition to central government.
- A local Citizens' Assembly would enable residents to shape local issues.
- Everyone from individuals to international organisations had a part to play.
- This was a major project that would incur costs. The Citizens Assembly would help avoid many of the negative aspects of major projects that undermined previous projects.
- A Citizens' Assembly would put residents at the front at an early stage and avoid the perception of putting a fait-accompli to a token consultation.
- Rather than wasting money on consultants to justify preconceived ideas, unbiased and expert opinion could be presented to inform a genuinely open decision-making process.
- The upfront cost of Citizens' Assemblies would be repaid by savings later.
- The Council needed to have effective carbon reduction policies itself and for the borough but also to engage the public in the process.
- There were other tools, better than citizens' assemblies, that could help increase engagement in the community where councils had found it difficult to use traditional methods.
- Experts advising a citizens' assembly would be the same as those that would advise the Council.
- The Council should involve everyone including school children and could explore additional methods to expand and increase engagement of the public.
- The Council had suffered in the recent past for a lack of engagement, the amendment pushed the Council back into its old behaviours.
- The third paragraph of the amendment made the assumption that finances would be redeployed which prejudiced the other options.
- The amendment concentrated responsibility for climate change on one committee whereas this should be a matter for all councillors.
- All committees should take account of the climate implications of each decision.
- The amendment would be counter to the recommendation of the cross-party working party.
- Climate change would not be solved by a committee of the council. It needed wide public engagement and education in order to change behaviour.
- The amendment recommended a mechanism in which accountability was held directly through elected councillors whose position was upheld by the public.
- The Climate Emergency Advisory Panel noted that it operated largely in isolation whereas action needed to be taken across the board so the idea of concentrating all responsibility in one committee was not supported.

The Mayor took a vote on the amendment by roll-call. Votes cast were 2 for, 39 against with 3 abstentions.

**AMENDMENT NOT CARRIED**

Debate returned to the original motion.

Debate included consideration of the following points:

- Many of the arguments for a Citizens' Assembly had been put forward in the debate on the amendment.
- The process of formulating a definitive outcome to the debate was unclear. The motion called for a debate to inform the Cabinet, whilst the minutes of the meeting would provide a summary a full recording would also be available.
- The motion from November 2019 called for a Citizens' Assembly as a way of involving residents, particularly young people, and businesses in a process that will have long lasting effects on them.
- Anything less than a Citizen's Assembly would be relying on a very small group of people.
- A Citizens' Assembly should be seen as a long-term investment paid back through future cost savings and inward investment. Existing measures such as LED lighting showed the potential for savings.
- Further carbon reduction measures would be expensive and public support would be needed.
- The views of younger people were essential if determining actions for the future. A Citizens' Assembly was the best way to achieve this.
- The Council previously agreed to a Citizens Assembly and should honour that.
- Whilst the Council should remain flexible to changes, nothing had changed since the motion in November 2019. Members were not naive to the potential costs.
- The Council would need to remain the final decision makers taking account of any recommendations of a Citizens' Assembly.
- The cost of Covid, for which the government had not fully repaid the Council, was a material change that needed to be taken into account.
- There was very little desire from the public for an Assembly, most people expected the Council to act.
- Climate change should infuse all aspects of the Council's work but councillors need to be making decisions, not a citizens assembly.
- Everyone was interested in taking measures against climate change. There was already a great deal of action taking place and the Council's role was to coordinate the champions of this cause.
- The cost seemed very expensive for outcomes that could be achieved through other means.
- Both the Council and KCC were committed to neutral energy policy by 2030 and Councils were the best places to implement these proposals.
- A Citizens' Assembly may not be the best way to engage young people. All the proposed options required significant time commitments from participants and there may be better ways to engage.
- External funding should be sought as opposed to all funding coming from the Council.
- A Citizens Assembly should be just part of an engagement programme which could target different demographics.

- A Citizens Assembly would be a public demonstration of changing attitudes at the Council – it needed to reach out rather than keeping things in the Town Hall.
- The Prime Minister had pledged to spend millions of pounds on tackling carbon emissions in this country and the Council should be appealing to the government for all the funding and support it can get.
- The cost of a Citizens Assembly was proportionately small compared to previous major projects and could lead to novel savings or better solutions that were more acceptable.
- Cabinet would consider all the options including modern engagement which was not previously available. New engagement tools were not expensive but utilising the correct tools in future was important.
- The Council would carry on with achieving its own targets regardless of what engagement method was decided upon.
- Some legitimate concerns had been discussed with Citizens' Assembly providers, there was still some questions about next steps following an assembly meeting.
- Even with the most expensive option an assembly only involved a small number of people and being representative of the whole borough would only include a handful of young people.
- Harnessing the enthusiasm of young people could be effective if done right. Each school having its own climate panel supported by the Council could be a more effective way of engaging young people.
- Regardless of an individual's opinion on Citizen's Assemblies, the motion asks for opinions to be taken back to Cabinet and so should be supported.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by roll-call. Votes cast were 41 for, 2 against with 1 abstention.

**RESOLVED –**

1. That the report from the Climate Emergency Action Panel, and the options for public engagement on climate issues be noted; and
2. That the Council's debate provide guidance on the preferred engagement option.

**APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR**

FC79/20 Councillor McDermott moved, and Councillor Dawlings seconded, the recommendation set out in the report.

Members recorded their agreement and appreciation of Councillor Bland.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

**RESOLVED –** That Councillor Godfrey Bland be appointed as Deputy Mayor for the municipal year 2021/22.

**TO RECORD THE COUNCIL'S APPRECIATION FOR THE MAYOR**

FC80/20 Councillor McDermott moved, and Councillor Mackonochie seconded, the motion set out on the agenda.

Members recalled the Mayor's achievements during their mayoral year and thanked her and the Mayor's Escort for their service.

The Mayor returned thanks.

The Deputy Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

**RESOLVED** – That Tunbridge Wells Borough Council records it's appreciation for valuable services rendered by the Mayor and the assistance given to them by the Mayor's Escort during their period in office.

#### **URGENT BUSINESS**

FC81/20      There was no urgent business.

#### **COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL**

FC82/20      Councillor Podbury moved, and Councillor Woodward seconded, the recommendation set out 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**

FC83/20      The next meeting was scheduled for Wednesday 26 May 2021.

#### **NOTES:**

The meeting concluded at 9.30 pm.