

TUNBRIDGE WELLS BOROUGH COUNCIL

MINUTES of a meeting of the Tunbridge Wells Borough Council, duly convened and held at the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Royal Tunbridge Wells, TN1 1RS, at 6.30 pm on Wednesday, 5 July 2023

PRESENT:

The Mayor Councillor Hugh Patterson (Chair)
Councillors Allen, Barrass, Barrington-King, Bland, Brice, Ellis, Fairweather, Goodship, Hall, Hayward, Hill, Holden, Johnson, Knight, Le Page, Lewis, Lidstone, March, McMillan, Morton, Neville, Ms Palmer, Pope (Vice-Chair), Pound, Roberts, Rogers, Rutland, Wakeman, Warne, White, Wormington, Curry, Francis, Munday, O'Connell, Opara, Osborne, Sharratt, Webster and Wilkinson

IN ATTENDANCE:

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC15/22 Apologies were received from Councillors: Atkins, Britcher-Allan, Chapelard, Dawlings, Fitzsimmons, Moon and Sankey

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING DATED 24 MAY 2023

FC16/22 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the annual meeting dated 24 May 2023 be approved as a correct record.

MINUTES OF THE EXTRAORDINARY MEETING DATED 24 MAY 2023

FC17/22 No amendments were proposed.

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the extraordinary meeting dated 24 May 2023 be approved as a correct record.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC18/22 No declarations of pecuniary or significant other interest were made.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FC19/22 **The Mayor Announced:**

- James Scholes has accepted the award of Honorary Alderman, and a small ceremony would be scheduled a little later in the year.
- He advised that Cllr Bland would be awarded his past Mayors badge at a date to be agreed in September.

Councillor Justin Rutland (Portfolio Holder for Economic Development)

- I'd like to update members on the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- From Community Grants Round 1 – the Council awarded Grants to the following projects:

- Whitehorn Allotment Improvements (Brenchley & Matfield) – the clearance of the site and creation of boundary hedges to provide new allotment patches
 - Cranbrook In Bloom – the installation of planters on Cranbrook High Street to showcase plants from Cranbrook in Bloom
 - Horsmonden Sports Club Security and Maintenance – the purchase of maintenance equipment and installation of CCTV to protect the facilities from vandalism and theft
 - Lamberhurst Village Improvements - the urgent maintenance of public toilets and the erection of signage across the village
 - Foal Hurst Wood Improvements (Paddock Wood) – the regeneration of a threatened area of woodland
 - Wildflower Meadow Improvements (Paddock Wood) – the rewilding of a wildflower meadow, used by the local community
 - War Memorial Maintenance (Pembury) – the cleaning and maintenance of the War Memorial in Pembury
 - Community Biodiversity Project (Speldhurst & Bidborough) – the creation of a biodiverse habitat as part of a community volunteering project in the village
- I am pleased to say that a second round of grants applications has just closed and the council Panel will consider 15 project proposals from 7 different locations across the borough.
 - I emphasise that these are UKSPF projects not to be confused with other community grants that the Council awards.
 - Works to improve Sherwood Lake and the surrounding woodland has been completed. Kent High Weald Partnership has installed new boardwalks, signage, undertaken works to improve biodiversity and held community volunteering and engagement activities.
 - The Cranbrook Community Kitchen project has also been a success. Local volunteers have used funding to provide meals and shelter to vulnerable members of the community, whilst also upgrading local facilities to ensure the project can continue post UKSPF funding.
 - The West Kent Business Support Programme is progressing well. Smarter Society (who won the tender process to deliver the programme) has set up a website (www.westkentbusiness.com), delivered events and has fully booked places for its mentoring sessions. Micro grants will be awarded to programme participants in September.
 - Work to establish a new West Kent Rural Grants Programme is progressing. A Project Manager is now in place (based at Sevenoaks DC), guidance and application criteria has been agreed and a panel of local stakeholders has been established to consider project proposals.
 - DEFRA have approved the £444k (£443,603) Council programme for

the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). This will enable support to complete the decarbonisation of the Weald Sports Centre this year.

- In addition, the Council will be making £333k (£332,703) from our REPF allocation towards supporting local rural businesses and communities in 2024/25.

PRESENTATION OF FREEDOM OF THE BOROUGH AWARD

FC20/22 The Mayor and members of the Council welcomed Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust to the meeting and set out their reasons for granting the well-deserved award.

Director of Change & Communities read the Borough of Freedom Oath and the Mayor presented David Highton with the award.

Upon receiving the award David Highton expressed his thanks on behalf of all of the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS staff.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

FC21/22 The Mayor advised that no questions from members of the public had been received under Council Procedure Rule 8.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

FC22/22 The Mayor advised that there were three questions from members of the Council had been received under Council Procedure Rule 10.

Councillor Holden felt it was not right or fair that the Mayor had taken the decision to group his questions, the Mayor acknowledge his concern but his decision was final..

1 Question from Councillor Holden

1.Can you tell me the name of the private contractor which is giving equality, diversity and inclusivity training to TWBC staff? Are the providers Nelson Training or Inclusive Employers and is the training package from Flick E-learning?

2. Can you provide me with the text and the power point slides which are used by this company which is paid with public money to train TWBC staff?

3. Can you confirm the costs spent on this training already and the costs projected for the future?

4. These training sessions, I believe, are compulsory for staff. Are they free to disagree with the trainers and put, for instance gender critical viewpoints? Can they refuse to attend for any reason?

5. Are staff encouraged to state their pronouns

Answer from Councillor Warne

Thank you for your questions, Cllr Holden. I believe you have also submitted a Freedom of Information request and a response was sent to you last week covering many of the points you have raised.

As I would hope you would be aware, everyone in Great Britain is covered by the Equality Act 2010. This includes you and everyone you come into contact with, in your role as a councillor. The main principles of the Act are equality, diversity and inclusion. For absolute clarity the Act says that diversity is about the ways in which people differ. These differences should be recognised, celebrated and treated as a natural part of society.

Staffing issues are a matter for the Chief Executive as Head of Paid Service but in answer to your question the Council provides training to staff to ensure it complies with its public sector duty. A variety of methods and providers have been used including Nelson training, Inclusive training, and Flick E-learning. You have been supplied the training materials you requested and also the Chief Executive has already provided you with an estimate of the cost associated with this which is around £2,250.

Non-discriminatory recruitment, training and promotion processes, and working practices contribute towards an organisation which recruits and retains employees from a wide demographic, and there is clearly a benefit in recruiting and retaining the best employees irrespective of their gender, age, sexual orientation, ethnicity or nationality, religion or belief, disability, educational/social background, etc. Not to do so would almost certainly reduce the pool of talent from which an organisation can recruit, and therefore hamper growth, employee morale and ultimately the services we provide to our residents.

In respect of your other points, staff are obviously free to hold whatever views they wish or to state their pronouns and I believe that this has already been made clear to you.

Finally, I would remind Cllr Holden that Non-compliance with the Equality Act can lead to a legal challenge and judicial review

Supplementary answer from Councillor Holden

Do you know that the government Equalities Office has phased out subconscious, unconscious bias, which is the training that's been given by TWBC and that the government has said it expects local government and other agencies to abandon that form of training that the outgoing chair of the Institute of Race relations Colin Prescott called unconscious bias training, nonsense, that the race relations commission has called for an end to it are you aware that this is a completely contentious point of view, the unconscious bias training, and it has been widely discredited and discontinued by the government, the race relations commission and the race relations group, why are we continuing to do it and spending public money on it

Supplementary answer from Councillor Warne

I think the question in relation to how the council staff are trained is the responsibility, as I said, of the chief executive who is the head of paid service, If you would like more information on that, we're happy to provide a full response in writing in due course, I will ask the Leader of the Council to do that.

Written response from Councillor Chapelard supplied 12/07/2023

We are aware that a recent Ministerial Statement on unconscious bias training stated: "The government expects other parts of the public sector, including local government, the police, and the NHS, to review their approaches in light of the evidence and the developments in the Civil Service". We are also aware that the Equalities and Human Rights Commission (Research report 113, An Assessment of the evidence of the effectiveness of Unconscious Bias Training) concluded that "overall, our evaluation of rigorous studies on the effectiveness of UBT indicates a mixed picture and a need for further research", however it also found that UBT is effective for raising awareness and can be effective for reducing implicit bias.

As Councillor Warne made clear in her response to your substantive question, we are required to comply with the provisions of the Equalities Act, and raising awareness of the Act and the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion contained within it, is a crucial part of doing this. We will continue to review our training programme in light of changes to legislation and research to ensure we give our staff the best information and training available to us.

2 Question from Councillor White

Can you please provide clarification on whether KCC or TWBC is responsible for the oversight and running of the traffic scheme on Mount Pleasant, outside the Public Realm, which is currently causing residents so much concern. And as part of this can you also please confirm who residents should direct their petition questioning the scheme to – KCC or TWBC?"

Answer from Councillor Rutland

KCC is responsible for the implementation and operation of the scheme. TWBC operate it on their behalf under an Agency Agreement. KCC are due to take back responsibility from 1 April 2024.

There is already a petition to KCC in existence

Supplementary answer from Councillor White

Are you aware that KCC are telling residents that the scheme has nothing to do with them and also not willing to accept the petition.

Supplementary answer from Councillor Rutland

I am aware that certain people are saying it is nothing to do with them and I am not aware of the response to the petition, it was considered I assume when KCC first accepted the petition when it was begin in May, I can't really comment on any further on KCC matters.

3 Question from Councillor White

Can you please confirm if you would consider a dispensation scheme for local residents and suppliers for local shops who are now having to take detours which are very disruptive to their daily lives and simply pushing extra traffic onto the surrounding roads”?

Answer from Councillor Rutland

Deliveries to businesses in the restricted zone are permitted, and so are drop-offs to the charity shops. I would like to assist residents most impacted by the scheme and am looking to work constructively with them and with our KCC colleagues to see what is possible and what is not. We can make representations, but any dispensation scheme for residents would need to be considered by KCC, who, if they agreed, would need to consult and amend their Traffic Regulation Order, the legal basis on which the scheme operates.

Supplementary question from Councillor White

That's great but not sure if you are aware of residents presented their own scheme to go round this and the JTB on Monday, so it would be wonderful if you could actually talk to them about that and listen to their proposal and consider it further.

Supplementary answer from Councillor Rutland

Thanks, yes indeed I will, they are my Culverden Residents and I invited them to the JTB to speak, so I am aware of their ideas and will be listening to them and working with them and their ideas and other ideas that have produced by RTWF, thank you.

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2022/23

FC23/22 Councillor Knight moved, and Councillor Holden seconded, the recommendation set out in the report.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation.

RESOLVED – That the Overview and Scrutiny That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2022-23 be noted.

HORSMONDEN NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

FC24/22 Councillor Pound moved and Councillor Warne seconded the recommendations set out in the report on the agenda..

Councillor Pound spoke on the motion:

1. Expressed the importance of the Plan
2. Advised that the turnout of residents voting was >30.8%
3. Thanks was expressed to all the hard work undertaken by the Officers.

The report was taken as read

The Mayor took a vote on the motion by affirmation

RESOLVED -

1. This report recommends that the Horsmonden Neighbourhood Development Plan (HNDP) be formally 'made' (adopted) and become part of the statutory Development Plan for the area with immediate effect, following a favourable local referendum result;
2. The Horsmonden Neighbourhood Development Plan post-referendum Decision Statement at **Appendix A** be published; and
3. The Horsmonden Neighbourhood Development Plan SEA Adoption Statement be drafted and published after the NDP is 'made'.

URGENT BUSINESS

FC25/22 There was no urgent business.

COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL

FC26/22 **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

FC27/22 The next scheduled meeting was Wednesday 4 October 2023.

NOTES: the meeting concluded at 7.24pm

NOTES:

The meeting concluded at Time Not Specified.