

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, 12 October 2016

PRESENT:

The Mayor Councillor David Neve (Chairman)
Councillors Backhouse, Bland, Bulman, Chapelard, Mrs Cobbold, Dawlings, Gray, Dr Hall, Hamilton, Hannam, Hastie, Heasman, Hill, Holden, Horwood, Huggett, Jamil, Jukes, Lewis-Grey, Lidstone, Mackonochie, March, Munn, Noakes, Nuttall, Oakford, Ms Palmer, Podbury, Rankin, Scholes, Simmons, Sloan, Mrs Soyke (Vice-Chairman), Stanyer, Stewart, Mrs Thomas, Uddin, Weatherly and Williams

IN ATTENDANCE: William Benson (Chief Executive), Lee Colyer (Director of Finance and Corporate Services (Section 151 Officer)), Mathew Jefferys (Interim Democratic Services and Elections Manager) and Paul Taylor (Director of Change and Communities)

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

FC30/16 Apologies were received from Councillors Barrington-King, Basu, Bland, Elliott, Hills, McDermott, Moore, Reilly and Woodward.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

FC31/16 No declarations of pecuniary or significant other interest were made.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

FC32/16 The Mayor noted that a written summary of his past and future engagements had been made available to members.

The Mayor stated that the Civic Dinner was a record success with the number of attendees and Past Mayors attending and that the sum raised for one evening was £6,556.

He invited a number of public speakers to talk about events attended by the Mayor and Mayoress.

Zoe Sayer and Colin Reynolds from the Financial Risk Department at Axa-PPP talked about their team building event with 120 colleagues from the department to attempt some Guinness World Records. They explained that they invited the Mayor as they needed an independent witness for the afternoon and had been honoured by his attendance and how excited and enjoyable it had been having the Mayor there. One of their Guinness World record attempts has been submitted and is waiting to be verified. They thanked the Mayor and said that his attendance had added prestige to their event.

Linda Page Chairman of Cranbrook in Bloom spoke about their annual presentation and thank you evening attended by over 120 people. They had invited the Mayor to present the certificates and that the evening was a great success with the children being given Mayor's Bears badges and how delighted they were with them.

Robin from The Wiesbaden Riding competition explained about the history of the event and that it had started 32 years ago with competitors from all different countries attending the dressage and jumping competition. The Mayor watched part of the jumping competition and presented the prizes at the ceremony. He thanked the Council for their support and interest in the competition and explained that as well as the competition they liked to show the competitors all the best of what Tunbridge Wells has to offer as a Town and their feed back from the competitors was how welcomed they felt by all in Tunbridge Wells.

Councillor Jukes made an announcement that there would be a peer review at the Council next week and this was being done by an independent group from the Local Government Association. This review would report on how the Council was performing and the results of the review would be available in about three months time.

The Chief Executive introduced the Council's new Monitoring Officer, Estelle Culligan who would be advising the council in the future.

THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING DATED 20 JULY 2016

FC33/16 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meetings dated 20 July 2016 be approved as a correct record.

THE MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING DATED 7 SEPTEMBER 2016

FC34/16 **RESOLVED** – That the minutes of the meeting dated 7 September 2016 were approved as a correct record.

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

FC35/16 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

FC36/16 **Question one from Councillor Munn**

“Given the new Chancellor’s pragmatic view on the economy and the unprecedentedly low interest rates, what approach is the Council taking to the recommendation from the Local Government Association’s Housing Commission that local authorities build housing once again?”

Response from Councillor Weatherly

“Thank you Councillor Munn for the question.

I read the Housing Commission’s report with interest and was pleased that its approach was focussed on working proactively with the Government and partners to make change happen.

The housing agenda is a fast changing one at present and I’m sure Councillor Munn will want to join me in welcoming the very positive announcements made by the new Prime Minister, the Communities Secretary and the

Housing Minister last week which focussed on boosting the supply of new homes.

In direct response to his question I'd advise that, yes, the council could build council houses but not without some significant issues.

For example if the Council wanted to build more than 50 council houses it would need to reopen the Housing Revenue Account and restore it to the balance it was prior to the Stock Transfer in the early 1990's. The financial case of this Council building large numbers of homes would be complicated by virtue of expensive construction and land costs not being covered by below market rents and with tenants then having the right to buy their property at a discount. These issues were in part the reason behind the stock transfer and the creation of Registered Social Landlord's such as Town and Country Housing Group (TCHG) who are perhaps better placed to provide new social housing.

I'm sure he is aware that we work very closely with TCHG and will continue to do so.

These are important issues and need to be carefully thought through. I'd also suggest it would be prudent to wait for the new Housing White Paper which will be published later in the year and will, I understand, contain 'further significant measures'."

Supplementary question from Councillor Munn

Councillor Munn said that he was a little disappointed that there is no immediate prospect on the council moving on this because there was a national housing crisis that the private sector was unmotivated to resolve. He said that this council was being repeatedly asked to approve developments that do not offer any affordable housing despite the council's 35% policy on that and in view of very detailed and helpful response from Councillor Weatherly could he have a full copy of her speech?

Response from Councillor Weatherly

Yes.

Question two from Councillor Uddin

"The Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) has agreed that there is no place for hate crime in the borough. Sadly I was contacted by a few of our Muslim community members in relation to this despicable criminal activities and how this has impacted their daily lives. What assurance can the TWBC give to the Muslim community as to how this awful act will be dealt with by the appropriate authority and what support mechanisms exist for people to report this to the police?"

Response from Councillor Weatherly

"Let me start by saying there is absolutely no place for hate crime in our borough. This was the view of Full Council in July and this is the view of our borough now.

Indeed I was really saddened to learn that some of our local community had been the victims of hate crime as there is simply no place for it. I would like to reiterate that this is something that the Council and Kent Police take incredibly seriously. I can also confirm that it is considered on a daily basis through the Community Safety Unit and its partnership approach.

I am aware of the examples to which Cllr Uddin's question refers as I have spoken to him personally on this matter and I know that the response from local Kent Police is ongoing and has been robust.

I'd also like to encourage all communities to report incidents of hate crime to Kent Police. This should be done by calling 101 or 999 if it is an emergency. Hate crime is a crime, and like any crime, it will not be tolerated."

Question three from Councillor Backhouse

The Mayor explained that before Councillor Backhouse asked his question, which he was minded to allow, some of it was a matter of record and this information could have been obtained from Officers.

Councillor Backhouse thanked the Mayor for this information and explained that he was both a Town Councillor for Southborough and High Brooms and a Borough Councillor for Sherwood, many of his constituents are not aware of the levels of unemployment in the Borough and that is why he was asking the question today.

"How successful was the Jobs Fair in September?
What are the levels of unemployment in; a) TWBC b) Sherwood Ward?"

Response from Councillor March

"Our third Jobs & Training Fair, held in the Assembly Hall Theatre was a great success. As in previous years it was held in partnership with Job Centre Plus but for the first time it was promoted across West Kent with our partners in Sevenoaks and Tonbridge & Malling.

With 35 employers and training providers gathered in one place and over 350 local people looking for work coming through the doors, there was a lively crowd. Feedback from both the employers and job-seekers was positive and the seminars were well-attended."

Supplementary question from Councillor Backhouse

Councillor Backhouse thanked Councillor March for her response and asked if there any other plans to follow up for young parents who have been out of the jobs market?

Response from Councillor March

Councillor March explained that they were planning a smaller jobs fair in Tonbridge in March - asked for by the exhibitors - and large one in Tunbridge Wells in September. Councillor March also informed the meeting that she had

attended a Skills fest event at Salomons today held with the Education Business Partnership. It was attended by about 1,000 pupils aged 14 -18 years of age and exhibitors from all over UK attended to advise on apprenticeships, degree and college courses.

Second part of Question three from Councillor Backhouse

At the Mayor's discretion Councillor Backhouse returned to re-iterate the second part of his original question which was unanswered.

"What are the levels of unemployment in: a) TWBC b) Sherwood Ward?"

Response from Councillor March

The numbers as at August 2016 for Tunbridge Wells Borough was 575, equivalent to 0.8 per cent. For Sherwood Ward the number was 45, equivalent to 1.2 per cent.

These figures are well below the county average of 1.6 per cent and the national average of 1.8 per cent.

Supplementary question from Councillor Backhouse

Councillor Backhouse asked whether Councillor March was aware that unemployment when he became Councillor in 2010 was nine per cent in Sherwood and that the decrease was a massive one and reflected the work put in by Officers and Department for Work and Trade.

Response from Councillor March

Councillor March said she hoped we had many more Jobs Fairs and Skillfests as obviously it was working.

FOUR-YEAR FUNDING SETTLEMENT TO 2019/20

FC37/16 The Mayor opened the item and noted that the report had been subject to very rigorous debate at the advisory boards and the subject of an all Member briefing.

Councillor Jukes introduced the report he stated that he had hoped Councillor Barrington-King would introduce but he was not here so he would do his best even though it was not part of his Portfolio. He advised members that this was a historic opportunity to accept this Local Government four year funding; that it had been through the Cabinet Advisory Board and there had been briefings on it, it was a well laid motion and moved the resolution.

Councillor Horwood seconded the motion and reserved his right to speak.

Councillor Scholes commented that on Page 21 a name of an officer John Scarborough should not be there, not because he had left but no names of officers should be included in table.

This was agreed.

The Mayor invited comments, and reminded Members that this did not need a recorded vote - only the budget needed a recorded vote.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion.

MOTION CARRIED

RESOLVED –

1. That the Government's four-year funding settlement be accepted; and
2. That the Efficiency Plan, as set out at Appendix A to the report, be agreed.

PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION (PLANNING SCHEME OF DELEGATION)

FC38/16 The Mayor opened the item

Councillor Horwood introduced the report and noted that of the two recommendations, the second recommendation was logical and hoped that no one would question it. He said that it was the practice previously and was now being added to the constitution.

Councillor Dawlings seconded the motion.

The Mayor invited comments.

Councillor Mrs Thomas added that she would endorse the recommendations.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion.

MOTION CARRIED

RESOLVED – That, in order to ensure the Constitution was up-to-date and provided for good decision making, the following amendments to the Constitution be approved:

- a) 'Notifications' - amend paragraphs 8.1 and 8.5 of Section 8 of Table 3 to Part 3 of the Constitution, as set out in paragraphs 2.11 and 2.12 of the report; and
- b) 'Non-residential threshold' - amend paragraph 8.3 of Section 8 of Table 3 of the to Part 3 of the Constitution, as set out in paragraph 2.15 of the report.

APPROVAL OF TIMETABLE OF MEETINGS 2017/2018

FC39/16 The Mayor opened the item.

Councillor Jukes introduced the report and noted that this was just annual housekeeping on the times the Council have their meetings and there was nothing controversial about the report.

Councillor March seconded the motion and reserved her right to speak.

Councillor Chapelard commented that he was disappointed that Cabinet wished to put meetings back to daytime at 10.30am rather than evening at 6.30pm. Last year it was agreed to trial evening meetings and that he did not feel that two meetings was conclusive either way, attendance had been two and three in the evenings and one and four in the day and he considered this a score draw. Councillor Chapelard expressed disappointment meetings were not continuing in the evening thus denying some Councillors the opportunity to attend and make representations. He noted in respect of paragraph 2.4 of the report that Councillors could go to the Cabinet Advisory Boards in the evening however, these may only have one member of the Cabinet present and surely it was better to have the opportunity to talk at Cabinet in front of all decision makers.

Councillor March was surprised by the comments and said that if Councillor Chapelard had got all his other members along that they might have looked at it slightly differently but he did not have the support. Attendees were generally members of public coming to listen rather than Councillors coming to speak. She continued that at each of Community Cabinet Advisory Boards there are normally three members of Cabinet. She thought Councillor Chapelard was a little unclear as to what a trial actually meant and explained that there had been two meetings in the evening already with two more to go and she considered that to be a good trial. It had not been as successful as they would have liked and that they would have been willing to continue evening meetings if it had been successful. Councillor March added that they would be going back to day time meetings where support from officers was readily available and that she was very sorry that they could not support Councillor Chapelard further on this.

As the proposer of the motion, Councillor Jukes endorsed Councillor March's comments and added that he thought evening meetings might have had more engagement from the community however, Cabinet meetings were obviously not exciting enough to get people to come out. He stated that it was far more useful to have meetings during day where there was a good attendance.

The Mayor took a vote on the motion.

MOTION CARRIED

RESOLVED – That the Timetable of Meetings for 2017/18, as at appendix A to the report, be agreed.

URGENT BUSINESS

FC40/16 The Mayor confirmed there was no urgent business to consider within the provisions of Council Meetings Procedure 2.1.12

COMMON SEAL OF THE COUNCIL

FC41/16 **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

FC42/16 It was noted that the next meeting of the Full Council would take place on Wednesday 7 December 2016 at 6.30pm

NOTE: The meeting concluded at 7.15 pm.