

MORECAMBE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of Morecambe Town Council held on Thursday 16th May 2019 at 7.00 p.m. at Morecambe Town Hall

Present: Councillors: T. Anderson, P. Anderton, Alex Ashworth, June Ashworth, Marius Balcer, Mirka Balcer, J. Bates, V. Boyd-Power, S. Burns, I. Clift, R. Cleet, R. Dennison, M. Evans, J. Firth, J. Goodwin, P. Heath, J. Hanson, D. Jenkins, C. Matthews, J. Pilling, P. Ross-Clasper, B. Vickers and D. Whitaker

Officers in Attendance:

D. Croxall (Town Clerk) and N. Kitchen (Assistant Clerk)

1. Appointment of Chairman

As this was the Annual Meeting of the Council, nominations were invited for the position of Chairman of the Council.

Two nominations were received.

Councillors June Ashworth and R. Dennison proposed Councillor Heath.

Councillors Hanson and Whitaker proposed Councillor Bates. Councillor Bates indicated that he did not wish to be considered for the position of Chairman.

Resolved:

That Councillor Heath be appointed Chairman of the Council until the Annual Meeting of Council 2020.

(Councillor Heath took the Chair and signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office)

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman

The Chairman invited nominations for the position of Vice Chairman of the Council.

Councillors R. Dennison and Burns proposed and seconded Councillor June Ashworth be appointed as Vice Chairman of the Council.

Resolved:

That Councillor June Ashworth be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Council until the Annual Meeting of Council 2020.

(Councillor June Ashworth signed the Declaration of Acceptance of Office)

3. Apologies for Absence

Councillors T. Clarke and G. Dennison,

4. Declarations of Interests

There were no Declarations of Interest.

5. Minutes of Meetings held on 21st March 2019

The Council considered the Minutes of the Meeting of the Town Council held on 21st March 2019.

Resolved:

That the minutes of the meeting of Council held on 21st March 2019 be signed as a correct record

At this point the meeting adjourned to allow public participation

6. Public Participation

Two members of the public addressed the meeting.

(a) Mrs Barber

Mrs Barber congratulated Councillors on their election to the Town Council and advised all members that the Town Council was a Parish Council and should be free from political infighting.

She advised the Council that she was a former Councillor who had brought to the attention of the Council's Auditor issues regarding payments made as part of a Festival Grant that she did not believe had been processed properly.

As a result, she had been subjected to slanderous comments by a Councillor and when these were made the meeting had not been filmed as certain individuals knew that these comments would be made.

Mrs Barber advised she had legal grounds to sue the Councillor concerned and to date had not received a written apology.

The reasons for the verbal attack on her was as a result of Mrs Barber challenging what she believed to be the mismanagement of Council funds with cheques being issued to a Festival provider without proper accountancy records, misleading accounts being provided by the Festival provider which should not happen with public money.

Mrs Barber had thus contacted the Council's Auditor which had resulted in a witch hunt by an employee and some councillors.

(b) Mr Williams

Mr Williams welcomed new Councillors and the comments made by Mrs Barber. He hoped political dog fighting was now at an end and advised new councillors that they should always feel empowered and in this fourth version of the Town Council hoped that the Town Clerk and Responsible Finance Officer gives you the support you deserve.

He advised Councillors that he was responsible for the Council filming its meetings as minutes were not recorded correctly. He urged Councillors to challenge the minutes if they did not believe they had been recorded correctly otherwise they would not be acting in the public interest.

He informed the Council that in his opinion Morecambe Town Council disengages with the public and hopes new Councillors will change this for the benefit of the town.

Following the completion of public participation, the meeting reconvened at this point

7. Review of Committee Structure and Terms of Reference

The Council were advised that it was the requirement of the Annual Meeting of the Council to review the current Committee structure and Terms of Reference of each Committee.

It was proposed by Councillor Heath and seconded by Councillor Bates:

“That the Council meets every month on the first Thursday of each month, with all Committees being disbanded apart from the Personnel and Complaints Committees, and the Morecambe Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group also be retained.”

The Chairman advised that this proposal would allow all members to be involved in all debates and decisions of the Council and would free up staff time to enable work to be progressed more speedily on Council projects. With regards to Planning Applications and the Council being a statutory consultee, details of planning applications would be forwarded to members on a weekly basis and members could request any application to be considered by Council at its monthly meeting.

Resolved:

- (1) That in future the Council meets on a monthly basis on the first Thursday of each month, with the first meeting of this new arrangement being held on Thursday 6th June 2019, and that Standing Order No. 1(a) and 2(d) be amended accordingly when the Council reviewed Standing Orders within Minute No. 8 below.
- (2) That the Personnel and Complaints Committees be retained with all Groups being represented on each Committee on a proportional representation (PR) basis.
- (3) That the Morecambe Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group be retained with all members being able to attend meetings.
- (4) That the Council organises Working Groups on specific issues on a PR basis if and when needed.

8. Review of Standing Orders, Financial Regulations, Complaints Procedure and Freedom of Information Policies

In accordance with Standing Orders the Council undertook the annual review of the following policies:

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Complaints Procedure
- Freedom of Information Policy

The Council considered recommendations made by the Finance and Management Committee in respect of amendments to Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

Resolved:

- (1) That the following amendments be made to Standing Orders:

Standing Order No. 1 (a) be amended to read:

“Meetings of Council shall normally be held at Morecambe Town Hall on the 1st Thursday of the month at 7 p.m.”

Standing Order No. 2 (d) be amended to read:

“In addition to the Annual Meeting of the Council, the Council to meet on the first Thursday of each month with all meetings commencing at 7 p.m.”

(2) That a formal media policy be introduced based on the content of Standing Order No. 28.

(3) That the Financial Regulation 5.3 be amended to read:

“Cheques drawn on the bank account in accordance with the schedule referred to in paragraph 5.2 shall be signed by two members of Council. The authorised signatories to be four members of the Council including the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Council together with two other members.”

(4) That following (2) above, the two additional cheque signatories to be Councillors R. Dennison and Hanson.

(5) That no amendments be made to the Freedom of Information Policy and Complaints Procedure.

9. Budget 2019/20

The Council had set the budget for 2019/20 at its meeting on 17th January 2019.

To fund this budget, the Council had set its Council Tax rate at £19.59 per Band D property, which will raise a precept of £189,593.58, which represented a nil percent increase on Council Tax from the previous year.

The remainder of the budget would be funded through reserves and carry forward of underspend from the 2018/19 financial year.

The Clerk informed Council that whilst the final accounts could not be presented to this meeting due to the issues reported in Minute No. 12 below, there were no serious issues arising from the 2018/19 year end position that were of concern to the Responsible Finance Officer.

It had not been possible to utilise the Mobile CCTV funding as reported to the previous Council on several occasions. This was due to the City Council undertaking tests to find suitable equipment that would be effective in catching fly tippers etc. The Town Council's CCTV camera would be an additional camera to those used by the City Council and would be managed by the City Council, although the Town Council would determine its positioning.

With regards to the Speed Device, the Council currently owned one device which was moved around its seven locations on a biweekly basis. Further funding was included in the 2018/19 budget to allow a further device to be purchased to enable two devices on the seven sites at the same time i.e. covering both directions of traffic. Unfortunately, the device the Council currently owned had ceased to be produced and the Council had been liaising with Lancashire

County Highways regarding a suitable alternative option. The Clerk advised that County Highways had now suggested a suitable option and that the Council should consider whether to retain this funding within the budget.

The Clerk presented the 2018/19 year end position including suggested items that the Council may wish to consider carrying forward to the 2019/20.

The agreed 2019/20 Budget required total funds of £300,740.00 to fund it.

The precept totalled (received on 10th April) £189,593.58

The Year End position was as follows:

Balance in Bank at 31st March,2019 (available to carry forward): £132,258.96

Less funds required for commitments and suggested carry forwards:

Community Grants £ 2,500.00

Deprivation funding approved not yet claimed £ 6,100.00

Morecambe in Bloom £ 500.00

Mobile CCTV £ 3,000.00

Speed Device £ 2,500.00

Total £ 14,600.00

The actual amount in the Bank Account available to carry forward to fund the 2019/20 budget was therefore: £132,258.96 – £14,600.00 = £117,658.96

In addition, the Council had £4,507.00 of VAT recoverable. Once this was received this would give a sum of £122,165.96

When these amounts were added to the precept it gave funds available to spend in 2019/20 of £311,759.54 which equated to a surplus of £11,019.00 over the agreed budget for 2019/20 and hence unallocated funds.

The Council was required to consider the allocation of this surplus amount within the 2019/20 budget at the earliest opportunity.

With regards to the unallocated funds totalling £11,000 proposals were suggested regarding the funds being utilised to support additional street cleansing projects and for grant aid towards tackling Deprivation in the town.

Resolved:

- (1) That the 2018/19 year end position as reported to Council be noted.
- (2) That with regards to unallocated funds totalling £11,019.00 the matter be further considered at the next meeting of Council.
- (3) That the following underspends within the 2018/19 budget be carried forward to 2019/20:

Community Grants £ 2,500.00

Deprivation funding approved not yet claimed £ 6,100.00

Morecambe in Bloom £ 500.00

Mobile CCTV	£ 3,000.00
Speed Device	<u>£ 2,500.00</u>
Total	£ 14,600.00

- (4) That with regards to the acquisition of an additional speed device, the Clerk be requested to investigate the possibility of purchasing a device which included data collection within the amount carried forward for this item.

10. Planning Development and Environment Committee

The Council received the minutes of the Planning Development and Environment Committee from its meeting held on 8th April 2019 and considered its recommendations in respect of the following items:

- (a) Planning Applications
- (b) Allotment Update
- (c) Morecambe in Bloom

Resolved:

- (1) That Lancaster City Council be advised that in respect of 19/00398/FUL, Hillcroft Nursing Home, 1 – 3 Poulton Mews, Morecambe, the Town Council were concerned at the lack of information regarding the proposed study dwelling and that it remained concerned that this was further retrospective planning application and urges Lancaster City Council to take the necessary action within its powers to reduce retrospective planning applications.
- (2) That Lancaster City Council be informed that in respect of Application No. 18/01079/FUL, 3 Alexandra Road, Morecambe, the Town Council could not properly consider this application due to no information being available on the City Council's website at the time of the Committee's meeting.
- (3) That Lancaster City Council be advised that in respect of Application No. 19/00300/FUL, 1 Thirlmere Grove, Morecambe, the Town Council were concerned that the proposed application had the capacity to result in the unsatisfactory overlooking and loss of light to neighbouring properties.
- (4) That Lancashire County Council be advised that in respect of Application No. 19/00288/FUL, 17 Hodder Avenue, Morecambe, the Town Council requests that the use of the proposed building should be linked to the existing use and location of the property to avoid a future application for the use of the proposed building as a separate development.
- (5) That Lancaster City Council be advised that in respect of Application No. 19/00281/FUL 220 Lancaster Road, Morecambe, the Town Council had no comments to make.
- (6) That Lancaster City Council be advised that in respect of Application No. 18/01654/FUL Maple Works, Northgate, White Lund Industrial Estate, Morecambe, the Town Council requested that the views and recommendations of the Highways Authority with regard to this application be taken into account before the application was approved, and that it remained concerned that this was further retrospective planning application and urges

Lancaster City Council to take the necessary action within its powers to reduce retrospective planning applications.

- (7) That Lancaster City Council be advised that in respect of Application No. 19/00100/FUL Jump Rush Trampoline Park, 21 Northumberland Street, Morecambe, the Town Council strongly objects to this change of use application, on the grounds that the current development was only permitted on the current site for leisure use only and changing its use to retail use would have an adverse effect on the economy and offer of Morecambe town centre.
- (8) That Lancaster City Council be advised that in respect of Application No. 19/00254/FUL 381 Marine Road East, Morecambe, the Town Council had considered the public objection to the application and believed this to be a boundary issue although were concerned that the proposed height of the wall could cause a loss of light into the neighbouring property.
- (9) That in respect of the Allotment site managed by the Town Council:
 - (a) the siting of a new community centre on the Allotment site be approved, provided it was on the opposite side of the site and that the site of the current community centre be returned to allotment space within three months of the new community centre being built; and
 - (b) To agree to submit the Planning application on behalf of the West End and Heysham (North) Allotment Association provided that the Association reimbursed the Council the fees for submitting the planning application and to the Council approving the proposed plans and drawings prior to the application being submitted.

11. Environmental Enforcement

In February 2016, when setting the 2016/17 budget the Council had agreed to fund an Environmental Enforcement officer position. The officer was employed for 18.5 hours per week and employed by Lancaster City Council.

The officer worked solely within Morecambe as an add on to the City Council's Dog Warden Service.

The primary function of the post was to:

- Patrol Morecambe working and engaging with the Community to reduce dog fouling and littering.
- Issue fixed penalty notices in respect of dog fouling not being picked up
- Issue fixed penalty notices for dogs not on a lead in areas where dogs should not be off a lead
- Issue fixed penalty notices for people dropping litter.

To issue fixed penalty notices, the offences must be observed by the officer.

The post was employed on an annual basis and funds had been included in the budget for 2019/20.

The Council continued to receive a high volume of concerns regarding dog fouling via social media.

The previous Council received updates at its meetings on the work of the Environmental Enforcement position and in February 2019 and raised the following concerns with the employer, Lancaster City Council:

- (a) Note the current situation regarding the extent of dog fouling, and to consider ways in which the post of the Enforcement Officer be amended in order to secure best value for money.
- (b) Request the Clerk to contact City Council as the employers of the Enforcement Officer, to discuss ways in which procedures can be amended in order to maximise the time the Enforcement Officer spends patrolling the streets and consider ways in which the role of the Enforcement Officer could contribute to reducing the prevalence of dog fouling.
- (c) Note that Morecambe residents are provided with additional resources through the Town Council's funding of the Enforcement Officer and request the Clerk to contact Lancaster City Council's Environmental Health Department to ascertain the work undertaken by the dog wardens in Morecambe.

The City Council had responded in detail and their response was submitted to the Council in full.

The Clerk advised the Council that whilst it remained very difficult to catch offenders despite a variety of methods being tried and tested, concern remained that the Town Council may not be receiving value for money for the post. As there appeared to be a reluctance by the City Council to treat the post as an add on service and to fully utilise the intelligence received by the Town Council from residents re problem areas.

Resolved:

- (1) That the City Council be requested to attend the Town Meeting on 23rd May to discuss issues around the Environmental Enforcement position.
- (2) That Councillors be requested to forward ideas to the Clerk regarding methods that could be used for more effective enforcement of dog fouling.
- (3) That the Chairman and Clerk meet with the appropriate Director at Lancaster City Council to discuss the Council's concerns regarding the management of the Environmental Enforcement position.

12. Town Council Website

At the last meeting of Council held on 21st March, the Clerk advised members that the website had not been working for several days, and that the Council's domain/website hosting Company were investigating the reasons for this.

Over the last two months the Council had faced severe issues with its website, emails and accounts system as follows.

Website

The Council's domain and Website were hosted by WUK Media. Due to problems faced by WUK Media following an attack on their servers, the Town Council website and emails systems had not operated efficiently since 18th March.

The Council's website was built on an old version of word press, and WUK Media had advised the Clerk that although they had restored the website to a date prior to the date of the attack, its long term functionality was no longer fit for purpose. Indeed, the Clerk advised that some of the functionality on the website had been lost and could not be restored.

WUK Media have therefore advised that the Clerk that the Council should consider investing in a new website.

The Council had not set a budget for this. However, it was essential the Council had a functioning and high quality website going forward.

Emails

The Council's two staff emails were also hosted on the server provided by WUK Media as the email addresses were linked to the Council's domain name.

As a result of the problems faced by WUK Media, the Council's emails for both members of staff since 18th March had not been operating effectively, particularly between 7th April and 23rd April when the Council could neither send nor receive any emails.

The two email addresses had been restored by WUK Media, although any emails received by the Council during the above dates cannot be seen or retrieved.

Therefore, following discussions with WUK Media and KTD (the Company who manage the Council computers and their security) the Clerk had authorised the two email addresses to be removed from all connections to the domain and WUK Media's server and migrated into the Microsoft exchange and to operate via Office 365. This work was completed on 13th May and had cost the Council £299.

The loss of email was concerning and was likely to have effected entries to Morecambe in Bloom in particular.

Accounting System

The Council had used an Accounts system called "Scribe" since 2014. This was a software package/programme for which the Council paid an annual fee. The software was bespoke for Parish Councils. Until 25th April 2019, the Council had not previously had any problems with the software.

However, the software failed to operate on 25th April. According to Scribe and KTD this was due to the files being corrupt. However, there were no viruses on the Council's computers and following extensive work between Council staff, KTD and Scribe, the backup files were finally able to be accessed on 9th May, and the software became functional again from 13th May.

Due to these issues it had not been possible to produce the 2018/19 annual accounts for consideration at this meeting

Resolved:

That the Town Clerk be requested to obtain tenders/quotations for the provision of a new Town Council website and to submit these to Council for consideration.

13. Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 6th June 2019 at Morecambe Town Hall commencing at 7 p.m.

The meeting ended at 8.10 p.m.

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Chairman

Any queries regarding this meeting, please contact David Croxall, Clerk to the Council on 01524 422929 or via email to clerk@morecambe.gov.uk

29th May 2019