

MINUTES of the Council Meeting of EDENBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL, held via ZOOM on Monday 09 November 2020, at 7.41 pm.

Present: Cllrs J Aldridge, A Baker, A Damodaran, V Jennings, A Layland (Chairman), N Lloyd, M McArthur (Vice-Chairman), S McGregor, A Read, J Scholey, S Sumner, S Taylor and B Todd

In attendance: Town Clerk; one member of the public (County Councillor) and no members of the press.

The Chairman read an advisory statement on the guidelines for conducting remote meetings due to the Government changes to holding and attending meetings under the Coronavirus Act 2020 S78. Town Council Standing Orders continue to apply.

1. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS OR PREDETERMINATION

Cllr Layland declared a personal interest in agenda item 12.4 (Member of the Chamber of Commerce).

19:43 Meeting was adjourned for agenda item 3

3. PUBLIC QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS

None.

19.43 Meeting was reconvened.

4. TO RECEIVE, ADOPT AND SIGN THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON [14 September 2020](#) (9396-9399)

Resolved: that the minutes of the Council meeting held on 14 September 2020 be duly signed by the Chairman as a true and accurate record of the meeting; pages 9396-9399.

5. TO RECEIVE COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS

5.1 County Councillors

The Chairman gave County Councillor Lake's apologies; (he joined the meeting later and is reported after agenda item 11).

District Councillors

Cllr McArthur said that Sevenoaks District Council (SDC) was currently preparing its budget for 2021/22. SDC was working with an external marketing consultant and the four towns in the district on reopening the high streets and would be producing some publicity material and social media posts. The Dunbrik depot was working hard to maintain its waste collection services across the district despite the current lockdown restrictions.

6. TO ADOPT THE FOLLOWING REPORTS/MINUTES OF MEETINGS

6.1 Planning and Transportation Committee – [7 September](#) (9388-9393); [28 September](#) (9406-9408); Planning Committee [12 October](#) (9411-9412)

Resolved: the minutes of the meetings and numbered - 7 September (9388-9393); 28 September (9406-9408); 12 October (9411-9412) to be adopted.

6.2 CIL Board – [14 September](#) (9394-9395)

Resolved: the minutes numbered 9394-9395 to be adopted.

6.3 Open Spaces Committee – [21 September](#) (9400-9405)

Resolved: the minutes numbered 9400-9405 to be adopted.

6.4 Forward Planning Steering Group – [5 October 2020](#) (9409-9410)

Resolved: the minutes numbered 9409-9410 to be adopted.

6.5 Finance and Governance Committee – [12 October](#) (9413-9419)

Resolved: the minutes numbered 9413-9419 to be adopted.

6.5.1 To receive the recommendation to adopt the draft Capital and Reserves Policy

- Resolved:** to adopt the draft Capital and Reserves Policy.
6.6 Emergency Planning Committee – 26 October (9420-9422)
Resolved: the minutes numbered 9420-9422 to be adopted.

7. COVID-19 (Coronavirus): update, following the Government’s announcement on 31 October to impose lockdown from 5 November

The Town Clerk’s report was noted and referred to: On 31 October, the Government announced a new lockdown from 5 November to 2 December. The Office changes meant splitting in to two teams working opposite times in the office and from home. This would likely continue for the duration of the winter months on a need be basis. The vast majority of the Town Council’s work and services would continue and should remain unaffected. The Groundstaff had adopted a similar approach. The Council had already changed its phone system to adapt to home working, but its IT facilities were not adequate to facilitate homeworking.

Care for our Community had been reinstated by SDC and residents could register for volunteer support if needed. However, it was expected that there would not be the same level of uptake as during the previous lockdown.

7.1 To consider approving the expenditure of up to £3,500 to be able to provide adequate home working facilities as needed

Members,

- Resolved:** expenditure of up to £3,500 to be able to provide adequate home working facilities as needed.

8. PERSONNEL

Following the Personnel Committee meeting on 2 September, Members of the Committee have met and considered the future staff retirements, potential restructuring roles and training. The proposal is:

8.1 to advertise for a replacement Responsible Financial Officer (RFO), as soon as possible

- Resolved:** to commence with the recruitment and advertisement for the replacement Responsible Financial Officer (RFO).

8.2 to change the role from 22 hours per week to full-time (37 hours) to incorporate other financial duties (e.g. the cemeteries and allotments)

- Resolved:** to change the role from 22 hours per week to full-time (37 hours) to incorporate other financial duties, and the additional annual expenditure of £13k to salaries.

8.3 to approve the additional expenditure for handover and training period

- Resolved:** to approve the additional expenditure of £7,320 for a handover and training period.

9. TO RECEIVE REPORTS AND ANY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORKING GROUPS; DELEGATED REPORTS; CLERK’S AND OFFICERS’ REPORTS:

9.1 Clerk’s Report

Received.

9.2 Community Warden’s report

Received.

10. MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES FOR REPORT AND NOT ELSEWHERE ON THE AGENDA

10.1 To note: On 8 October, Members met with the Leader and Chief Executive of Sevenoaks District Council for its Annual Town and District Council Liaison Meeting

The minutes from the meeting had previously been circulated.

10.2 To receive an update on the research for appropriate Electronic Visual Display facilities at meetings in Rickards Hall and consider the expenditure of up to £6,000

Members received an updated cost for the project, Members unanimously,

- Resolved:** the expenditure of £6,000 to provide appropriate Electronic Visual Display facilities at meetings in Rickards Hall.

10.3 To consider the expenditure of up to £1,000 for a new card reader and till system, and the 1.75% per transaction cost (currently £1.50 per cheque/and per £100 cash)

Members referred to the Clerk’s report and unanimously,

- Resolved:** to move to accept card payments with a new card reader and till system and the expenditure of up to £1,000.

10.4 To receive an update on the Food Bank

An update on the Food Bank had been provided in the Clerk's report. It was also noted that at the Edenbridge Churches in Covenant (ECC) meeting it had agreed that the current food bank to become part of the Trussell Trust network, with Grace Community Church and with Dave White as lead. A meeting with Trussell Trust will look at developing an action plan; a meeting with the local interested parties would be arranged.

10.5 To appoint a new Member on to the Finance and Governance Committee

Cllr Layland proposed Cllr Aldridge, Members unanimously,

Resolved: to appoint Cllr Aldridge on to the Finance and Governance Committee.

11. TO RECEIVE A VIEW ON THE PROPOSALS FOR THE BUDGET 2021/22 AND TO MAKE A RECOMMENDATION TO THE FINANCE COMMITTEE TO PREPARE ITS DRAFT BUDGET

Cllr Lloyd referred to the confidential papers he had circulated. Last year an above inflation increase of the precept was agreed by the Town Council as the first of a series needed to achieve a balanced budget. There continues to be an underlying deficit of ca £50,000 pa that needs to be remedied. In the past month, working with the Town Clerk and the RFO, he and Cllr Scholey had undertaken a detailed review of the Council's financial situation including costs, income, 10 and 30-year maintenance plans and reserves. Consideration was also given to which schemes could potentially be funded by CIL. He said that the Council is in a difficult and unpalatable position. The scenarios referenced in the papers set out some stark different choices.

- To eliminate the deficit and withdrawal on the reserves within the next year, the precept increase would need to be 13.5% (£20.11 per year on a band D property).
- To only increase by inflation (assumed to be 1.5%) would see the reserves depleted within 5 years; this would not allow for staff incremental increases and other above inflation costs.
- A 5.5% increase would see the deficit recover in 3-years.
- The other alternative would be for the Council to cut its services. The two biggest expenses to the Council are its staff costs and open spaces.

20:20 County Councillor Peter Lake joined the meeting.

Members considered and debated at length. Staffing costs, managing the Council's assets and open spaces were discussed, but no proposal was reached as to which service(s) to consider cutting.

A proposal to increase the Precept by 5% was put forward. Cllr McGregor requested that the vote be recorded. Cllrs Lloyd and Scholey said that they would abstain from the voting as they had scrutinised the budgets and prepared the range of proposals. Votes in favour: Cllrs Aldridge, Baker, Damodaran, Jennings, Layland, McArthur, Read, Sumner, Taylor and Todd. Abstained: Cllr McGregor.

A second proposal was put forward to increase the Precept more than 5%. The vote was 12:1 against an increase higher than 5%. The majority vote,

Resolved: to direct the Finance Committee to prepare its draft budget with a 5% increase to the Precept; £7.51 per year increase to a Band D property or £0.63p per month.

19:49 The Chairman invited Cllr Lake to give his County Councillors report. Members agreed and **resolved** to receive agenda item 5.1.

5.1 County Councillor report

Cllr Lake sympathised with the Council's dilemma over the Precept. He said that Kent County Council (KCC) was having the same difficult debates, and Brexit and Covid-19 had made matters worse for all. He mentioned that KCC had been hit with a £21m bill looking after the asylum seekers and central Government were stalling on any reimbursement. He was expecting KCC to increase Council Tax by 3%, and Social Services by 2%. This would not be helpful to those financially impacted by Covid-19. He went on to talk about the lack of support from KCC Highways to install 20 mph limits in a number of locations across the region, and that he had campaigned to Michael Payne (Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport). Referring to school transport, he said that there were currently no complaints.

21:00 Cllr Peter Lake left the meeting.

12. OTHER BUSINESS including items referred from Committees for decision

12.1 To approve the proposed Council and Committees Meeting schedule for 2021/22

Resolved: to adopt the Council and Committees Meeting schedule for 2021/22.

12.2 To approve the Office Christmas arrangements: Propose to close the office from 24 December to 1 January inclusive (using statutory days 24 and 29 December and the option for annual leave days on 30 and 31 December)

Resolved: to approve the Office Christmas arrangements; the office would close from 24 December to 3 January, reopening on Monday 4 January.

12.3 Anti-Social Behaviour in Edenbridge

Members had received a talk from Inspector Mark Stubberfield prior to the meeting on local policing and a number of special operations which had focused on Edenbridge and anti-social behaviour including the nuisance bikes. There were also a number of personnel changes: Sargent Kevin Sewill, new Community Safety Officer for Sevenoaks District; PCSOs Joe Cain and Amy Best were leaving, their replacements were PCSOs Sam Rustrick and Christian Ward-Davies.

Members suggested to invite the Crime and Police Commissioner to the Annual Town Meeting in March.

12.4 To receive a request from the Chamber of Commerce to request the use of Market Yard car park for this year's French Market on 22 November

Resolved: Members received the requested from the Chamber of Commerce, and unanimously, not to permit the French Market use of Market Yard car park this year due the current coronavirus lockdown restrictions.

13. CONSULTATIONS

13.1 [Budget Consultation 2021-22](#) – Kent County Council – opened 14 October closes 24 November
Noted.

14. TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM COUNCILLORS WHO HAVE ATTENDED MEETINGS OF OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr Lloyd had attended a Campaign to Protect Rural England meeting.

15. TO CONSIDER ANY PRESS RELEASES

None.

16. MATTERS FOR FUTURE AGENDAS

None.

17. DATE OF NEXT MEETING – 18 January 2021 (to confirm the draft budget and Precept for 2021/22)

Meeting closed at 21:10