

# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held remotely via Zoom on Monday 1<sup>st</sup> June 2020 at 7.00pm

## PRESENT:

Cllr. C. Macve (Chair)	Cllr. H. Firth
Cllr. D. Ward (Vice-Chair)	Cllr. J. Love
Cllr. B. Cox	Cllr. A. Smith
Cllr. J. Edwards	Cllr. P. Sparks

## IN ATTENDANCE:

2 members of the press (recorded the meeting)  
4 members of the public  
Cllr. K. Bedwell  
Cllr. D. Bennett  
Cllr. D. French  
Cllr. S. Mayhew

Holly Goring – Town Clerk  
Mark Francis – Estates & Facilities Manager  
Sarah D'Alessio – Assistant Town Clerk & RFO  
Minutes taken by Holly Goring

### 1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda.

None were received.

### 2.0 STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE CHAIRMAN'S DISCRETION

**GP01.06.20** It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to enable a member of the Fire Brigade Union to speak, and councillors who were not members of the General Purposes Committee on agenda item 8.3 – East Sussex Fire & Rescue's public consultation "Planning for a Safer Future."

Mr Parry, East Sussex firefighter and Secretary for the Fire Brigade Union, in East Sussex advised that the above document set out proposals to cut 10 fire engines, at least 30 whole time firefighters, and up to 60 retained (on-call) firefighter posts, which would reduce response times in particular during the evening and weekends.

There were currently two fire engines based at Uckfield station. Reduce that to one, and the response times at the weekend would be heavily impacted. The Fire Brigade Union were also unhappy with the timing of the public consultation, as

due to Covid-19 it had not been possible to hold face to face meetings. It was also considered to be inaccurate in places and overly complicated for members of the public to digest. A cross party letter had been sent from local MPs to parliament to push for a rejection to the proposals and cuts. Mr Parry urged Uckfield Town Council to write to the Chair of the Fire Authority to reject the proposals being put forward.

Councillor D. French understood the need for a periodic review but did not feel this was the right time to carry out public consultation – during a pandemic. Councillor French had listened to the interview with the Chair of the East Sussex Fire Authority, Roy Galley and he advised that they were not cuts, so felt the information being provided was still unclear. Councillor French wished to propose that the consultation be postponed and for the Town Council to give thanks to the Uckfield crew who had been dealing with a fire in Heathfield that day.

Councillor K. Bedwell reminded all in attendance of the increase in housing and subsequent increase in population, in not just the Uckfield area, but the whole of the district. This was not the time to look at reducing service provision. ESFRS did not just handle fires, they were also called upon to assist with medical incidents, flooding, education and prevention. Uckfield Town Council should speak out loudly and reject these cuts.

Councillor D. Bennett recognised the concerns raised and referred to the specialist and rescue equipment and skills provided by ESFRS including the water bowser, which was not available at all sites, Uckfield was fortunate to have these. The constant reductions in public services were making us very vulnerable and Uckfield was known to be a great support to other parts of the district and county when big incidents occurred. Fires such as those which occurred on the Ashdown Forest required the support of fire appliances from as far as West Sussex and Surrey. A question was posed to the Chair of the East Sussex Fire Authority which asked, should we expect other tax payers to pay for services in our area.

**GP02.06.20** Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

### **3.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillor C. Snelgrove.

### **4.0 MINUTES**

4.1 Minutes of the meetings of the General Purposes Committees held on the 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**GP03.06.20** It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meetings of the General Purposes Committee on the 9<sup>th</sup> March and 20<sup>th</sup> April 2020 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

### 4.2 Action list

Members noted the report.

4.3 Project list  
Members noted the report.

## 5.0 FINANCIAL MATTERS

5.1 To note bills paid  
Members noted the bills paid.

5.2 To note the income and expenditure reports for 2019/20  
Nothing to report on at present.

5.3. Bad Debts  
Members noted the current bad debts recorded and reasons for this.

5.4 To consider carry forwards of unspent revenue budget from 2019/20  
Members were provided with a short list of funding which had been set aside in 2019/20 for specific projects and new initiatives but work had not yet been completed.

**GP04.06.20** Members **RESOLVED** that the following unspent sums be carried forward from the 2019/20 financial year to 2020/21:

Environment & Leisure Committee:

Safety Surface Hempstead Play Area - £6500

(unspent funds to be carried forward for future works in Luxfords Play Area)

General Purposes Committee:

West Park Pavilion - £10,000 (saving for future project to be carried forward into earmarked reserves)

Data Protection - £900 (unspent funds to be carried forward into earmarked reserves)

Civic Centre Booking system - £8,000 (project not yet completed, funds to be carried forward into earmarked reserves to deliver in 2020/21)

5.5 To write off small under and over payments on the Town Council accounts  
Members reviewed the report which detailed a cheque which was issued in October 2018 for £152.25 but the cheque had never been banked and contact had been unsuccessful. It was proposed that the cheque be cancelled.

Two small underpayments had also been identified from November and December 2017 respectively – both for the amount of 60p.

In line with the Town Council's financial regulations and recommendations of Auditors, the Town Council is required to formally write off these amounts.

**GP05.06.20** Members **RESOLVED** to agree to write off the two small underpayment amounts listed in the report and to cancel the cheque which had not been banked.

## 6.0 BUILDINGS

6.1 To note the current position with the Council's buildings  
Members reviewed the regular update on works and repairs within the Town Council's buildings.

One member raised their concerns once more in regards to the car park adjacent to Foresters Hall. The Town Councillor was now getting complaints from

residents and the car park was full. This car park was for the use of hall hirers, throughout the week and weekend but during the Covid-19 lockdown had been used by local residents.

The Estates & Facilities Manager reminded members that he had put proposals together around 12 months before and presented to the General Purposes Committee for consideration. These proposals looked at the costs of placing a barrier on the entrance to the car park, to enable hall hirers and users to have access to the car park but deter general use.

One member felt that this was to be expected with more people at home during the Covid-19 lockdown and restrictions and also with an increase in housing and development.

A second member advised that discretionary parking was also offered by nearby business Mitchell & Cooper off Framfield Road. They felt that the current circumstances had not helped and developments such as the one off Mallards Drive would further affect the issue.

Referring back to the report, the Estates & Facilities Manager advised what works could be carried out during the lockdown period and those on the annual maintenance programme which were a priority, but also advised of three tasks identified which could be held off temporarily:

- replacement blinds Foresters Hall - £2,400
- roof works Osborn Hall - £7,200
- Weald Hall light trussing - £9,850

#### **GP06.06.20**

Members **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) note the report;
- (ii) postpone work on the above three items detailed in the Town Council's annual maintenance programme and for the General Purposes Committee to reconsider delivery midway through the financial year.

### **7.0 POLICY**

None.

### **8.0 ADMINISTRATION**

#### **8.1 To receive a report on Health and Safety within the Council**

Members reviewed the report circulated and noted the contents.

#### **8.2 To receive Members' audit reports**

The Town Clerk advised members that a couple of months still needed to be completed and the Clerk would be contacting members to see who could visit the office to carry these out in a socially distanced manner.

#### **8.3 To consider the details of the East Sussex Fire & Rescue's public consultation "Planning for a Safer Future"**

The Chairman referred members to the report which set out the key proposals of the consultation document from the East Sussex Fire Authority "Planning for a Safer Future." The Chairman also advised that clarity was required in the proposal (suggested response) by Councillor B. Cox - the document had been produced by the East Sussex Fire Authority and not East Sussex County Council.

Councillor C. Macve thanked Mr Parry and the three Town Councillors for their earlier contributions to the discussion on this agenda item. It was felt that more clarity was required on the Fire Authority's risk assessment in introducing these changes and questioned why this was being carried out at this time.

Councillor P. Sparks advised that he had previously been a member of the East Sussex Fire Authority for eight years, and it was important to look at the underlying reasons, which would be partly financial, for putting forward these changes. In 2010 the East Sussex Fire Authority received government grant funding of around £15million, and in 2020, as low as £3million. With such massive cuts in funding, it was important to look at the ways you could manage services. The Fire Authority received the smallest segment/proportion of the council tax bill, it was therefore vital that more appreciation be given to the value of the Fire Service. Councillor Sparks also agreed that it was not the right time to carry out the consultation and requested that it be placed on hold.

Councillor D. Ward referred back to the confusion in the messages being communicated. The Chair of the East Sussex Fire Authority in their recent radio interview advised that it wasn't for financial reasons. Councillor Ward felt the consultation should be postponed until things with Covid-19 had settled down and raised her concerns with the cuts and changes to public services.

Councillor B. Cox emphasised the loss that would be experienced if full time service members were to lose their jobs.

Councillor J. Love felt everyone had covered the main points but the impact of new development had not been incorporated. It was vital that this be considered in the consultation, as reduced services may not be able to meet demand and services should be improved, at this time, not taken away. Councillor J. Love put forward an alternative proposal:

*“ UTC urgently and forcefully call upon the East Sussex Fire Authority to immediately drop all and any proposed amendments to fire services in our county – especially in the current pandemic and with consideration for current and future developments appearing in our area.”*

Councillor A. Smith wished to thank Councillor Cox for his work and for bringing the detail of the proposals to the Town Council's attention. There was clearly some financial motivation for the proposals, and accountability was key – by placing the report out in the public domain for consultation, it made the Fire Authority accountable for these proposals. Councillor Smith was particularly interested in the rationale for these proposals, particularly in high risk areas, as it would reduce services dramatically and would not future proof the service. With climate change, it was likely that bush and forest fires could increase. Councillor Smith wished to propose that the consultation be suspended until it could be given proper consideration.

Councillor C. Macve advised that he also had a number of points regarding details within the report itself.

Councillor J. Edwards wished to thank Mr Parry for his earlier comments. Councillor Edwards suggested that the wording of the initial motion put forward by Councillor Cox needed strengthening further i.e. using phrasing such as 'demand' instead of 'request' and for Councillor A. Smith's proposal to be incorporated.

After further discussion, members felt that alterations should be made to Councillor B. Cox's initial proposal, in order to strengthen the wording, reflect on the timing of the consultation and impact of cuts at a time when housing numbers were increasing. The Town Clerk was asked to read out an amended proposal which incorporated the suggested amendments from Councillors Love, Smith and Edwards, to the initial proposal by Councillor Cox.

**GP07.06.20** Members **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) note the report, and with seven votes in favour,
- (ii) approve the following response to the East Sussex Fire Authority:

*“Uckfield Town Council urgently and forcefully calls upon the East Sussex Fire Authority, to immediately drop all and any proposed amendments to the Fire Service in our county. This council believes that the proposed cuts will put the town and its villages at risk and in danger. The council wholeheartedly disagrees with the cuts and will push back at East Sussex County Council on the proposal. And to our best endeavours fight to keep the high standards and first rate fire service that the people of Uckfield deserve.”*

As a result of passing this proposal, Uckfield Town Council will,

- (i) Demand that any public consultation be suspended until it can be given proper consideration (post Covid-19);
- (ii) Ensure that consideration is given to the new large-scale housing developments and subsequent population increase in this area in the next 5-10 years;
- (iii) Demand a comprehensive risk assessment of the impact of the cuts to all South East fire and rescue services, and in dealing with capacity for East Sussex;
- (iv) Ask for modelling of common fire risks in Wealden such as bush fires on the Ashdown Forest and the effects to capacity on Uckfield's Fire station;
- (v) Demand a full explanation from East Sussex Fire Authority on the proposed cuts.”

**9.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

**9.1** To consider reports from:-

- (i) Citizens Advice Bureau  
Councillor A. Smith advised that the CAB had held an extraordinary board meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2020 (remotely). Staff were wholly working remotely now, with the majority providing telephone support. 80% of volunteers were managing to work and call numbers had been steady. Their concerns rested with those who were most vulnerable. They too had noted that scams were increasing, and they had seen a hike in food bank vouchers. Employment benefits and universal credit had been the main issues they had received enquiries about. Over 5,000 clients had been supported in 2019/20, an increase of 5% on 2018/19. Members noted the update.
- (ii) East Sussex Association of Local Councils AGM  
Nothing to report at this time.
- (iii) Ridgewood Village Hall Management Committee  
Councillor K. Bedwell thanked the Town Council for the transfer of the agreed funds of £11k, during the refurbishment works. The refurbishment had commenced the previous week, and was expected to take 8-10 weeks. The works would also address all of the health and safety matters identified previously in association with the Town Council.

A new Treasurer had been appointed – Jane Atherton of Simmons Gainsford LLP. They had also registered for VAT, to ensure they could run the business more like a business, with the hire of their rooms. Members noted the update.

- (iv) Uckfield & District Housing Association Ltd Management Committee  
Nothing to report at this time.
- (v) Uckfield & District Preservation Society  
Nothing to report at this time.
- (vi) Uckfield Volunteer Centre  
Members noted the report provided by Councillor B. Cox. Members felt their communication throughout the Covid-19 restrictions had been excellent.
- (vii) Wealden Works  
Nothing to report at this time.
- (viii) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Management Committee  
Nothing to report at this time.
- (ix) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Planning Panel  
Nothing to report at this time.

#### **10.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman, Councillor C. Macve wished to record his personal thanks to the Town Clerk and the rest of the staff at the Town Council. They had done a superb job through very difficult times. He was personally grateful for this.

#### **11.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None.

#### **12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**

##### **GP08.06.20**

It was **RESOLVED** that pursuant to Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted it was advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they were instructed to withdraw.

- 12.1 To note update Town Council's lease agreements  
Members noted the report.
- 12.2 To note update on staffing and Civic Centre/Luxfords Restaurant  
Members noted the report.

The meeting closed at 8.36pm.