

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield on Monday 8 November 2021 at 7.00pm

PRESENT:

Cllr. P. Sparks (Chair)	Cllr. C. Macve
Cllr. H. Firth	Cllr. A. Smith
Cllr. G. Johnson	Cllr. D. Ward
Cllr. J. Love	

IN ATTENDANCE:

1 member of the press

Mark Francis – Estates & Facilities Manager
Holly Goring – Town Clerk
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 forthcoming.

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

None were received.

3.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were recorded from Councillors J. Edwards and C. Snelgrove.

4.0 MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on the 4 October 2021

GP22.11.21 It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 4 October 2021 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Action list

Members reviewed and noted the updates provided within the action list. They agreed to remove the sub text and actions from within action GP16.08.21 as this work had now been completed. Members subsequently noted the report.

4.3 Project list

Members noted the contents of 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 2021/22 (end of Sept 2021)

Members reviewed the income and expenditure reports for General Purposes Committee and Luxford Restaurant and noted the current position.

5.3. Bad Debts

Members were presented with a list of bad debtors. Councillor C. Macve noted that it was encouraging to see the list reducing and thanked staff for continuing to pursue these debts. Members subsequently noted the report.

5.4 To start considering new initiatives for the draft budget 2022/23

Members were provided with a short list from officers on potential items for inclusion in the budget for 2022/23 in terms of new initiatives and longer-term savings.

Councillor C. Macve queried the proposed works around extra drainage for Hempstead Recreation Ground car park. The Estates & Facilities Manager advised that further investigations were required to look at the surface water run off at both Hempstead Recreation Ground car park and Ridgewood Village Hall car park.

Councillor P. Sparks stated that green initiatives remained important for the council, and suggested looking at insulation within the Town Council's buildings. He recognised that to go to a very high level of green insulation would be expensive, but even improvements to existing insulation would help with keeping energy costs down.

Councillor H. Firth added that the replacement of gas would be costly. The Town Clerk added that the Estates & Facilities Manager had replaced the heating systems with an air con system in Foresters Hall, and the Signal Box would be next.

The Estates & Facilities Manager advised that there was still a wet system in the back of Foresters Hall linked to the toilets. As per his presentation to members on the outcome of the carbon audit in September, if the Town Council put away £8-9k each year, this would assist with reducing the Town Council's carbon emissions. It was suggested this be put down as a long-term saving. Members then noted the report.

6.0 BUILDINGS

6.1 To note the current position with the Council's buildings

Members noted the report provided.

6.2 To note the increase in utility costs for the Town Council's buildings and open spaces in 2022/23 onwards

Members were presented with a report which advised that the new two-year tariff agreed for electricity and gas for all Town Council buildings from February 2022 had increased substantially. The new tariffs would create an 87.96% increase in gas costs per annum, and 59.12% in electric. This would have a big impact on the Town Council's expenditure and would need to be reflected in the budget

setting process for 2022/23.

Members acknowledged that these figures were worrying. The Estates & Facilities Manager added that the current prices had been set three years ago, as part of the existing contract, so it was likely we would have seen some increase, but no one envisaged it would be this high. Councillor A. Smith asked if the feed-in tariff income was likely to increase as a result also. Officers were asked to investigate before members noted the report.

- 6.3 To consider an alternative proposal – to lease our Civic Centre rooms as office space
With income levels still not meeting pre-Covid times, the Estates & Facilities Manager had started to explore options for increasing income for the Civic Centre. Contact had been made with a local commercial estate agent to ascertain what rental income could be charged for leasing out the Martlets or Oakleaf rooms on a short-term basis (three to six months), compared to the hourly arrangements we had at present.

Councillor C. Macve thought it was a brilliant idea if current usage levels were down. It was useful to look at alternatives. The only query he had with the proposal was if there were any planning constraints on the original planning approval for the Civic Centre i.e. restrictions on the use of the building and hours of use.

Councillor P. Sparks questioned whether these rooms would then be available to other organisations during the weekday evenings and weekends. Several of these rooms were currently hired out during those times. The Estates & Facilities Manager confirmed that the leasing out of these rooms would be from 7am to 7pm guaranteed, but members did feel it would not be very practical from a data protection point of view to then hire out the rooms at the weekend if these rooms were used as business offices and held various information and data.

Councillor H. Firth advised that if these were shorter term lease arrangements it might be helpful for the Town Council to run a trial period of sorts to see how effective it would be before, taking a final decision. The previous initiative to add a divider to the Green Room was raised once more, but it was felt that the Green Room had a number of regular bookings in its current layout, and was bringing in good income.

Councillor G. Johnson thought this would be particularly attractive to new start-up businesses – the benefit of a short term arrangement, with perhaps a two week notice period. This would offer flexibility and security but it would be paramount to ensure the room is kept secure to protect access to the company's data. Councillor G. Johnson was supportive of the proposal.

- GP23.11.21** Members **RESOLVED** to consider leasing out both the Martlets and Oakleaf rooms on a trial period for short term commercial let (3-6 months), during 2022/23, and to review how this has worked after a 12-month period.

7.0 POLICY
None.

8.0 ADMINISTRATION

- 8.1 To receive a report on Health and Safety within the Council
Members reviewed and noted the report circulated.

8.2 To receive Members' audit reports
Members noted the reports from July and August 2021.

9.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

9.1 To consider reports from:-

(i) Citizens Advice Bureau
Members noted the report.

(ii) East Sussex Association of Local Councils AGM
Nothing to report at this time.

(iii) Ridgewood Village Hall Management Committee
Members noted the report.

(iv) Uckfield & District Preservation Society
Nothing to report at this time.

(v) Uckfield Volunteer Centre
Nothing to report at this time.

(vi) Wealden Works
Nothing to report at this time.

(vii) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Management Committee
Nothing to report at this time.

(viii) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Planning Panel
Nothing to report at this time.

10.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

11.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Discussed Town Council calendar competition.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

GP24.11.21

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 consider an update on Luxfords Restaurant

Members noted the positive feedback received in relation to the Take That Experience and noted the report.

12.2 To consider the renewal of the lease agreement for the Signal Box.

Members reviewed the information provided within the report.

GP25.11.21

It was **RESOLVED** for the Town Clerk to approach the Town Council's solicitors to seek advice on obtaining an extension to the current lease agreement on a shorter term.

The meeting closed at 7.56pm.