

UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield on Monday 23 October 2023 at 7.00pm

PRESENT:

Cllr. D. Ward (Chair)	Cllr. D. Manvell
Cllr. J. Love	Cllr. P. Selby
Cllr. C. Macve (Vice-Chair)	Cllr. A. Smith

IN ATTENDANCE:

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.

Councillor D. Manvell explained that he and Councillor B. Cox were Directors of the Uckfield Community Fridge CIC and for that reason, had a prejudicial interest in any discussions relating to the Hub site (agenda item 6.2).

Councillor J. Love explained her personal interest in Sussex Support Services based at Victoria Pavilion, who were linked to a couple of items on the agenda.

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

There were no statements from members of the public.

3.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

4.0 MINUTES

4.1 Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on the 11 September 2023

GP25.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 11 September 2023 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4.2 Action list

Members noted the update and agreed to remove completed action:
GP07.06.22 – to consider registering key buildings within Uckfield as assets of community value

It was hoped that a decision would be taken mid-November to early December on the three nominations.

4.3 Project list

Members noted the update and agreed to remove completed project:
Project no. 59 – Civic Centre booking system
Councillor Macve asked what the position was, with the Saturday 262 Bus Service. The Town Clerk advised that she would obtain an update.

5.0 FINANCIAL MATTERS

5.1 To note bills paid

Members noted the bills paid.

5.2 Bad debts

Members reminded the Town Clerk that they were keen to understand the Internal Auditor's perspective on whether the information in the bad debtors report should be in the public domain or considered under confidential. The Town Clerk explained that the Internal Auditor was due to visit on 9 November so the question would be asked at that time.

It was also suggested that it would be helpful for the report to indicate how long the debts had been outstanding. If timescales were incorporated within the report, it would assist members to understand how serious the matter was.

These points were noted, and members subsequently noted the report.

5.3 To note the income and expenditure reports up to 31 August 2023

Members were presented with a report showing profit and loss of sales and purchases for both Luxfords Restaurant and the Council's budget areas under General Purposes Committee.

One member asked for clarity to be provided on the expenditure which was due to be funded from earmarked reserves. This included expenditure relating to office equipment, general power of competence for community grant funding (due to an underspend in the previous financial year) and expenditure on the Hub site.

Councillor A. Smith questioned whether the funding within earmarked reserves allocated for climate change initiatives/green projects could be utilised towards the plumbing/heating works at Victoria and Foresters Hall. The Town Clerk advised that they were still awaiting quotes for these works, and this could be considered at this point, once the figures had been received.

Members noted the contents of the reports.

5.4 To note the Town Council's list of direct debits and standing orders

One member mentioned that they would be keen to see any direct debit payments authorised by two signatories like the suppliers BACs run payment process, despite authority already being given via the direct debit mandates. The Town Clerk advised that she would ask the advice of the Internal Auditor. Members noted the updated list of direct debits and standing orders for the Town Council.

5.5 To undertake an initial review of the budget areas for 2024-25

Members were asked to consider the list of priorities suggested by office staff, and to consider any other matters that they wished to explore for the budget in 2024-25.

Members understood that with increasing costs for materials, stock, fuel, utilities and staffing, that it might be the case that very few additional projects could be incorporated in the budget for 2024-25.

Members were in the main, supportive of the proposals being put forward. Air conditioning continued to be an issue within the Civic Centre in the summer months. In response to one member's request, the Town Clerk talked through each of the officer suggestions and the urgency or priority level of the suggestion. There was also a longer-term discussion amongst members relating to the town centre, and existing buildings and sites owned by the Town Council and the need to put money aside for the future of these buildings and sites.

Members wondered whether a couple of central sites such as the Civic Centre and Source site should be registered as assets of community value.

6.0 BUILDINGS

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

Members were presented with a detailed update on the current condition of the Town Council's buildings and the compliance work being undertaken and noted the work being undertaken within these buildings.

6.2 To note progress of the demolition of the Hub building

Members were presented with an update on the current demolition of the Hub building by powerpoint and the suggested way forward in response to the recent delays.

Members were disappointed with the current situation and were supportive of the proposed Plan B for the external area of the Source building and to address the works outstanding. It was hoped that a revised quotation would be received from Lawson Queay on behalf of the contractor in the following couple of days.

6.3 To note the Buildings Insurance Renewal documentation for 2023-24

Due to the timescales involved, the Town Clerk presented the annual renewal documentation for the Buildings Insurance which had been reviewed in detail by office staff and renewed prior to the meeting of General Purposes Committee.

One member was disappointed that the insurance broker had only approached one insurance company to quote for the Town Council, and felt for the fee paid, they should have undertaken a full review. They also queried whether the indemnity of the business interruption should be based on three years rather than two years worth of rent and income receivable. The Town Clerk explained that the standard term had been two years over previous years, but would be happy to liaise with the agent on this in due course.

Members noted the remaining contents of the documentation and the Town Clerk would advise the Insurance Broker of the above.

7.0 POLICY

7.1 To review the Member's Audit Policy

In response to feedback from the Internal Auditor, and reference to the Town Council's Financial Regulations, it was emphasised that time needed to be put aside on a quarterly basis for members to review all bank reconciliations, and

sign these off. It was suggested that this exercise be undertaken as part of the member audits. It was therefore necessary to update the Member Audit policy to record this procedure.

GP26.10.23 Members **RESOLVED** to approve the revision to the Member Audit Policy, and adopt the contents of the policy.

8.0 ADMINISTRATION

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

Members noted the report.

8.2 To receive Members' audit report

Members noted the audit report for July 2023.

8.3 To review the Community Grants Programme documentation before the application period opens on 1 November 2023

Members were advised that the application period for the Town Council's Community Grants programme was due to commence on 1 November 2023. It was therefore a good opportunity to review the documentation and advise if anything needed changing beforehand.

It was suggested that as the work of the Finance Sub-Committee to review each of the applications was undertaken under confidential business, that the sentence in the covering letter relating to representatives being required to stay for the duration of the meeting, was not necessary and could be removed.

It was also suggested that paragraph 5 be amended to state that Councillors would not consider an application if the representative was not present at the meeting, unless in exceptional circumstances.

GP27.10.23 Subject to the above amendments to the covering letter, members **RESOLVED** to approve the Community Grant Programme documentation ready for publication.

9.0 REPORTS FROM COUNCIL REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

9.1 To consider reports from: -

(i) Wealden Citizen's Advice

Nothing to report at this meeting.

(ii) Uckfield Volunteer Centre

Members noted the update.

(iii) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Mgt Committee

Councillor D. Manvell noted that Wealden DC's Corporate Plan had now been published. Members noted the update.

(iv) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Planning Panel

Nothing to report at this meeting.

10.0 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair, Councillor D. Ward, did not have any announcements to make.

11.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Town Clerk, advised that an update had been received that day from Wealden DC on the Streatfeild House site. They had re-commenced the tender process, and had set a deadline for tenders to be received by 13 November. They were hoping to have taken a decision and award the tender by the end of November 2023.

12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS

GP28.10.23

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 were pleased to receive this report. The Town Clerk updated members on recent events and the fantastic work of the team through working together.

The meeting closed at 8.45pm.