

# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held  
on Monday 2 December 2024 at 7.00 pm  
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

**PRESENT:** Cllr. K. Bedwell (Town Mayor)      Cllr. S. Mayhew (Deputy Mayor)  
Cllr. B. Cox      Cllr. M. McClafferty  
Cllr. D. French      Cllr. P. Selby  
Cllr. J. Love      Cllr. A. Smith  
Cllr. C. Macve      Cllr. P. Ullmann  
Cllr. D. Manvell

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

County Councillors Claire and Chris Dowling  
Two members of the public  
Sarah D'Alessio      Assistant Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer  
Holly Goring      Town Clerk  
Minutes taken by Holly Goring

## **1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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. They were advised that notice should be given at this part of the meeting of any intended declaration and that the nature of the interest should then be declared later at the commencement of the item or when the interest became apparent.

The Town Clerk provided blanket dispensation for members to talk on the general principles of the business planning documents. If a particular matter did become detailed, members could then declare their interest.

Councillor A. Smith declared her personal interest in agenda item 13.0 relating to the service level agreement for Wealden Citizens Advice as she was the Town Council representative.

Councillor P. Selby also declared a personal interest in agenda item 13.0 relating to the service level agreement for Wealden Volunteering as he was the Town Council representative.

The Town Clerk explained that they could speak on agenda item 13.0, to assist with information, as this report was only to gauge views at this stage.

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

There were no statements from members of the public.

### **3.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**FC.69.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to enable updates to be provided by County and District Council representatives.

Councillor Chris Dowling referred to a number of ongoing matters in New Town and Ridgewood that he had been supporting residents with. This included potholes, streetlighting, and highway safety in Ridgewood (New Road).

Councillor Claire Dowling advised that she had been liaising with East Sussex Highways in relation to the works due to be undertaken to the footways in Lashbrooks Road.

Good news had been received regarding Fireflies Nursery, who would now be moving to a new venue following the closure of Holy Cross Primary School.

The ES Highways contractor (Balfour Beatty) had developed a member portal which had proved extremely useful in advising members of the progress on matters reported within their ward area. Over the last month in Uckfield North, they had had 11 potholes and 34 streetlights repaired, and 37 drains cleaned.

Councillor Dowling reminded members that there was an SLR meeting arranged for January, so not to wait for that for any urgent matters.

Councillor Macve wished to congratulate ES Highways on the reconfiguration of the traffic lights at the Church Street junction. This had made quite a difference. He asked if it could be further extended so that there was a longer entrance into the town. It currently only allowed about two additional cars through.

Councillor French referred to the layby in Church Street. The gulley adjacent to the layby was saw water sitting at the grid level of the gulley, so questioned if there was a blockage.

Councillor Manvell sought clarity on the ES Highway member portal, which sounded really useful. Councillor Dowling clarified that it recorded the reactive repair work being undertaken, not scheduled works. The Town Clerk advised that progress still needed to be made on the request to install a pedestrian crossing on London Road near North Row.

Councillor French asked if there was any further news on the Holy Cross site. No further information had been received as yet.

Councillor Macve asked if numbers could be added in the new bus station/bus shelters for local taxi companies.

In providing Wealden District updates, Councillor B. Cox advised that both he and Councillor Manvell had joined the Wealden Alliance at Wealden District Council.

Councillor French had raised the upcoming closure of the day service unit at Uckfield Hospital, to Wealden District Council and the relevant Portfolio Holder.

Councillor Manvell added that he was now Portfolio Holder for Housing and Benefits at Wealden District Council.

**FC.70.12.24** Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

#### **4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillors D. Bennett, V. Frost, B. Reed, and D. Ward due to sickness and personal commitments.

#### **5.0 MINUTES**

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 21 October 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

**FC.71.12.24** Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 21 October 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Mayor.

#### **5.2 Action List**

Members agreed to remove the following actions and noted the report:

FC.93.01.24 – Lloyds Bank Group correspondence

FC.65.10.24 – Residents' Survey

#### **6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES**

6.1 To note the acts and proceedings of the following committee meetings:-

(a) Plans Committee of the 28 October and 18 November 2024

**FC.72.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 28 October and 18 November 2024.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee of the 25 November 2024

**FC.73.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Environment & Leisure Committee of the 25 November 2024.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 4 November 2024

**FC.74.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee of the 4 November 2024.

**7.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES**  
(None received).

**8.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM FULL COUNCIL WORKING GROUPS**  
(None received).

**9.0 TO RATIFY DOCUMENTATION CONSIDERED BY STANDING COMMITTEES:**  
**General Purposes Committee**

(i) Member Audit Policy – Policy No. 63

**FC.75.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** to ratify the decision of General Purposes Committee on 4 November 2024 and adopt the Town Council's updated Member Audit Policy.

#### **10.0 TO CONSIDER A MOTION FROM COUNCILLOR CHRIS MACVE**

Councillor C. Macve had put forward a motion to request that Uckfield Town Council hosted an event to assist with advertising the variety of clubs, societies, groups, and facilities available within the town. He thought that the Civic Centre could host a showcase event.

Councillors Macve and Selby offered to host the event, with the intention that those attending would organise themselves for their displays and information.

The Town Mayor, Councillor Bedwell wondered if it could be linked to the Annual Town meeting, but Councillor Macve felt a weekend would be more suitable.

**FC.76.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** to support Councillor Macve's motion, and for the matter to be referred to the Environment & Leisure Committee, to establish a working group for the organisation of the event:

*"I have been thinking for a while about proposing a motion for UTC to consider providing an event to promote and advertise all the clubs, societies, groups and facilities that are available within our town. The idea being to improve the social, inclusivity and community life for our residents and the local environment. I understand that there have been a number of observations and comments recently from residents from some areas of the new developments regarding a feeling of exclusion from the town of Uckfield. I expect that this also applies to newer residents who have moved into the existing established areas and this will only grow as all the new plans come forward and the town boundaries expand. If the Town Council sponsored a showcase event in the Civic Centre where all of the clubs and societies could promote themselves it would show "newcomers" what a huge variety of facilities the town has to offer. It would also be an opportunity for those clubs to encourage new members to join them as I know many of them need to bolster their numbers"*

#### **11.0 TO REVIEW A SNAPSHOT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S BUDGET AND BALANCE SHEET POSITION FOR Q2 OF 2024/25**

The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO referred to the profit and loss account, and explained that some invoices were still to be issued, such as those for sports hire. Luxfords restaurant and the Civic Centre events income was projected to increase in Q3 due to a large variety of functions and events during that period. Members subsequently noted the report.

#### **12.0 TO CONSIDER THE INITIAL FINDINGS OF THE RESIDENTS' SURVEY**

The Town Clerk explained that the deadline for responses to the Town Council's residents' survey had finished that day. For that reason, the Town Clerk presented some of the very early highlights from the online survey for members' information. At that point, a total of 138 responses had been received.

The Town Clerk therefore suggested that as analysis of the full survey was likely to take place nearer Christmas due to current workload in overseeing festive events, covering staff sickness, and working closely on the working draft budget papers, it would be prudent to extend the survey deadline, to see if they could reach 200 responses.

Members supported the idea, and offered help to promote the survey at Late Night Shopping, with flyers being collected by Councillors later that week who would be manning various stations on the night - on the ramp, with a reindeer and on the stage!

Members felt the Town Council should also undertake more consultations, and polls to drill down further on responses from the survey, and engage with the community on specific issues, moving forward.

**FC.77.12.24** Members noted the work undertaken to date, and **RESOLVED** to support the extension of the deadline for responses to the Residents' Survey 2024, and

assist with its promotion in the lead up to Christmas.

### **13.0 TO CONSIDER THE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS FOR:**

#### **(i) Wealden Citizens Advice**

#### **(ii) Wealden Volunteering**

Members had previously received a presentation from Wealden Volunteering at the end of October, which had included a useful update on their services, their plans for expansion, and their request for an increase in funding from £8,000 to £9,000.

Members received a presentation from Wealden Citizens Advice (WCA) prior to the Full Council meeting, which had also been very useful with updates on matters handled by the Citizens Advice team, and financial support they had given to local residents. They were also requesting an increase in funding; requesting a sum of £28,000, in comparison to the current £19,000 attached to the service level agreement.

#### Wealden Citizens Advice

The Town Council representative for WCA, Councillor A. Smith, advised that they were supporting the most vulnerable of the town's residents, and she also understood the immense pressure on their services. They were supporting residents with the fundamentals of life i.e. their income. She was also aware that they were dealing with one of the highest levels of disabled clients of the Citizens Advice Bureaus in the country. The cost of living and cost of running that business would have increased exponentially, so it was important to protect the wellbeing of the town's most vulnerable residents through this service.

A further four Councillors supported the provision of an increase in principle, despite noting that available funding within the Town Council's budget was limited. Members noted the hundreds of thousands of debt relief their service had found for residents in need in the district, and felt the service provided an incredible return on those organisations awarding grant funding.

Members questioned whether they could utilise some of the general power of competence grant funding, to support an increase.

#### Wealden Volunteering

The Town Mayor discussed her 'People to People' project with Wealden Volunteering and the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce.

Members felt the contents of the service level agreement needed to be strengthened further, in terms of reporting and updates on the services they delivered to residents and businesses.

The Town Clerk suggested that both service level agreements should only be renewed for 12 months to provide more flexibility for all parties moving forward. Members subsequently noted the report.

### **14.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT CONTENT FOR THE STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-30**

The draft objectives for the Strategic Plan had been updated to remove projects that had been completed, and ensure alignment with current priorities and deliverables for 2025 onwards.

One member felt that more emphasis needed to be incorporated on the need for more sports facilities, lobbying for the increase of parking facilities, and a desire to reconnect the railway line to the Tunbridge Wells line.

Members discussed the format of the draft plan, and questioned whether the objectives included within the draft plan were achievable for the Town Council. At present, there was a mix of aspirations and tangible objectives. A number of those listed were not in the power or control of the Town Council, but were important for the town. In referring to the latter, the Town Council played the role of lobbying, and pushing for change.

The Town Clerk suggested changing the formatting of the document, in its publication, and separating out the deliverables for the Town Council and community aspirations under each theme. Aspirations were considered just as important to include, to show to developers, and partner agencies. It was questioned whether they should be phrased as aspirations, but the Town Mayor on reading out the definition, that the plan can set out the two parts of our intentions, what we can achieve ourselves, but the second part should express the needs of the town over the long term.

Members supported this suggestion and requested that the Town Clerk re-prioritise and set out the contents. It was also noted that the Strategic Plan should align with the Uckfield Neighbourhood Plan.

#### **15.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ANNUAL PLAN FOR 2025/26**

Members reviewed the draft annual plan and were asked, similar to the Strategic Plan, if they could provide any further feedback to the Town Clerk over the Christmas break.

Under the community section, it was suggested that the floral displays be included. It was also suggested that more reference be made to the service level agreements under the community grant funding action. Members subsequently noted the draft Annual Plan for 2025/26.

#### **16.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ANNUAL BUDGET FOR 2025/26**

The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO presented the draft working budget papers. This was the very first draft, and therefore very much work in progress. She explained the first covering sheet which listed the proposed income and expenditure for each committee with the total gross income and expenditure, then the net figure with the income removed. This provided the required precept which was then divided by the council tax base to calculate the average council tax figure for each household per annum (council tax band D).

The first draft was based on early indications for service delivery, contract costs, utility charges, proposed staffing changes and increases as a result of NI threshold changes, and estimated NJC salary increases in 2025.

The Town Clerk explained that unfortunately the developments of Ridgewood Farm and Mallards Drive (Harlands Park) would not accrue any community infrastructure levy, as these outline applications were approved pre-CIL. This was very disappointing for such major developments and meant that zero

developer contributions would be coming from these developments. In fact the only additions to Town Council facilities was the creation of a footpath on adjacent Town Council land, for both Harlands and Victoria. Officers were still awaiting the council tax base figure from Wealden District Council, by which the precept would be divided to calculate the amount per average household (council tax band D) per annum.

Members reviewed two options and understood that where previously very minimal increases had been put in place during and after the pandemic, the Town Council was now playing catch up and trying to deliver services and large scale projects with limited resource. The last two to three years had also seen more use of reserves to deliver key projects. Substantial works were required to the Town Council's built assets and this could see a fair proportion of the earmarked reserves being spent. Yet, more attention was required on the Town Council's estates (grounds) to improve current grounds maintenance, play and sport facilities, to better understand and preserve our nature reserves and woodlands, particularly those adjacent to developments. Costs had also increased across the board with external contractors.

Some members also questioned if this budget was too conservative, and wondered if further contingency should be factored into the budget, in line with the recommendation of the Internal Auditor.

Members were understandably concerned about proposing a large increase, but also recognised the risks involved if the Town Council didn't set a realistic budget for 2025/26 to get service levels and the condition of our assets back to existing levels, ensure we remained compliant, reduce the pressure on existing staff, and establish and prepare itself for future growth in the town. The current position was not sustainable.

Members subsequently noted the report, and welcomed further discussions on the revised versions as the figures were reviewed, at both Finance Sub-Committee and General Purposes Committee.

**17.0 TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR 2025-30**

Members were in general, content with the document. They sought clarity on a current land dispute, to which the Town Clerk was awaiting an update from the solicitors, and a more detailed breakdown was requested for the lease/rental income on the Town Council's asset portfolio. Members subsequently noted the draft.

**18.0 TO CONSIDER A RESPONSE TO THE UK GOVT CONSULTATION ON REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT MEETINGS**

The Town Mayor, Councillor Bedwell, suggested that Town Councillors should respond to the survey individually, as views were likely to vary, and would increase the responses provided. The Town Clerk would circulate the weblink for members to complete.

**19.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Members noted the report.

**20.0 SIGNING OF GRAVE CERTIFICATES AND TO NOTE TRANSFERS OF DEEDS OF GRANT**

Two deed of grants had been received:

Victoria Nanina Skinner

Mrs Vanessa Fox

**FC.78.12.24** It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

**21.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED**

None received.

**22.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Town Clerk advised that the Uckfield Food Bank were incredibly grateful for the support from Uckfield Town Council on their collection campaign that weekend, in Tesco.

**23.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair, Councillor Bedwell reminded members of the importance of the Full Council meeting on Monday 13 January 2025, where the final drafts of the business planning documents for the Town Council would be considered for adoption. There would be two Finance Sub Committee meetings and a General Purposes Committee meeting between this meeting and the Full Council in January. All members were welcome to attend these meetings, and ask questions of the officers in that period.

The meeting closed at 8.46pm.