

# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of the **General Purposes Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield on Monday 16 December 2024 at 7.00pm

## **PRESENT:**

Cllr. D. Ward (Chair)	Cllr. J. Love
Cllr. C. Macve (Vice Chair)	Cllr. D. Manvell
Cllr. B. Cox	Cllr. P. Selby
	Cllr. P. Ullmann

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Town Mayor, Councillor Karen Bedwell

Sarah D'Alessio – Assistant Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer  
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 declared an interest, due to his position on the board of Uckfield Community Fridge CIC. He wished to raise this interest in case discussions became detailed when considering the draft budget papers or buildings update. The Town Clerk advised that it was unlikely discussions would get to that level of detail, and gave Councillor Manvell dispensation to speak on these agenda items.

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

No statements received.

### **3.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillors V. Frost and A. Smith due to personal commitments.

### **4.0 MINUTES**

#### **4.1 Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on the 4 November 2024**

**GP31.12.24** Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee on 4 November 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Councillor Ben Cox left the meeting at 7.06pm due to work commitments.

#### 4.2 Action list

Members agreed to remove the following actions from the action list, due to these projects being completed:

GP07.06.24 – consider re-allocation of reserves for creation of online event ticket system

GP24.11.24 – note the current position of the Town Council's buildings (replacement of boiler)

Members subsequently noted the remaining contents of the report.

#### 4.3 Project list

Members agreed to remove the following projects from the project list, as they had now been completed.

Project 60 – Online event ticket system

Project 66 – Climate Change initiative funding

Project 74 – part removal (removal of funding allocated for Foresters Hall as funding was utilised for installation of the airsource heating system)

Members noted the remainder of the report.

### 5.0 **FINANCIAL MATTERS**

#### 5.1 To note bills paid

Councillor C. Macve raised a question in relation to invoices paid for Luxfords Restaurant which referred to stocktaking fees. The Town Clerk was able to clarify this expenditure.

Members subsequently noted the bills paid.

#### 5.2 To note the income and expenditure reports up to 31 October 2024

Members discussed the detail within the reports. Councillor Ullmann suggested that it may be useful for a light cashflow forward looking forecast to be prepared to predict the outcome of changes in income streams. This could be prepared as part of the budget setting process if capacity allowed or with the new budget.

Members subsequently noted the contents of the report.

#### 5.3 To note the report of the Internal Auditor

Members were satisfied with the recent visit and subsequent report of the Internal Auditor, and noted that fewer actions for continuous improvement had been identified on this visit.

Members noted the report.

#### 5.4 To consider the renewal offers for utility charges from February 2025

The current utility contract was due for renewal at the end of February 2025.

Uckfield Town Council worked with a broker to find the best deals for the Town Council's asset portfolio for utility charges (9 x electricity supplies and 2 x gas).

As a result of plumbing and heating improvements in the past two years, only two sites now utilised gas (Victoria Pavilion and the Civic Centre) due to the pressure on these sites to meet high levels of demand and run specific gas served equipment. Current rates were sought from four to five companies for both gas and electricity. The rates circulated had been obtained in November, so a further update of the rates were tabled at the meeting, which actually saw a reduction across a board and a more positive picture than that first circulated.

**GP32.12.24** Based on the rates obtained for that day (16 December 2024), members

**RESOLVED** to:

(i) request if a further reduction could be obtained based on a dual fuel contract, but if not;

(ii) obtain a dual fuel energy contract with EDF Energy for 24 months for all sites which would see a 4.65% increase for electricity, and -0.18% change for gas.

This contract would commence from 1 March 2025.

5.5 To confirm the fees and charges for room hire at the Civic Centre, Foresters Hall and Victoria Pavilion for 2025-26

Members were presented with a revised flyer with the charges incorporated for all three sites, which reflected discussions at General Purposes Committee on 4 November 2024.

**GP33.12.24** Members **RESOLVED** to set a 5% increase on room hire charges for the three sites of the Civic Centre, Foresters Hall and Victoria Pavilion (Ground Floor), and for the fees to be rounded up or down to the nearest 25p.

5.6 To consider draft budget proposals for 2025/26, and reconciliation of earmarked reserves.

Members were presented with a very slight update to the papers previously presented to Full Council on 2 December 2024. This was as a result of the Council Tax Base being received from Wealden District Council. This figure determined what the budget for the financial year would be divided by, so important element of the calculation for the precept. It had increased only very slightly, which had been challenged by the Town Clerk, as a large number of homes had been built and occupied in Uckfield in the previous 24 months so it was thought the figure would increase further.

The member allowance figures had been based on 10 councillors with a 5% increase, as initial views were being obtained from members prior to a formal decision being taken at Full Council on 13 January 2025.

In Finance Sub-Committee prior to General Purposes Committee, members considered the broader budget proposals and changes affecting the working draft such as the changes in NI thresholds, National Joint Council salary increases, service level agreement requests, tree surveying and tree works, the need to listen to the Internal Auditor's advice on setting aside some contingency, and business planning for the Civic Centre and restaurant.

The need for contingency was felt important by Finance Sub-Committee members, as the last 2-3 years had seen more reliance on the re-allocation of earmarked reserves to assist with project and service delivery. It was not prudent for the Town Council to keep doing this, as it could leave the authority vulnerable further down the line.

One member noted that there was no funding set aside to mark VE and/or VJ Day in 2025, and it would be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary so beacons could be lit.

The Town Clerk confirmed that there would be a meeting of Finance Sub Committee on 7 January 2025, prior to the meeting of Full Council on 13 January 2025. Officers would continue to review the figures in detail over the Christmas break, and reassess the earmarked reserves during the consolidation of these. However, it was vital that the meeting of Finance Sub-Committee provide a

strong steer on the budget being presented to Full Council on 13 January 2025.

The Town Clerk offered to also review the precept discussions of other Town Councils in Wealden and Mid Sussex, but noted that these would only be for information. Uckfield was catching up - Crowborough, Hailsham and Seaford had made substantial changes to organisational structures in 2023 and 2024.

Members noted the draft working budget papers.

## **6.0 BUILDINGS**

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

The Town Clerk provided an update on the vandalism of the newly installed pillar lighting at the bottom of Luxford Field.  
Members noted the report.

## **7.0 POLICY**

### **7.1 To review the Town Council's Risk Management Policy (Policy No. 29)**

**GP34.12.24** Members **RESOLVED** to approve the annual revisions to the Risk Management Policy.

## **8.0 ADMINISTRATION**

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

One member noted that the Town Council was still separating the figures of staff affected by Covid, from other forms of sickness and questioned whether this still needed to be included, now UK Government guidelines had been relaxed. Town Council staff were aware of the impact to customers and fellow colleagues, but this was about whether the figures needed to be recorded and reported to General Purposes Committee.

**GP35.12.24** With three votes in favour, members **RESOLVED** to remove the specific recording of covid cases from the sickness data, and noted the report.

### **8.2 To receive Members' audit reports (September and October 2024)**

Members noted the member audit reports for September and October.

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

### **9.1 To consider reports from: -**

#### **(i) Wealden Citizen's Advice**

The bi-annual report had been received for the period April to October 2024. The figures of debt written off and financial support that residents had received was extensive. Members noted the report, and noted that further discussions would continue in relation to the service level agreement for 2025/26.

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

Nothing to report.

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

Nothing to report.

- (iv) Wealden District Association of Local Councils – Planning Panel  
Nothing to report.

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

The Chair, Councillor D. Ward, reported back on the excellent feedback she had received from Late Night Shopping on Friday 6 December, and wished to thank all of those involved in organising the annual event.

Councillor Ward also stressed the importance of attending the Full Council meeting on Monday 13 January, whereby the Town Council's priorities and budget would be considered for adoption for 2025/26.

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

The Town Clerk provided her condolences to the Cooper family on the news of Mrs Barbara Cooper's sudden passing. If she received any further details, she would let Councillors know.

Councillor Macve also notified members of the funeral that week for Mr Robert Brown, and asked members to join him in sending their condolences to the family.

#### **12.0 CONFIDENTIAL BUSINESS**

**GP36.12.24** 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 bad debts**

Members discussed the bad debts listed. The Assistant Town Clerk & RFO advised that for one of the debts, it related to missed invoices from April and May and the matter was being dealt with, with officers on the case. The second debt referenced could be reported to a higher authority if funding was not received in due time.

##### **12.2 To consider an update on Luxfords Restaurant**

Members discussed the report, and noted its contents.

The meeting closed at 8.24pm.