

HONITON TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting of the Town Council held via Zoom on 14th December 2020 at 7.00 pm

Present

St Michael's Ward

Cllr J Taylor
Cllr J Zarczynski (Chairman)
Cllr J McNally
Cllr L Dolby

St Paul's Ward

Cllr R Coombs
Cllr C Gilson
Cllr P Carrigan

In attendance

Heloise Marlow, Deputy Town Clerk
Cllr P Twiss EDDC/DCC
13 Members of the public

PART A

20/111 The Chairman welcomed Councillors and members of the public who were attending via ZOOM and confirmed that the meeting would be recorded.

20/112 To receive apologies for absence
None were received

20/113 To receive declarations of interest and receipt of requests for new DPI dispensations on items on the agenda
None received.

20/114 To note the grant of dispensations made by the Town Clerk in relation to the business of this meeting.
None were made.

20/115 Public question time on items on the agenda

Mrs M Howe raised the following:

Questions from the Public are always recorded in Council minutes, as are the replies where these are given verbally at the time. But if the questioner asks something that cannot be answered immediately, for example if the answer requires fact-checking, then the reply is given later, by letter. This written response is not, to my knowledge, seen by the public. This happened at November's Council meeting when Mr Kolek asked a question, to which Councillor Carrigan undertook to respond by letter. We

have no idea, first, whether the Councillor did actually respond, and secondly what that response was. This is a minor anomaly in Council procedures which needs correction.

In future, please could the Minutes either include any written response, either integrated into the main body of the minutes if short enough, or else attached as a separate document.

Cllr Zarczynski agreed and suggested that written responses to questions be published on the Council's website. He would discuss implementing this with the new Town Clerk.

Cllr Coombs advised that he had also replied in writing to Mr Kolek. He had asked Mr Kolek to explain why he was of the view that the list of projects recently published was a lie. He has yet to receive a response from Mr Kolek.

Mr Burgess asked the following question:

Can the Mayor confirm that HTC will no longer pursue any action against Baileys?

Cllr Zarczynski advised that due to limitation issues, HTC had been forced to discontinue its action against Bailey Partnership, which was due to the matter not being pursued in 2015 as it should have been.

Mr Burgess clarified his question having had an email from Cllr Coombs which stated that the issue had not been totally resolved which indicated that further action was being contemplated.

Cllr Zarczynski confirmed that the action was not entirely resolved as whilst the action against Bailey Partnership was not being continued, there was an issue relating to the public money spent on the action to recover the overspend, action which was supported by the internal auditor. However, he could not discuss the options available to the Council at this time.

Mr Burgess then raised his second question as follows:

Concerning the minutes of the meeting on 9th Nov – proposal for payments to HCC.

- a. You are proposing to replace the SLA agreement with a yearly payment of £10,000pa yet you are expecting HCC to pay the insurance of approximately £3500. In other words, HCC will only commit £6500.*
- b. You say that HCC may also apply for a grant, yet tonight's agenda has grant applications of £28,000 when you have only budgeted £18,000.*

So either you prune the grants or find the extra £10,000. How could HCC expect any more than £1000 at the most from the council if it applied for a grant?

Under the SLA agreement the annual payment would be nearer £20,000

In entering legal disputes with the Beehive and with Baileys the council has wasted £88,000 that could have been used to fulfil the council's legal obligations to the Beehive

***Does the mayor accept that:
This offer to HCC is an insult to the charity that has run the Beehive so successfully for nearly 7 years and the 100's of Honiton citizens who have volunteered their time?***

And will he accept that by this insulting offer Honiton Town Council is reneging on the legal agreement between HTC and HCC that came into force in 2015?

Cllr Zarczynski disputed the assertion that under the SLA agreement, the annual payment to HCC would be £20,000.00. The SLA states that HTC will pay 10% of reasonable service charges for the 3 offices occupied by HTC in the Beehive and any other reasonable operating costs of the Beehive. A dispute arose between HTC and HCC in respect of the calculation of this contribution, so HTC obtained independent legal advice from the authors of the lease and the SLA. Based on that advice HTC made an offer to HCC which was refused even though it was in excess of what the legal advice had suggested. As regards the legal costs incurred, HTC appointed its former Town Clerk and former Cllr Sheridan-Shaw to enter into negotiations with HCC but after 1 year the situation remains the same. HTC is trying to resolve the matter and has put forward an alternative proposal to HCC which he cannot discuss as HCC have yet to respond formally to that proposal.

Cllr Taylor confirmed that he had reviewed the SLA contribution. For this to equate to £20,000.00, would mean operating costs of £200,000.00. HTC is only liable for 10% of the servicing costs of the building, not 10% of the servicing costs of the product of the charity.

Cllr Carrigan referred to the legal costs being as a result of action initiated by HCC against HTC who had no option but to defend itself.

Cllr Coombs clarified that having regard to the previous public question, he had also provided Mr Burgess with a written response so would provide the Deputy Town Clerk with a copy of that response also.

Cllr Zarczynski also clarified that the insurance contribution paid by HCC was separate to the SLA agreement.

20/116 To confirm the accuracy of the minutes of the Full Council Meeting held 9th November 2020, and the Extra-ordinary Full Council Meetings held on the 19th November 2020 and 2nd December 2020

Members **RESOLVED** by 6 votes for and 1 abstention to approve the Minutes.

Proposed by Cllr McNally and seconded by Cllr Carrigan.

20/117 Reports from District and County Councillors.

Cllr Twiss provided the following report:

Division members report to Honiton TC, 14th December 2020 – DCC Cllr Phil Twiss

A slightly more detailed report this time, but I hope you will all find the information useful.

Care home COVID-19 Testing

As is well documented older people are generally more vulnerable to contracting COVID and the challenge is to given them maximum protection, keep them out of an acute hospital setting and through no fault of the own using up resources.

However, the Department of Health and Social care are about to launch a huge expansion of testing in care homes, with their pledge being that by the 18th December all care homes will have received sufficient test kits to enable ...

All staff to be tested twice a week

- All residents to be tested weekly
- Up to 2 visits by 2 visitors every week (i.e. testing for up to 4 visits a week for every resident)

Most of the test kits will be the new 'Lateral Flow Devices' which give results in less than 30 minutes. This is really good news for the many care homes in East Devon and beyond.

This is a small-scale pilot involving eight care homes in Devon and DCC are one of three Local Authorities (also Hampshire and Cornwall) who were selected, based on low prevalence rates.

The aim of the pilot is to examine the role of how testing of visitors, alongside other existing infection prevention/control measures, maximises safety. It will run for four weeks from 16 November to 13 December 2020. Homes received training through online webinars on 12/13th November before commencing the pilot on 16th November.

The testing will use a combination of new rapid-results tests as well as the tests already in use:

Weekly swab testing of regular visitors, using existing PCR swab testing technology new Lateral Flow Devices (LFD) tests which are taken before visitors enter the home with results available within 15 to 30 minutes.

As LFDs are new technology, any positive tests will be confirmed with a PCR test.

Feedback from the homes is collected through weekly online sessions, facilitated by the DHSC has been mainly positive, reporting that the process is simple to follow and meaningful contact whilst wearing full PPE is appreciated. Relatives and residents have been very emotional with the pilot bringing hope and a glimpse of the new normal.

30 visitors had been tested as of 20th November. One visitor tested positive and went home to isolate whilst awaiting the result of the PCR result. One visitor refused testing because they didn't feel comfortable

Mass vaccination programme – next steps

Hundreds of local vaccination services run by family doctors and their teams will open across England this week, including Primary Care Networks in Devon as part of the biggest vaccination programme in NHS history.

Groups of health providers are setting up local vaccination centres in villages, towns and cities covering every part of the country.

Nurses, paramedics, pharmacists and other NHS staff will work alongside GPs to vaccinate those aged 80 and over, as well as care home workers and residents, identified as priority groups for the life-saving vaccine.

The NHS will contact people in the priority groups when it is their turn to receive the vaccine.

Patients will be contacted and invited for vaccination but the NHS are urging them not to contact their practice enquiring about vaccination, as they will contact them.

Free school meals holiday voucher scheme update

DCC has confirmed plans to provide funds to ensure that families of primary and secondary age pupils who are eligible for free school meals during term time are able to purchase food over the holidays to replace the meals their child would have had at school.

Supermarket vouchers have now been sent to nearly 16,000 children across Devon who currently receive free school meals to help their families buy groceries over the Christmas holidays. The number of families being supported is expected to rise over the coming week with influx of new claims for those whose circumstances have recently changed.

There's lots of detailed information about the scheme and how it works on our website. At <https://www.devon.gov.uk/coronavirus-advice-in-devon/document/free-school-meals-holiday-voucher-scheme/>

Key points:

- Each child eligible for free school meals will receive a £30 supermarket voucher (£15 per week for the 2-week school Christmas holiday) that can be used at Sainsbury's, Tesco, Morrisons, Asda, M&S Food or Waitrose.
- The vouchers are issued individually per child, so families with more than one child entitled to free school meals will receive a voucher for each one.
- DCC has partnered with an organisation called Black Hawk Network to help us provide these vouchers as quickly as possible at <https://www.select-your->

reward.co.uk/ . They have many years' experience of managing voucher schemes like this and are working with several other local authorities too.

- The vouchers are electronic and will be emailed to families. Arrangements are in place for families who cannot access the internet or who cannot get to one of the six major supermarkets.
- DCC is providing vouchers for all children attending schools within our administrative area, irrespective of where they live. If a child lives within Devon but attends school in a neighbouring authority, the school they attend will make arrangements to support them.
- Eligible children in pre-school and young people in sixth form colleges will also receive the vouchers. Colleges within Devon are developing their own schemes funded by the County Council to provide free meal vouchers during holidays for eligible families.
- If are aware of a family whose circumstances have recently changed, and you think they may now be eligible for free school meals, please help us ensure they can access this holiday voucher support over Christmas by encouraging them to [apply online via our website as soon as possible](#). This is the quickest and easiest way for their eligibility to be assessed and they will get an instant decision. Alternatively, they can call our education helpline on [0345 155 1019](tel:03451551019). To ensure that they receive the free school meals holiday vouchers for this Christmas period, they must apply by Friday 18 December 2020.

Waste and recycling

All DCC our recycling Centres are open, but from recent personal experience in recent weeks very quiet.

Winter opening hours are in operation for most sites this is 9-4.30 Monday to Friday and 10-4.30pm Saturday and Sunday. They will be closed on Christmas day, Boxing Day and New Year's Day.

Highways

I am pleased to report that volumes of work across the Highways teams remains really high, and the recent wet weather has seen a significant number of problems on the network, but this has not held up the winter maintenance programme which officially started on the 15th of October, with the salt barns fully stocked, and all vehicles ready.

Additional COVID related contingency plans are also in place should they be required. In many ways we are quite fortunate to have as many depots as we have including one in Honiton that serves the eastern end of East Devon. You may have seen recently that the new Network Operations Control Centre that has been set up now in Great Moor House to make sure our roads stay functioning throughout the year..

The DCC Highways Asset Team are extremely busy delivering our highest ever capital programme. This larger budget is allowing us to look beyond the normal priorities of our main A roads and address some of the deterioration on our important lower category roads. These improvements and renewals across the network are beginning to be noticed by the travelling public as this work continues.

As ever, at this time of year, the DCC gully cleaning policy is under scrutiny as we experience a combination of leaf fall and an extended period of wet weather. The team have carried out a detailed review of our approach to drainage cleaning which has resulted in a number of improvements.

The second Doing What Matters project focused on the rebuild of the safety defect process and is now beginning to look at new software development with a view to rolling out a trial 'beta' system in the New Year. The primary aim of the project is to improve the number of defects repaired at the first visit. In order to achieve this we are investing in the amount of advance information recorded by our Safety Inspectors

Cllr Zarczynski raised the issue of weeds growing on the highways and the risk that this would cause drainage issues. Whilst HTC could fund some of the work, it would not be able to fund it all.

Cllr Twiss referred to a website which provides details of when drains are being inspected and cleared. He confirmed that he would forward the link to the website to HTC. He has already discussed the matter with Mike Brown at DCC Highways and Members could look at the website and review the proposed cycle of works and highlight specific areas where they would want the cycle of work to be reviewed. Unfortunately, the District Council no longer has the budget to do the work as often as it previously did. Some Town Council's do undertake the work themselves and whilst this is an added cost to the precept, it is possible for Town Council's to do this.

20/118 Reports from Members with Special Responsibilities

Cllr Coombs presented his report on the Parish Paths Partnership Inspections 2020-2021.

Cllr Taylor thanked Cllr Coombs for succeeding with the Schedule 14 application in respect of the footpath between Whitmore Way and Sidmouth Road.

Cllr Zarczynski confirmed that the ditching and drainage works around Honiton had been completed and that he was now looking forward to moving forwards with the allotments. He also thanked Cllr Taylor for his assistance with the Christmas lights, some of which have been repaired and others which have been replaced.

20/119 HTC Grants Procedure 2020/21

The Deputy Clerk presented her report and apologised for not being able to provide Members with the information required for the allocation of grant funding at this meeting, partly due to the absence of Mrs Carolyn Bowles for health reasons.

In addition, due to current circumstances, Members have not been able to come into the office as usual to review the applications. It has also not been possible to scan the grant applications received having regard to the number received and the amount of paperwork provided. In addition, the amount requested in grants exceeds the budgeted amount for 2020/2021.

Cllr Taylor and Cllr Carrigan were of the view that the youth budget still had monies available, which could be used to fund some of the grants applied for.

Members **RESOLVED** unanimously to defer the distribution of grant funding for 2020/21 to the Full Council meeting on the 11th January 2021.

Proposed by Cllr Taylor and seconded by Cllr Coombs.

20/120 Budget Planning Report

Cllr Carrigan presented the following report:

Budget 2021-22

Overview

This budget has been prepared during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, and severely damaged the economy of the country, and resulting mental and physical deterioration, and economic pain incurred nationally, and in Honiton.

Councillors have raised these concerns and we are endeavouring to try and allocate resources where they can help Honiton residents. In this regard, due to the Council having built up reserves over the years, we are in a position to increase expenditure in 2020-21 and 2021-22 over the 2020-21 budget total, without proposing any increase in the precept for Honiton, by reducing these reserves, while still having reserves in excess of the minimum required.

The other significant initiative, given the climate crises, and the government's plans to cease the sale of petrol/diesel cars in 2030, is to investigate and install electric charging points in the Beehive car park. Given the shortage of such charging points in the area, this will likely bring people to Honiton, and given the time required time to charge a car, I understand a minimum of thirty minutes, hopefully result in the drivers and passengers visiting the Town. This would result in an increase in business for the Town, including the Beehive. The Council hopes to have a substantive proposal completed for the February Council meeting.

Specific comments on budget line items are as follows.

Administration

The 20/21 outlook for Audit has increased by £5,000 from £4,200 to £9,200. This is due to a member of the public making a complaint regarding the accounts of the Council. The £5,000 increase is based on the cost incurred on a previous complaint, by the same member of the public. The increase in insurance £2,300 relates mainly to crediting a charge previously made to HCC, therefore providing a benefit of approximately £3,000 in 2020/21. The 21/22 budget is similar to the outlook for this year but assumes that no complaint will be made related to our accounts, requiring additional audit fees to be incurred.

Staffing

The 20/21 outlook includes a reduction in salaries of £19,000, partially offset in professional fees. The professional advice relates to Human Resources. The reduction in salaries partially relates to the resignation of our Town Clerk in September. The Human Resources advice is ongoing, as the Council addresses issues with staff. The 21/22 budget provides for an increase in salaries, as our new Town Clerk will be in position for 21/22, but we expect to continue to incur Human Resources costs.

Promotions

The outlook for 20/21 is lower by £13,000 mainly to the lack of marketing spend, £5,000, the absence of any work on the art project, £2,000, and the absence of spending to upgrade our website resulted in website/it support/backup outlook expenditure being reduced by £5,000 for 20/21. The 21/22 budget is similar to the 20/21 outlook.

Premises

The outlook for premises is reduced by £6,000, £3,000 of which results from the absence of spending on room hire due to Covid-19.

Community Complex

The £59,000 relates to interest and capital repayment on the loan related to the construction of the Beehive Complex. The District Valuer estimated the market rent for the Beehive Complex at £46,000 per annum approximately seven years ago. The Honiton Community Complex pays £1 annual rent.

Environmental Services

The outlook has an increase of £15,000, after a reduction of £9,000 after a transfer from reserves. The Increase of £9,000, funded by a transfer from reserves is to improve footpaths, and the natural environment in town, it being well known that mental & physical health are strongly connected. The Council plans to utilise the £7,000 climate budget for the current year to install electric car charging points in the Beehive car park.

The increase in Bus shelter maintenance of £4,000 mainly relates to replacing a bus shelter in New Street. An increase of £4,000 expenditure for Roundball Wood related to emergency work regarding Health & Safety concerns. Increase seat maintenance/maintenance due to plans to install a seat in Town and maintain the ones we have. We have allocated £9,000 from reserves for Mental & Physical Health, whilst providing small increases under various headings, for example Dog Bins, to improve the situation for residents to physical and mental health, to walk around town, be able to find a seat if required, and reduce the dog mess on our streets. The Council spent £3,500 to purchase additional Xmas lights, when it was found in late November that a third of the Council's Xmas lights weren't working, and obviously hadn't been for several years. The 2021/22 budget has been reduced by £10,000, mainly due to transferring the expenditure to projects under other headings.

Additional Town Services

Given that Covid-19 has caused significant issues for local charities and community groups, the Council's outlook includes a Covid-19, £20,000 grant to Honiton Gymnastics, to be funded from reserves, due to the Council's concerns related to physical & mental health which were exacerbated by the pandemic. The postponement of the Gate2Plate reduced our expenditure under this heading for this year by £5,000. The overall reduction in the outlook is £3,000, and the 21/22 budget is similar to the current year budget.

Grants to local organisations

The Council's outlook increases grants for 20/21 from £18,000 to £49,000, funded by reserves. We have taken a decision to significantly reduce reserves, given the damage the pandemic has caused locally. This largest component of this increase is a grant of £15,000 offered to Honiton Community Complex (HCC), but this is dependent on them agreeing an adjustment to the Service Level Agreement, to replace a complicated charging calculation, with a fixed amount of £10,000 per annum, which we believe is a generous agreement. The Council has historically incurred significant legal costs, as has HCC, in defending a legal action initiated by HCC against the Council, which HCC dropped at a late stage in the process.

Market income

The outlook is for no income for the market for the current year. This is due to the pandemic, and the Council's decision not to charge stallholders until April 21, at the earliest. We have budgeted £15,000 income for 21/22. The Council took the view that the market was integral to bringing opening up the town after the lockdown.

In summary, it is proposed to reduce the reserves by £63,000 to fund the increase in grants and expenditure set out with a further reduction in reserves of about £35,000 the following year. However, HTC will retain reserves in excess of the minimum required.

Cllr Zarczynski confirmed that he supported the proposed budget and that in the New Year he would be seeking to pursue further the sports funding which had been put on hold.

The Deputy Clerk confirmed that she had had no input in the drafting of the proposed Budget which she has only received from Cllr Carrigan that day. As such she could not advise Members on the proposed Budget. Members will need to agree a budget and then a precept figure which has to be sent to EDDC by 20th January 2021. The 2020/21 budget was approved by Members at the January Full Council meeting and whilst the new Town Clerk may not be in post by then (11th January 2021) he should be in a position to advise Members on whether the proposed budget is appropriate. As such, as because the proposed budget was only made available that day, the

Deputy Clerk advised that the approval of the budget be deferred to the Full Council meeting on the 11th January 2021, which would give Members time to review it.

Cllr Zarczynski advised that the proposed budget would result in there being no increase in the precept as the additional spending proposed would come out of the Council's reserves.

Cllr Taylor wished to highlight the COVID 19 rates grant in the sum of £10,000.00 received from EDDC and that new development in Honiton would lead to an increase in CIL payments to HTC.

Members **RESOLVED** unanimously to defer the approval of the 2021/22 budget to the Full Council meeting on the 11th January 2021.

Proposed by Cllr McNally and seconded by Cllr Coombs.

20/121 Honiton Town Council's Facebook Page

Cllr Zarczynski presented his report.

Members **RESOLVED** unanimously to disable public comments from being posted on the HTC Facebook page.

Proposed by Cllr Dolby and seconded by Cllr Carrigan.

20/122 Members RESOLVED unanimously to take item 11 into Part B

Proposed by Cllr Zarczynski and seconded by Cllr Carrigan

20/123 HR and current staffing matters

Members discussed staffing issues.

Members **RESOLVED** unanimously to extend the meeting by 15 minutes.

Proposed by Cllr Zarczynski and seconded by Cllr Dolby

Note: Cllr Coombs left the meeting between 21.11 and 21.13 during the course of the above discussion.

20/124 To close the meeting

The meeting was closed at 21.15pm.