

Witham Town Council

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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Tuesday, 24th January 2017**

Present:	Councillors	P.	Horner	(Town Mayor)
		J.C.	Bayford	
		J.C.	Goodman	
		M.C. M	Lager	
	Mrs	S.C.	Lager	(arrived 7.40 p.m.)
	Mrs	J.M.	Money	
		T. A.	Pleasance	
		R.P.	Ramage	
		W.J.	Rose	
		M.	Squire	(Town Clerk)
	Mrs	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.R. Barlow, L.D. Campbell, Mrs J.A. Kempf, Mrs A. Kilmartin, P.M. Ryland, Mrs J. Williams and R. Williams and Mrs S.C. Lager who would be late.

72. INTERESTS

Councillors P. Horner, J.C. Goodman, Mrs J.M. Money, R.P. Ramage and W.J. Rose declared non-pecuniary interests in Minutes 76 – Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus and 77 – 2017/2018 Tax Base, as Members of Braintree District Council.

73. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the press or public present.

74. CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk was pleased to report that the caretaker had started to redecorate the Council Chamber.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

75. COUNCIL TAX REFERENDUM PRINCIPLES

An email regarding the decision not to extend the council tax referendum principles to town and parish councils in 2017/2018 was received.

Members were pleased to receive confirmation.

RESOLVED That the email be received and information noted.

76. COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION FUND SURPLUS

Councillors P. Horner, J.C. Goodman, Mrs J.M. Money, R.P. Ramage and W.J. Rose had declared interests.

A letter was received from Braintree District Council explaining that a proportion of the surplus on the Collection Fund will be shared with the town and parish councils.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

77. 2017/2018 TAX BASE

Councillors P. Horner, J.C. Goodman, Mrs J.M. Money, R.P. Ramage and W.J. Rose had declared interests.

An email was received from Braintree District Council explaining that the Tax Base for Witham is 8028.78.

Members were informed that this is 2.6% up from last year and there is an increase throughout the district of 1.7%.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

78. OUTLINE BUSINESS CASE

Councillor M.C.M. Lager, Leader of Witham Town Council, spoke about the issues being faced by the Town Council.

He was proud of Members' contributions to well-being and amenities for residents and businesses. He said that this coming year the Council should again aim for Best Town and Parish Council in Essex. He said that the world is changing, incomes are starting to fall behind prices, imports and sterling exchange rates are affected and an increase in interest rates seems likely. Government could cap local authorities at 2% increase in precept in the future which could restrict the Town Council raising funds. Locally the rate of house

building is increasing but adequate infrastructure needs to be put in place also. Health service improvements are in the pipe-line. Sensible ideas have been put forward for resolving parking issues. Crime and anti-social behaviour has increased coupled with reduction in police resources. He said that with the decrease in the Localism Fund the Town Council has an unsustainable deficit.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager arrived at the Meeting at 7.40 p.m.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager spoke about Town Centre regeneration and traffic movements in the town. Improvements to be made to the green spaces of the town and possible relocation of outdoor staff to more suitable premises. He said that the vehicle replacement fund would need to build up.

He said that a way needs to be found to balance the books to achieve the Town Council's aspirations. How much would the precept need to be increased to improve public order and safety? He thought that a 'lengthsman' scheme to carry out off-road work trimming hedges and cleaning signs could be achieved in partnership with the County Council. He said other issues were outstanding from 2016/2017, the realignment of boundaries, the completion of the Town Plan. He thought recognisable branding for Town Council events should be considered, there would be a communications review including social media and improving the website, along with other ways to promote the Council.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then detailed the three outline business cases.

He spoke about the lack of policing, community development on housing estates and young people leaving school with nothing to do. He said that the CCTV system in the town centre would be renewed and the Town Council should promote the recruitment of special constables. Crime reduction measures should be advertised in the Information Centre. There are lots of clubs and organisations for active young people but he was concerned that career's advice has gone. With community halls being shut, residents have lost the heart of their community and he suggested that Residents' Associations should be promoted.

Members then spoke of the issues raised, the decline of Neighbourhood Watch and the work undertaken by Community Champions on estates.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then spoke about the need for a green spaces strategy. He advocated an holistic view of how green spaces could be managed and that discussions needed to take place with both Essex County and Braintree District Council. He spoke of improvements which could be made by integrating the River Walk with Whetmead Nature Reserve. He was concerned about the misuse of the Period Garden and consideration should be given as to whether it should be retained.

Members agreed that consideration should be given to relocate the outdoor staff or their equipment and tentative enquiries could be made to obtain suitable premises. Members agreed to support the Tree Group and welcomed the excellent relationship with them.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then referred to unfinished business, to revisit boundary discussions with Hatfield Peverel and Rivenhall Parish Councils, completion of the Town Plan, communicate with neighbouring parishes, review policies and communication with residents.

RESOLVED That the Business Cases be received and approved.

79. BUDGET 2017/2018 AND PRECEPT

(a) Estimates Sub-Committee

The Minutes of the Estimates Sub-Committee Meeting held 9th January 2017 were received.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager explained that a detailed review had been carried out and £36,000 of savings had been achieved. He stressed the importance of having sufficient funds to carry on the Town Council business and to have healthy general reserves. He believed that more realistic budget headings had been made. The Task and Finish Group should meet soon when there will be opportunities to look at income and expenditure and further savings could be made. He was concerned that the deficit will become more significant over the next few years.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received.

RESOLVED That the Recommendations for Central Services, and Community, Environment and Policy and Resources Committees for 2017/2018; and Earmarked Reserves for inclusion in the accounts as at 31st March 2017 be agreed and approved.

(b) Precept 2017/2018

The Precept Form from Braintree District Council was received and Members asked to agree a precept for 2017/2018.

The Chairman said that the Recommendation from the recent Estimates Sub Committee meeting was for a rise of 5% in the precept. He personally believed that this would not cover the full costs and he had himself advocated a larger increase.

Members considered a potential 9% increase and also considered the options of a larger increase now against phasing in smaller increases over a number of years.

A 9% increase in the precept was proposed and seconded, a vote was taken but not carried.

Members then voted on the Recommendation of a 5% increase in the precept which was carried.

RESOLVED That a 5% increase in the precept for 2017/2018 be agreed.

RESOLVED That the Precept Form be received, that a precept of £455,232 be agreed for 2017/2018, a Band D equivalent of £56.70 and approval given for the form to be signed.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 9.06 p.m.

Councillor P. Horner
Town Mayor

MS/GK/2.2.2017