MINUTES

Meeting of: Town Council
Date: Monday, 18th January

Present:
Councillors
- P. Horner (Deputy Town Mayor in the Chair)
- J.C. Goodman
- Mrs. J.A. Kempf
- Mrs A. Kilmartin
- Mrs M.C. M Lager
- Mrs S.C. Lager
- Mrs J.M. Money
- T. A. Pleasance
- R.P. Ramage
- W.J. Rose (arrived 8.17 p.m.)
- Mrs J. Williams
- R. Williams

Cllr
- Mrs S Wilson (Braintree District Council)
- Mrs J. Hyde (Citizens Advice)
- M. Squire (Town Clerk)
- Mrs G. Kennedy (Committee Secretary)

And two members of the public.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors P.R. Barlow, P.M. Ryland and Mrs C. Thompson; and Councillor W.J. Rose who would be late as he had to attend an earlier Meeting.

50. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Town Council held 2nd November and 15th December 2015 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.
51. **INTERESTS**

Councillors J.C. Goodman, P. Horner, Mrs A. Kilmartin, Mrs J.M. Money and R.P. Ramage declared non-pecuniary interests in Minutes 56(b) – Budget 2016/2017 and Precept, 59 – Drainage Improvement at Blackwater Lane and 64 – River Walk, as Members of Braintree District Council.

Later in the Meeting at Minute 58 – Community Payback Work, Councillor W.J. Rose declared an interest as he knows the manager of the scheme.

52. **QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

The Chairman asked for comments from the members of the public present.

Mrs Betty Beale, organiser of the Arts Activities since the early eighties, said that she was promoting the high quality lunch time concerts on the first Wednesday of the month at the United Reformed Church. She said performers cost £50 each and whilst the concerts are themselves free, a four pound donation is requested. She asked for help from the Town Council in promoting the concerts. She considered that the notice board across the road is inadequate and there could be an opportunity for more noticeboards in the town and a ‘What’s On in Witham’ leaflet. She would also like a regular panel in Witham’s Voice.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Beale for her comments.

53. **MONEY MANAGEMENT ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**

The Chairman welcomed Jennifer Hyde, the new Chief Executive Officer of the Braintree, Witham and Halstead Citizens Advice Bureau, to the Meeting to give a presentation on money management advice for young people.

Mrs Hyde tabled a hard copy of her presentation for Members’ information.

She said that she had produced figures for the first nine months up to December 2015 and detailed the numbers of Witham residents that had been helped during this time. 1,048 clients had been helped with 2,385 issues by the seventeen volunteers. She said that Witham is typical of other areas with welfare/tax credit, debt, employment, relationship and housing problems being the main issues of concern.

Mrs Hyde stressed that correct up-to-date advice can be given based on the information given by the national office. She then gave details of two cases and the help that was given to resolve the problems including benefits checks and debt relief orders.

She spoke of the importance of educating people to avoid debt in the first place and would like to arrange courses on how to manage money. A new advisor is interested but he would need training himself on delivery. She then suggested that training for young people could be based on matters of interest to them for example mobile phone contracts and the best use of money saving voucher schemes. She considered that a pilot programme, with appropriate partners, could be undertaken with quality of delivery monitored and evaluation of achieved outcomes. She thought that the trial programme could be at the Hub with the support of the Boys’ Brigade although she understood that these young people were probably in receipt of
good advice from their parents. She stressed that funding would become very tight as hefty cuts are being made to their core funding.

Members then had an opportunity to ask questions and to comment. Mrs Hyde was asked if she could produce comparison figures over the last five years for Witham to see whether the repercussions of the recession have tapered off. Members thought that the earlier young people receive money management training the better and that it should be part of the curriculum.

It was considered that the proposal needs clarity of outcomes in line with SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, resources and realistic, and timed). It was noted on Mrs Hyde’s proposals that there was a one-off spend of £500 for a tablet or iPad which was considered to be unnecessary. The proposals could then be taken to Community Committee for further consideration.

Members thanked Mrs Hyde for her informative presentation.

54. TOWN CLERK’S REPORT

The Town Clerk’s Report on matters arising was received.

The Town Clerk drew members’ attention to the article on the River Walk mural that had appeared in ‘Clerks and Councils’ magazine. He said that the new Community Officer has the capacity to publicise and promote the Town Council in this way.

RESOLVED That the Report be received and noted.

Councillor W.J. Rose arrived at the Meeting.

55. FORWARD PLANNING FOR WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Councillor M.C.M. Lager, as Leader of the Council, gave a presentation on Forward Planning for the Town Council.

A hard copy of the presentation was tabled for Members’ information.

He considered that it would be useful to consider the financial plans and resources, look at current finances and forecasts. He said that the precept had not been increased for a number of years, he highlighted a 2% growth in housing, rising staff pension costs above inflation and the potential impact of cycle path repair costs. He drew Members’ attention to the current general reserves surplus figures and that by 2019/2020 there could be a deficit which was unsustainable. Action needed to be taken.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then broke the figures down into Committees. He said that the Community budget had fallen as the Town Council no longer funds Police Community Support Officers. He spoke of the costs of open spaces and the River Walk, the lavatory in the Park and the accommodation issue for the Open Spaces Team that will need to be addressed in due course. He said that there is a significant increase in the Policy and Resources budget so support can be given to the local economy, Town Team and joint working with the District and County Council plus Town Plan/Neighbourhood Plan.
He considered that everything will need to be reviewed to find savings.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then referred to the Earmarked Reserves and the need to build up funds for replacement vehicles and equipment, election expenses and to cover major repairs to the Town Hall. He was concerned that £26,000 had been promised to the District Council for improvements to the Park a number of years ago but the scheme had still to be delivered.

He then moved on to the wider context of ongoing pressure on public spending and an expected large growth in the population over the next few years. He predicted that there would be a significant increase from 25,000 to 30,000 and that public services would lag behind the needs of the residents.

He spoke about assessment of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. He said that the District Council is likely to raise its precept by 2% over the next two years, Police and Fire & Rescue would also raise its element likewise the County Council for adult social care and to keep its own budget in balance. He had calculated that with the District Council’s cut in grant from the Localism Fund over the next three years this would equal for the Town Council a 2.3% cut or £1.23. Action needs to be taken now and a spending review undertaken by the Committees.

He reckoned that the Town Council staff are outstanding and Members are engaged with the community. Outdoor accommodation is inadequate and costs of the River Walk rising. He was concerned that inappropriate or unbalanced development was a risk. He promoted cooperation with neighbouring parishes and benefits that could arise.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then talked about short term issues and the need to respond to the District Council’s consultation on its budget and that the collection fund surplus should be requested which would be between four and five thousand pounds for the Town Council. Also early clarity should be sought on the Infrastructure Levy which would contribute to the Town Council’s income as well as the allocation of New Homes’ Bonus. He considered that the District Council Members could press for this.

He spoke of the need for a boundary review, promoting Town Centre developments which would have local facilities and contribute to the well-being of the town and the need to finalise the Town Plan. He thought that the CCTV system could be expanded and updated and link up with other systems to provide a better service. He stressed the importance of the Working Groups to take matters forward. He was concerned that the Town Team and Strategy Group were still divided. He promoted the Lengthsman scheme and the need to agree a pilot project. The Town Council wished to acquire the freehold of the River Walk and consider the options for alternative accommodation for the Open Spaces Team. There should also be a review of communications, new technologies and the Voice (newsletter).

Councillor M.C.M. Lager then turned to the Outcomes for 2016 – 2017 and the need to get Witham in Bloom onto a sound footing, to agree a River Walk strategy and to integrate land at Saul’s Bridge to link up the River Walk and Whetmead. He referred again to the Lengthsman scheme and accommodation for the Open Spaces Team. He spoke about the need to finalise the Town Plan, a health services improvement plan and update of emergency planning reviewed in light of extreme weather risks. He referred to the parking issues being recognised by the North Essex Parking Partnership and for the Section 106 at Maltlings,
including community and faith centres and an area for a health facility which does not need to be under the auspices of the NHS, to be delivered. Essex County Council should be lobbied for the improved traffic signage and Quality Council foundation standard should be achieved.

He suggested that the Committee Chairmen should take this forward at their next Meetings and asked that the Outcomes be adopted.

**RESOLVED** That the Outcomes be adopted and the Committees take them forward at their next Meetings.

### 56. **BUDGET 2016/2017 AND PRECEPT**

**(a) Estimates Sub-Committee**

The Minutes of the Estimates Sub-Committee Meeting held 11th January 2016 were received.

The Recommendations for Central Services and the Community Committee were taken in turn and agreed.

A typographical error in the Environment Committee Recommendation was pointed out and that Central Services Income should read £5,000.

The amended Recommendation for the Environment Committee and the Recommendation for the Policy and Resources Committee were agreed.

The Recommendations for the Earmarked Reserves were discussed and the suggestion was made that as the £26,000 for Town Park funding had sat in the reserves unused for a number of years it should be returned to General Reserves as at 1st April 2016. Members commented that there is a long-term plan for a band stand in the park by 2018.

**RESOLVED** That the sum of £26,000 for improvements to the Town Park be transferred back into the General Reserves on 1st April 2016.

The Recommendation for Earmarked Reserves, less £26,000 in the Environment Budget for Town Park Funding, and now with a grand total of £53,424, was agreed.

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes be received and Recommendations approved.

**(b) Localism Support and Precept 2016/2017**

Councillors J.C. Goodman, P. Horner, Mrs A. Kilmartin, Mrs J.M. Money and R.P. Ramage had declared non-pecuniary interests.

The Precept Form from Braintree District Council was received and Members asked to agree a Precept for 2016/2017.
Members agreed the Recommendation to respond to Braintree District Council’s budget consultation as per the Estimates Sub-Committee Minutes.

**RESOLVED** That a response to the Braintree District Council’s budget consultation should include –

- That any reductions in the Localism Fund should be linked to the government’s Settlement Funding Assessment (as the District Council was proposing for the CAB (Citizens Advice Bureau) and BDVSA (Braintree District Voluntary Support Agency)) instead of the Revenue Support Grant as originally decided by the District Council, which would result in a fairer and slower rate of decrease for the Town Council,
- A refund on the Council Tax Collection Fund should be requested in line with last year,
- Early clarity of the Community Infrastructure Levy should be requested as between 10 – 15% could be claimed on new housing,
- Allocation of new housing bonus should be closely related to infrastructure needs arising from the new housing.

Members agreed with the Recommendation that a precept of £422,556 be set.

**RESOLVED** That the Precept Form be received, that a precept of £422,556 be agreed for 2016/2017, a Band ‘D’ equivalent of £54 and approval be given for the form to be signed.

57. **FREEDOM OF WITHAM**

A report was received regarding the policy for awarding the Freedom of Witham.

Members agreed that the wording should be changed to read ‘and person who has rendered eminent services’ and that there should be no time stipulation.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and the policy as amended be agreed.

58. **COMMUNITY PAYBACK WORK**

Councillor W.J. Rose declared a non-pecuniary interest as he knows the manager of the scheme.

A report was received regarding Community Payback Work.

Members whilst agreeing that using Community Payback workers would be a good idea they were concerned that the last time they were used the Open Spaces Supervisor spent a lot of time supervising them rather than undertaking his own duties. Members were informed that the new manager of the scheme would ensure that the workers are adequately supervised but Members on balance agreed to decline using the workers on the basis of previous supervision issues.
RESOLVED That the report be received and the Town Council decline to use Community Payback workers on the basis of previous supervision issues.

59. **DRAINAGE IMPROVEMENT AT BLACKWATER LANE**

Councillors J.C. Goodman, P. Horner, Mrs A. Kilmartin, Mrs J.M. Money and R.P. Ramage had declared non-pecuniary interests.

A report and request from Braintree District Council were received regarding works to improve drainage.

Members agreed that the earth mound adjacent to Blackwater Lane could be moved back a metre by Braintree District Council to improve the drainage capacity of the lane.

Members were shocked by the amount of litter in Blackwater Lane and they were reminded to contact Stuart Thompson of Braintree District Council to get it cleared.

RESOLVED That the report be received and that permission be given to Braintree District Council to undertake the requested work.

60. **TOWN MAYOR’S ENGAGEMENTS**

Details of the Town Mayor’s Engagements were received.

RESOLVED That the details be received and noted; and the Town Mayor thanked for undertaking these duties.

61. **LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD (QUALITY COUNCIL) – FOUNDATION STATUS**

The Town Clerk explained that the documents Statement of Intent on Training; Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy; and Action Plan for 2015-16, needed to be agreed and put on the website before application for Foundation Status. He suggested that it would be sensible to have a small panel of Members to annually review all policies.

RESOLVED That the policy documents –
- Statement of Intent on Training
- Comments, Compliments and Complaints Policy,
- Action Plan for 2015-16,
and the Foundation Award Checklist be approved and application be made for Foundation Status of the Local Council Award (Quality Council).

RESOLVED That a small panel of Members to include Councillors J.C. Goodman and Mrs A. Kilmartin be appointed to annually review Town Council’s policies and procedures.

In view of the time it was agreed to suspend Standing Orders.
RESOLVED That in view of the time, Standing Order 4(a) be suspended to allow business to be completed.

62. COMMITTEE REPORTS

(a) Community Committee Meeting held 1st December 2015

Minutes 52 – 71 (inclusive).

Councillor R. Williams, Chairman of the Community Committee, gave his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Community Committee be received.

(b) Environment Committee Meeting held 16th November 2015

Minutes 53 – 68 (inclusive).

Councillor J.C. Goodman, Chairman of the Environment Committee, gave his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report be received.

(c) Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held 8th December 2015

Minutes 49 – 61 (inclusive).

Councillor M.C.M. Lager, Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, gave his Report en bloc.

RESOLVED That the Report be received.

EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

63. OPPORTUNITIES IN THE TOWN CENTRE

A report was received.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

64. RIVER WALK

Councillors J.C. Goodman, P. Horner, Mrs A. Kilmartin, Mrs J.M. Money and R.P. Ramage had declared non-pecuniary interests.
Reports and a letter were received.

**RESOLVED** That the reports be received and noted.

65. **COMMITTEE REPORTS (CONT’D)**

(a) **Environment Committee Meeting held 16th November 2015**

Minutes 69 – 71 (inclusive).

Councillor J.C. Goodman continued his Report en bloc.

**RESOLVED** That the Report of the Environment Committee be received.

(b) **Policy and Resources Committee Meeting held 8th December 2015**

Minutes 62 – 65 (inclusive).

Councillor M.C.M. Lager continued his Report en bloc.

**RESOLVED** That the Report of the Policy and Resources Committee be received.

66. **PUBLIC DOMAIN**

Members agreed that no item discussed in Private Session should be moved into the Public Domain.

**RESOLVED** That no item discussed in Private Session should be moved into the Public Domain.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 10.00 p.m.

Councillor P. Horner
Chairman

MS/GK/22.1.2016