



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE
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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Town Council**

Date: **Tuesday, 5th May 2020**

Present: Councillors Mrs S.C. Lager (Town Mayor)
 R.P. Ramage (Deputy Town Mayor)
 Mrs S. Ager
 K.L. Atwill
 P.R. Barlow
 J.C. Bayford
 J.C. Goodman
 S.E. Hicks
 Miss C. Jay
 Mrs A. Kilmartin
 M.C.M. Lager
 T.A. Pleasance
 R. Williams

 J. Sheehy (Town Clerk)
 Mrs H. Andrews (Assistant Proper Officer)
 Mrs G. Kennedy (Committee Clerk)
 Miss N. Smith (Assistant RFO)

The Town Mayor welcomed everyone to the Zoom meeting and was pleased to see everyone was keeping safe.

100. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.S. Livermore who was unwell, P.M. Ryland and Miss M.L. Weeks who had previous engagements.

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and accepted.

102. MEETINGS ADMINISTRATION

(a) Members were asked to consider when it would be appropriate to hold the Council's Annual General Meeting.

Members were informed that Braintree District Council had decided that its AGM would be postponed until April 2021 and Members agreed with the suggestion that the Town Council should do likewise, not only retaining the current Town Mayor and her deputy, but all membership of

committees and representatives on outside bodies until the AGM in May 2021. It was noted that this was in accordance with the Statutory Instrument 2020 No 392, the regulations put in place to allow Local Authorities business to continue during the coronavirus pandemic.

RESOLVED That the Town Council would not hold its Annual General Meeting until May 2021.

(b) Members were asked to consider when to hold the Council's Annual Town Meeting, postponed from 14th April 2020.

It was pointed out that whilst in practice the Town Mayor calls the Annual Town Meeting it is in fact the electorate's Meeting and for them to ask that it takes place. Members agreed that it would be impossible to hold the Meeting remotely during this time of social distancing but it would be disingenuous not to be held as it was the one meeting during the year when residents could have their say. The Town Clerk advised that the Meeting should normally be held between 1st April and end of June each year.

It was agreed that an informal Town Meeting could be called when the situation improves.

RESOLVED That the Annual Town Meeting could not be held this year because of social distancing but an informal meeting be held once this becomes viable.

(c) Members were asked to consider suspension of Committee Meetings and adoption of fortnightly Council Meetings until further notice.

Members considered that fortnightly meetings would be too often particularly with the good scheme of delegation in place. Members considered that monthly meetings would afford Members the opportunity to scrutinise the delegated decisions as well as keeping touch.

RESOLVED That Town Council Meetings be held on a monthly basis.

103. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's report on actions taken and business conducted from 25th March 2020 in relation to Covid-19 was received.

Members considered the need to officially cancel the Community Day and considered that the Puppet Festival too should be cancelled before any further money was spent.

Members discussed whether all events for 2020 should be cancelled and discussed the Halloween event and whether a decision should be taken now or next month to cancel. After further discussion it was agreed that the Halloween event should also be cancelled.

RESOLVED That Community Day, Puppet Festival and the proposed Halloween event be cancelled.

RESOLVED That the Town Clerk's Report be received and noted.

104. REVIEW OF COVID-19 REGULATIONS

Members were asked to review the interim regulations in force until 15th June 2020 and consider reaffirmation of delegated powers.

Members agreed to the interim regulations being in force until 15th June 2020 and reaffirmed delegated powers.

RESOLVED That the interim regulations remain in force until 15th June 2020.

105. DELEGATED DECISION TAKEN TO 27TH APRIL 2020

The delegated decisions list taken from period 25th March 2020 to 27th April 2020 was received.

Members were informed that these decisions were taken in conjunction with the Committee Chairmen.

In answer to a question, the Town Clerk said that with the current restrictions, it was difficult to perform the tender process for major maintenance of the paths on the River Walk but he was hopeful that work could commence later this year.

RESOLVED That the delegated decisions be received and endorsed by the Town Council.

106. LOCAL GRANT SUPPORT

A report was considered regarding the scope for local grant support guidelines and appetite for releasing funding for local community support.

Members considered that the scheme should be for local rather than national charities and should be a bolt-on to the current scheme. The suggestion was made that an additional £5,000 should be put into the budget.

The Town Clerk supported this approach as there was already a robust mechanism in place and surplus funding available. The grant applications would need to be approved by the Town Council not under delegated powers. Members pointed out that whilst certain aspects could be relaxed it was important to ensure that the grant was properly spent and there was commensurate benefit.

Members then spoke about the good work being undertaken by The Hub and their need for funding. They had many volunteers who made up to one hundred deliveries of food a day.

The Town Clerk advised that the decision to be made this evening was to accept the scheme and agree additional funding not to agree a particular grant request.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the Grant Scheme be extended to help local charities, with the existing criteria in place, and an additional £5,000 put into the budget.

107. SIGNPOSTING AND WEBSITE OVERHAUL

A report was received along with supporting draft images of a new web platform for review by Members.

The Town Clerk explained that the new system meant there was more control over the website and would increase both accessibility and visibility of information for members of the public above and beyond statutory requirements.

Members considered that the concept was good and a great improvement over the present website.

RESOLVED That the report be received and the information noted.

108. SCHEME OF DELEGATION

The draft Scheme of Delegation was received.

The Town Clerk explained that there had never been a scheme in place before and one was necessary to achieve the Quality Council Gold Standard. Members were informed that the Scheme of Delegation codifies the role of each committee and helps to combine various terms of reference into a single reference document in addition to clarifying the roles and responsibilities of various officers, office holders and Members.

RESOLVED That the Scheme of Delegation be received and adopted pending final editing for any outstanding continuity errors.

109. COMPULSORY PURCHASE

A report was received from Councillor M.C.M. Lager who asked Members to consider the merits of compulsory purchase of a vacant plot of land on the Maltings Lane estate, which had planning consent.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager explained that the residents of the Maltings estate were irritated by this wasteland near the school. He understood that negotiations were ongoing with regard to realigning the boundary but considered that the District Council should be urged to get the land developed. The Town Council does not have direct powers to compulsory purchase the site but it could be done through the District Council. He suggested that the Town Clerk make preliminary enquiries of the District Council so an informed decision could be made.

Members discussed whether this could be viable but on balance agreed that a preliminary investigation be made.

RESOLVED That the Town Clerk be delegated to undertake enquiries to ascertain whether the Town Council would have an appetite to instigate compulsory purchase of the vacant plot of land on the Maltings estate.

The Town Mayor thanked the staff for their work during this difficult time.

There being no further business the Town Mayor closed the Meeting at 8.25 p.m.

Councillor Mrs S.C. Lager
Town Mayor

JS/GK/18.5.2020