

Melksham Town Council

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 2nd December 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor T Price (Town Mayor)
Councillor S Rabey (Deputy Town Mayor)
Councillor P Alford
Councillor P Aves
Councillor G Ellis
Councillor A Griffin
Councillor C Stokes
Councillor A Westbrook
Councillor J Westbrook

IN ATTENDANCE:

OFFICERS:	Andrew Meacham	Committee Clerk
	Tracy Predeth	Locum Clerk
	Hayley Bell	Deputy Clerk

Three members of the public and one member of the press were present and two members of the public were present virtually

117/24 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Hubbard.

118/24 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

119/24 Public Participation

Sue Mortimer.

When is the Income & Expenditure report for financial year ending 31st March 2024 going to be presented to Council? The Town Mayor Councillor Price advised that an answer would be sought from the RFO on his return from leave.

Annie Benham-Taylor.

Is there any availability of allotments and how much do they cost?
Why has the £4000 allocated for allotments not been spent?
Is there a waiting list for allotments?
How many allotments are currently available?

The Town Mayor Councillor Price replied.

Some work had been done on troughs but staff turnover and council priorities meant the £4000 had been budgeted but not spent.

Addison Road - 5 vacant plots
Awdry Avenue – 4 vacant plots
Dorset Crescent – no vacant plots

There is a waiting list but number of people on the list is not to hand. Vacancies are offered to those on the waiting list first. If they do not wish to take them on the vacancies will be publicised.

Chris Holden.

Q1. Why has the lighting in KGV been dimmed? When the lights were installed people felt safe in the park at night but dimming defeats this objective. Speaking as a committee member of Wiltshire Neighbourhood Watch, they encourage the Council not to dim the lights. Lighting aligns with Wiltshire Police Vigilant Community Initiative. Why have the lights been dimmed and can the council give assurances that dimming will not continue.

The Town Mayor Councillor Price advised the lights were dimmed because of residents claiming the lights were too bright and having a negative impact on their quality of life and on bio-diversity. Lights were dimmed to the lowest level possible. A survey and review are being conducted and no assurances can be given at this point.

Q2. Does Melksham Town Council intend to raise a formal complaint with the Local Government Ombudsman about Wiltshire Council's attitude to Melksham Independent News and withholding information?

The Town Mayor Councillor Price said that Melksham Town Council and Wiltshire Council are separate entities and do not always hold the same views. He confirmed that there was currently no intention to write a letter of complaint and it would require a motion from a member to be discussed.

Councillor Alford advised that the complaints process only allowed complaints to Wiltshire Council from individuals.

Pamela Wiltshire.

The Town Mayor Councillor Price read out the question and answer.

Please could you advise me how at just over half way through the council year, the central salaries are already at 96% of the budget. Half a million pounds was budgeted for salaries in total, how much more will be spent in total over this council year? You

have big overspends on other budget headings as well, yet there appears to be virtually nothing spent on, amongst other things, such as Play area maintenance, Rospa checks, trees and tree maintenance. Splash pad is at 169% of budget. Are we as residents getting value for money from our precept?

Thank you for your enquiry regarding the breakdown of salaries and the current status of the budget.

Due to confidentiality, we are unable to provide a detailed breakdown of individual salaries. The privacy of our staff members is of utmost importance, and we must adhere to data protection regulations and internal policies that safeguard this information.

Regarding the overall budget, it is important to note that last year's staff budget was reduced, which has contributed to an overspend in the current year as adjustments were made to meet operational requirements. We understand the concerns this may raise and want to assure you that we are closely monitoring the situation to manage spending effectively.

It is also worth highlighting that there are still four months remaining in the current fiscal year. Some areas of the budget are underspent, and we anticipate that these will provide the necessary flexibility to balance expenditures across all areas.

We appreciate your understanding of the challenges involved in managing resources while maintaining transparency and compliance with regulations.

The Town Mayor Councillor Price added that the overspend on the Splashpad was as a result of issues with Water Bills and was for 5 years.

120/24 Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from Councillors.

121/24 Minutes

The minutes of Monday 23rd September 2024, Monday 30th September 2024 and Tuesday 8th October 2024 having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price.

122/24 Town Mayor's Announcements

The recent floods and the effect on Melksham residents and businesses was noted. It had been decided to open Town Hall for use by people affected by the floods. Improvements were needed to Melksham Town Council Flood Emergency Policies.

Saturday coming is the Christmas Light Switch on. The Mayor asked members to share on socials and come along to the event.

Councillor Forgacs had been disqualified as a Melksham Town Councillor. Wiltshire Council had confirmed that no by-election was needed.

123/24 Police Report

There was no report. It was noted that Sgt Rutter had hoped to attend but was unable to do so for personal reasons.

124/24 Reports from Unitary Councillors

Councillor Alford reported on various issues as follows.

- (i) The local Development Plan had been submitted to the Inspector.
- (ii) The Melksham East Relief Road was now open.
- (iii) The Melksham Independent News was discussed in Cabinet and at Overview & Scrutiny Management. Councillor Alford gave an overview of discussion and advised that both meeting were available on YouTube.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor J Westbrook and

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders.

Joe McCann of the Melksham Independent News confirmed a meeting with Wiltshire Council Leadership team, that Councillor Hubbard had made a speech which would be at the beginning of the Overview & Scrutiny recording and that different reasons for the decision had been given at different times.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

RESOLVED to re-instate Standing Orders.

125/24 Shurnhold Fields Working Group

It was noted that no membership had been appointed at the Annual Meeting. Councillor Alford and Councillor Aves had recently attended a meeting on behalf of Melksham Town Council but would have been unable to vote had that been required.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor J Westbrook and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Alford, Councillor Aves and Councillor Rabey as representatives on Shurnhold Fields Working Group.

126/24 VAT Partial Exemption

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders to allow a member of the public to speak.

Sue Mortimer referenced a letter from DCK and asked why it was not in the agenda pack and why MTC was opting not to tax when that was the advice. The Town Mayor Councillor Price confirmed that MTC was now taxing and had a finance team to advise on these matters.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

RESOLVED to re-instate Standing Orders.

Councillor Griffin was concerned if DCK had revealed information to a member of the public. The Town Mayor Councillor Price asked officers to investigate and find out what, if anything, had been revealed by DCK.

The item was noted.

127/24 The Parochial Church Council of the Melksham Parish of the Ecclesiastical Parish of Melksham, Salisbury

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor A Westbrook and

RESOLVED to suspend Standing Orders to allow Rev. Charlie Thomson to speak.

Rev. Thomson spoke to the request for a grant. It was a plan to bring a derelict building in a conservation area back to life as a benefit for the community.

Questions were asked. Some concern was raised about granting money to a religious organisation. Rev Thomson confirmed the facilities would be open to all regardless of belief and that other grants had been awarded despite similar concerns. The Town Mayor Councillor Price confirmed that advice had been given that the grant could be made.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Ellis and

RESOLVED to re-instate Standing Orders.

There was discussion on where any grant should be funded from. CIL and Solar were suggested. It was questioned whether this grant would take funding away from other projects that would then need to be funded via the precept. It was pointed out that

there were sufficient funds in Solar and a further payment was expected. It was agreed that officers would investigate which would be appropriate to use.

It was proposed by Councillor A Westbrook, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to award a grant of £10000, to be paid from either CIL or Solar funds, with a preference for Solar if possible.

128/24 CCTV Policy

There was discussion on potential review date, access to the CCTV room & footage and whether the views of the Police and a CCTV expert had been sought.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor J Westbrook and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED for officers to seek views on the CCTV set up and the policy from the Police and a CCTV expert, other than the suppliers.

129/24 Safeguarding Policy

The Town Mayor Councillor Price expressed thanks to Councillor Oatley, the Deputy Clerk Hayley Bell and HR Officer Fran House for their work on this policy.

There was comment on the front sheet of the policy and a request for a similar sheet to be used on all future policies.

It was proposed by Councillor Alford, seconded by Councillor Aves and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to adopt the policy.

130/24 Sponsorship Policy

The Town Mayor Councillor Price spoke to the policy. It was confirmed that any decision on sponsorship would be by committee, a policy for sponsorship of council events was being worked on and that there was not as yet a budget for sponsorship.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to adopt the policy.

131/24 Conclusion of Audit Year 2023/24

Councillor Griffin noted that the information made public was the minimum in order to comply and felt that more information should be provided.

The item was noted.

132/24 Pay Award

Councillor A Westbrook asked if a Personnel Committee meeting could be called.

Councillor Ellis expressed his appreciation for the work of officers.

The pay award was noted.

133/24 Neighbourhood Plan

The suggested locations for viewing the plan were discussed. It was suggested that there should be a location in East Melksham as that was the area most affected. It was pointed out that this was in the Local Plan, not the Joint Melksham Neighbourhood Plan.

The item was noted and the minutes were received.

134/24 Asset Management & Amenities Committee

The minutes were received.

135/24 Community Development Committee

The minutes were received.

136/24 Economic Development & Planning Committee

The minutes were received.

137/24 Finance Administration & Performance Committee

The minutes were received.

138/24 Personnel Committee

The minutes were received.

139/24 Confidential Session

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to go into private session for the remainder of the meeting.

140/24 Evie's Cafe Lease

It was confirmed that the lease had been amended as discussed and resolved in the previous meeting and sent to solicitors. It was hoped to be ready to sign by Christmas.

Legal advice had been sought with regard to the £25000 provided for refurbishment. Advice was clear that MTC could not in any way "gift" the sum.

There was discussion on sums spent on maintenance, who the lease was with, the agreement regarding cleaning of the eco-loos, repayment of the investment and recovery of investment via a charge on equipment in the event of default.

There was a request for officers to look at the situation with preferred contractors generally and a feeling the process on leases needed to be tightened up.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor A Westbrook and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to delegate authority to the Clerk and Deputy Clerk to take the matter forward.

141/24 31 Market Place Lease

The item was noted. There were no comments.

142/24 Bowerhill Depot Lease

The Clerk advised that matters were still being investigated and would be brought to a future meeting. It was noted that there was currently a rolling lease.

143/24 Round House Lease

Councillor A Westbrook declared an interest because of her connection with the Melksham Community Larder. It was noted that the lease had expired and a Memorandum of Understanding was needed to protect the parties.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor Griffin and

RESOLVED to issue a Memorandum of Understanding.

There were two abstentions.

144/24 31 Market Place Survey

There was discussion on the survey. It was noted that as landlords MTC was legally responsible for the repairs. £35000 had been allocated in the proposed 2025/26 budget and the total cost was £69000 over two years.

Possibility of a Market Value and Rent Review was discussed.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Rabey and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to delegate powers to officers to obtain quotes for the work on 31 Market Place.

It was noted that the Council is required to publish a list of buildings that it owns. It was requested that an Asset Register come before Full Council as soon as possible.

145/24 Blue Pool

The solicitors advise was noted.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor Councillor Price, seconded by Councillor J Westbrook and

RESOLVED to proceed as advised by solicitors.

Meeting Closed at: 10.00 pm

Signed:

Dated: