

Melksham Town Council

Minutes of the Full Council meeting held on Monday 18th December 2023

PRESENT:

Councillor S Crundell (Town Mayor)
Councillor T Price (Deputy Town Mayor)
Councillor P Alford
Councillor P Aves
Councillor G Cooke
Councillor J Crundell
Councillor C Forgacs
Councillor J Hubbard
Councillor J Oatley
Councillor S Mortimer
Councillor Stokes
Councillor J Westbrook

IN ATTENDANCE:

OFFICERS:	Hugh Davies	Head of Operations
	Andrew Meacham	Committee Clerk

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

Colin Goodhind.

Recapped the position on requesting a Public Space Protection Order for Avon Place. Has there been any action?

Has there been any progress on updating the joint Flood Plan with Melksham Without Parish Council?

Local Cycling and Walking Plan. Route round park, Riverside Walk and Murray Walk. Has the Council looked at any changes that might happen and what can be done to stop changes in light of the sale of Cooper Avon Tires?

The Committee Clerk confirmed that he and the Town Clerk did start the process and held a meeting with the relevant Wiltshire Council officer. Having chased the matter recently after a query from Councillor Hubbard the advice was that there was insufficient evidence to pursue a PSPO at this time. Councillor Hubbard further advised that insufficient incidents of anti-social behaviour had been reported. The Wiltshire Officer is happy to provide log books to record and build evidence. Councillor Hubbard will be meeting with the officer in the New Year.

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell was unable to answer the question on the Flood Plan and suggested referring it to Economic Development and Planning.

Mike Saunders.

Understands Bruce is leaving. Is there a plausible reason for this?
The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell advised that council could not comment on HR matters.

Joe McCann

A CCTV report was expected before Christmas. Is it ready and if not, when will it be ready. Can an update on mobile CCTV be given?

Head of Operations advised that the main CCTV report would be available in January. On mobile CCTV, an area to deploy had been identified but need to speak to BT about attaching to telegraph poles.

Follow up question, so the mobile CCTV is now operational? Head of Operations confirmed it was.

648/23 Apologies

Apologies were received from Councillor Ellis and Councillor Rabey.

649/23 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

650/23 Questions from Councillors

There were no questions from councillors.

651/23 Minutes

Councillor Mortimer raised an issue with item 628/23, saying the question she had asked was whether professional advice had been sought on taxing the café building. The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell made a handwritten amendment to the minutes.

Councillor Hubbard asked if the purchase order for WiFi had been placed. Head of operations confirmed it had.

Councillor Hubbard asked about the Biodiversity Policy. The Committee clerk advised that the Environment and Climate Working Group were finalising their suggestions for SMART OBJECTIVES when the agenda for this meeting needed to be published. The item has been placed on the agenda for the January meeting. Councillor Hubbard expressed concern that ECWG were holding informal meetings.

The minutes of 27 November 2023 having previously been circulated, were approved as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell.

652/23 Town Mayor's Announcements

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell expressed his thanks to all involved in Carols Around The Tree. It was nice to see so many residents enjoying the event, especially the children.

653/23 Police Report

There was no report to receive. The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell noted that councillors often had questions for the Wiltshire Police representative and asked that APS Simon Tuong be invited to attend the next full council meeting.

654/23 Reports from Unitary Councillors

Councillor Hubbard reported that Wiltshire Council had received an “Outstanding” judgment from OFSTED for its Children’s Services. Wiltshire is the only Council in the South-West receiving an Outstanding judgement and one of very few receiving an Outstanding judgment coming out of Covid. Councillor Hubbard expressed his appreciation of Wiltshire officers and councillors work leading to the judgment.

Councillor Alford recognised Councillor Hubbard’s role in the work done.

Councillor Oatley had nothing to report but wished residents a Merry Christmas and A Happy New Year.

655/23 Committee Appointment

It was questioned whether Standing Orders allowed a vote on the appointment in the absence of Councillor Rabey.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Rabey to the Asset Management and Amenities Committee, subject to it being allowed under Standing Orders.

656/23 Car Park and Entrance Improvement Project Shurnhold Field

It was noted that the work had not yet been done. There was discussion on whether the funding obtained from the Area Board was £5000 to each council or a total of £5000.

Councillor Hubbard expressed concerns over the lack of a breakdown of reserves showing what funds are committed to projects and what is available to be allocated.

It was proposed by Councillor Hubbard, seconded by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED

- (i) to move £15000 or whatever the sum originally set whichever was the highest, from Major Project Reserve to a Shurnhold Fields Reserve. Officers to check to ascertain what amount was budgeted two years ago
- (ii) Officers to check the question of funds from the Area Board and, if £5000 was allocated to Melksham Town Council, to transfer that sum to the Shurnhold Fields Reserve.

657/23 Place Studio and Neighbourhood Plan

The importance of the Joint Neighbourhood Plan was generally acknowledged. It was also acknowledged that, in the absence of staff resources at Melksham Town Council, it was necessary to allocate funds to allow Melksham Without Parish Council to finish the work.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to allocate up to £5000 from the General Reserve to finish the work on Joint Neighbourhood Plan consultation.

658/23 Internal Audit Year Ended 31 March 2024 - Interim Audit Report

Councillor Mortimer noted the following:

- On page 23 of the agenda pack (page 2 of the report) the inherent risk assessment states 'There has been no incident of high staff turnover'. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell asked that this be highlighted to the Internal Auditor.
- On page 27 of the agenda pack (page 6 of the report) it states 'A more detailed breakdown of the EMR, split to show the specific projects the funds have been allocated to, may be beneficial and more transparent to demonstrate the council's plans'

Councillor Hubbard noted the statement page 29 of the agenda pack (page 8 of the report) regarding cash handling. Felt this should be noted and the matter brought back to Council to advise how this has been addressed. Councillor Hubbard noted there were other points of concern in the audit.

Councillor Aves queried a reference to bank statement being signed. Councillor Mortimer advised this related to signing bank reconciliations without evidence of agreement with computer sheet balance.

It was noted by the Mayor, Councillor S Crundell that a new member of staff would be addressing some of these issues.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to implement steps to address the issues identified, to be completed by end of March 2024 and to update council as steps are taken.

659/23 Unity

Councillor Hubbard queried the Finders Fee of £3674.40 on page 37. What is this payment and on who's authority was it made? The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell said it was for a member of the Amenities Team and would be under the delegated authority of the Head of operations. Councillor Hubbard asked what budget the sum was paid from. Head of Operations will provide a written answer.

Councillor Hubbard raised concerns about the ongoing issue of miscoding. Councillors have a legal duty to ensure money spent by Melksham Town Council is being spent appropriately. Signing off accounts with mis-postings gives the impression councillors don't care how the money is spent. For two years the final figures on accounts do not accurately reflect how the money has been spent.

Councillor Hubbard - 'When are we actually going to start seeing some...accurate numbers coming to us?'

Councillor Hubbard commented on a request from Councillor Mortimer and himself for the accountant to come to a finance meeting, which was cancelled and not followed up. The Mayor, Councillor S Crundell advised this was solely because of the accountant serious health issues.0

A new member of staff starting in January will be able to assist and can attend the Finance, Administration and Performance meeting on Monday 15 January 2024.

660/23 Lloyds

There were no comments

661/23 Petty Cash

There were no comments

662/23 Income Report

There were no comments.

663/23 Detailed Income & Expenditure by Budget Heading

Councillor Mortimer commented that the expenditure total shows as £2259000 and the reason this is incorrect is the coding used for earmarked reserves.

There was a discussion of Councillor Mortimer's motion at the Finance, Administration and Performance meeting on Monday 20th November 2023. Councillor Westbrook stated that the motion was voted down because there was confusion and members were advised by the clerk that the changes would take a long time and tie up staff resources, which has subsequently proved not to be the case. Councillor Stokes noted that an amendment was proposed to approve the changes but delay implementation until the new financial year. This amendment was not accepted.

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell suggested that the matter be raised with the new member of staff at the next Finance, Administration and Performance meeting. Councillor Hubbard suggested that the new officer meet with Councillor Mortimer before the next meeting.

Councillor Hubbard asked for it to be minuted that members were advised by the Responsible Financial Officer that they shouldn't make the change.

664/23 Budget Report

There were no comments.

665/23 Monthly Financial Statement

Councillor Mortimer re-iterated her concerns about the earmarked reserves.

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell called for a vote and Councillor Hubbard asked for clarification of what they were voting for. The Committee Clerk recapped and also stated that he did not believe the Clerk had told the finance committee they could not make the changes. Councillor Westbrook accepted that the issue was timing and felt they may have been some miscommunication about how much time it would take.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell, seconded by Councillor Aves and

RESOLVED to receive the reports with the proviso that the matters raised be addressed.

666/23 Local Cycling and Walking Plan (LCWIP) for Melksham,

There was some discussion. It was asked what had been done so far to publicise the consultation. It was suggested that it be publicised on Melksham Town Council social media and councillors own social media.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to defer the item to the next full council meeting on 22 January 2024 and councillors review the document and to email their thoughts to officers.

667/23 Committee Minutes

Councillor Hubbard raised concerns about discussions in and decisions made in Staffing Committee that should come to Full Council. He cited the announcement at the meeting of a locum clerk and that Standing Orders required any such appointment to be made by Full Council. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell advised that the new officer was not a Locum Clerk and the staffing committee was following advice.

Councillor Hubbard was concerned that Staffing Committee minutes recorded decisions but gave no details of discussion. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell pointed out that the procedure followed under his chair was no different to that followed under Councillor Hubbard's chair. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell advised that he would check the validity of the advice given.

Councillor Westbrook was concerned that councillors were unable to answer questions raised by residents. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell said that the Staffing Committee shared as much as they could, subject to legal advice. He would check the advice.

Councillor Hubbard again raised the issue of appointing a Locum Clerk without a decision of Full Council. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell again confirmed that the new officer was not the Locum Clerk or the RFO and that Head of Operations was in charge pending appointment of a Locum/RFO in the New Year.

Councillor Westbrook proposed a detailed timeline of when councillors can know what is happening and what will happen going forward.

The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell said he would supply as detailed a timeline as possible. Councillor Westbrook confirmed she did not require a vote on the point as the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell had confirmed he would supply the timeline.

Councillor Hubbard expressed his concern that the council was not being properly advised and it may result in a considerable cost. The Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell stated he would be updating council at the end of the meeting and could assure Councillor Hubbard that what he believed about the matter was not true.

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

RESOLVED to receive the minutes of Economic Development and Planning Committee of 14 November 2023 and the Staffing Committee of 6 November 2023 and 28 November 2023.

668/23 Working Group Minutes

Councillor Oatley raised the previously mentioned matter of Environment and Climate Working Group holding informal meetings and officers being invited to one such meetings.

There was robust discussion of the matter.

It was proposed by Councillor Hubbard, seconded by Councillor Oatley and

RESOLVED that the Environment and Climate Working Group completes its work on the Biodiversity Policy to be brought to Full Council meeting on 22 January 2024. The existing group is then dissolved and new terms of reference are to be put to Full Council at the first opportunity.

It was proposed by the Town Mayor, Councillor S Crundell, seconded by Councillor Hubbard and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to receive the minutes of the Environment & Climate Working Group of 14 November 2023.

669/23 Confidential Session

In view of the confidential and sensitive nature of the business about to be transacted, in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960.

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

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted that the press and public be instructed to withdraw.

670/23 Tribunals

The Town Mayor Councillor S Crundell gave an update on matter relating to tribunals. There was discussion on the update and on which councillors were recused from being appointed to a panel to deal with tribunal claims.

It was proposed by Councillor Oatley, seconded by Councillor Stokes and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Alford, the Deputy Town Mayor Councillor Price and Councillor Westbrook and delegate them to deal with all matters arising from Tribunal claims through to conclusion.

Meeting Closed at: 9.40 pm

Signed:

Dated:

