

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Wednesday 17th June 2020 at 5.00pm

The meeting took place in a virtual environment using “Zoom” video conferencing technology and members of the public and press were given the opportunity to observe or participate in the meeting by pre-registering.

PRESENT: Cllr Tony Ring, Town Mayor
Cllr Philip Day, Deputy Mayor
Cllr Andy Briers
Cllr Gareth Deboos
Cllr Rae Frederick
Cllr John Haywood
Cllr Jeremy Heron
Cllr Peter Kelleher
Cllr Gloria O’Reilly
Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine
Cllr Glenys Turner

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Mrs Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk
County Councillor, Michael Thierry
Inspector Michael Minnock, Hampshire Constabulary
Brian Byrne – Service Manager, Housing Estates Management, CCTV,
Community Safety and Community Alarms, NFDC (*until 5.58pm*)

ABSENT: Cllr Hilary Edge
Cllr Darren Loose

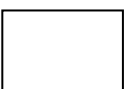
C/6454 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were two members of the public present, one representing the newly formed Poulner Residents Association, and a resident of Poulner.

It was reported that the Poulner Residents Association had been formed following the arrival of travellers in town and the frustration of residents and concern over a perceived lack of transparency and action being taken. It had been launched on Saturday and now had a membership of 639 households. Residents had been worried about going out, which was partly due to a lack of understanding and information, and they were concerned that the authorities were being reactive rather than proactive. Since the travellers had left, deterrents had been introduced in North Poulner Road and Poulner Lakes, and the concern now was that there were a number of unprotected green areas throughout the town that could be accessed by travellers during the summer. Residents had protected Kingfisher Way but wished to see a permanent solution that was in keeping with the area.

The Town Mayor suggested that a separate meeting be held with the Residents Association to look at measures that could be taken.

Cllr Heron said there had previously been an understanding with the Police that some areas did not need protecting, particularly those within residential areas, as Section 61 powers could be used to move travellers on. Indeed, there had been an incursion in North Poulner Road



two years ago, and they had been moved on in 20 minutes. If this was no longer the case, there would be a need to review all sites across the area.

C/6455
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

C/6456
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Haywood, Heron and Kelleher declared a personal interest as members of the Poulner Residents Association.

C/6457
UNAUTHORISED ENCAMPMENT

The Town Mayor stated that the purpose of this extraordinary meeting had been to review current policy on unauthorised encampments and authorise any necessary actions to resolve the current situation on North Poulner Road/Poulner Lakes. However, thanks to the efforts of the Town Clerk, Cllr Heron and Brian Byrne, the travellers had now departed. This meeting would therefore seek to address public concern, and discuss issues relating to the encampment. The policy could then be reviewed at a later date, if necessary.

Brian Byrne and Inspector Michael Minnock were invited to comment and there followed a series of questions from councillors and the members of public present.

Brian Byrne had been in regular communication with the Town Clerk and complaints received from the public had been dealt with on an individual basis. They were limited by what could be reported in public but would seek to learn from this experience and improve communication in future. The suggestion that areas should be protected from the travelling community would need careful consideration as they are protected by the Equality Act. There was a need to work with communities to discuss cultural differences. During these unprecedented times, the government had produced guidance advising tolerance where possible, as the travelling community were particularly vulnerable to Covid-19.

Inspector Minnock was unable to comment on what had happened two years ago, and said that legislation, policy and guidance had changed since then. He explained the Police response to encampments and the powers that were available to them. In order to use Section 61, certain criteria had to be met relating to the number of people and vehicles, damage caused to gain access and threats to landowners. In addition, a number of aggravating factors had to be assessed, including communities being deprived of local amenities; significant impact on the environment and economy; and the need to take preventative action against unruly and intolerable behaviour. This assessment had been made in partnership with the District and Town Councils and the conclusion had been that these aggravating factors had not been met and use of Section 61 would be neither proportionate nor necessary. The Police then worked with the lead agency (NFDC) to progress the eviction under Section 77.

It was acknowledged that the lock had been broken to gain access to Poulner Lakes, but this was unproven, and that there was evidence of theft of canes and damage to newly planted trees, but this was not significant enough to justify the use of Section 61.

It was not possible to use Section 62 as there was no designated sites in the area to move the travellers on to. There was one private site in the New Forest district, but no new vehicles were being accepted due to Covid-19. The Police would not rule out using this as an option in future, but due to the amount of liaison required, this was not a quick option. Inspector Minnick had requested that the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner consider this issue as there were no identified transit sites in Hampshire.

Inspector Minnock had reflected on the situation and considered what he could offer to the community to allay fears and concerns. He said that the Police were reliant on incidents being reported in order to build intelligence, make informed decisions and allocate resources. He offered to deliver a presentation to the Town Council on policing powers and policies, so that this information could then be communicated to residents. In addition, he would in future, if possible, look to visit residents in the immediate vicinity, although it was noted that he had tasked the neighbourhood team to increase presence in the area and speak to residents. He would also be considering how to manage communication of travellers' encampments in future, to ensure the community is aware of the decision-making process and that action is being taken.

It was noted that several residents had reported concerns via 101, either online or by phone, but there appeared to be some irregularity in response and feedback. Inspector Minnock said that Covid-19 had impacted call management and a high level of screening had been adopted. However, the importance of reporting should not be underestimated, and residents should be encouraged to do this.

Inspector Minnock left the meeting at 6.25pm.

It was noted that the Council's policy on unauthorised encampments was not available on its website. It was agreed that this should be added, as it would help the public to understand how such issues were dealt with.

Some Members were of the opinion that there was no need to review the Council's policy on unauthorised encampments as no amendments had been proposed. Others felt that it should be reviewed in light of the recent experience, and that there was a need to consider how to improve communications in the future.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the offer from Inspector Minnock to give a presentation to Council on general Police powers be welcomed.
- 2) That, if requested, the Council's policy on unauthorised encampments be reviewed by Policy & Finance Committee.

ACTION C Wilkins

There being no further business, the Town Mayor closed the meeting at 6.37pm.

APPROVED
24th June 2020

TOWN MAYOR

