

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Wednesday 27th May 2020 at 7.00pm

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 Hilary Edge
Cllr Rae Frederick
Cllr John Haywood
Cllr Jeremy Heron
Cllr Peter Kelleher
Cllr Darren Loose
Cllr Gloria O’Reilly
Cllr Steve Rippon-Swaine
Cllr Glenys Turner

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Chris Wilkins, Town Clerk
Mrs Jo Hurd, Deputy Town Clerk

ABSENT: All Members were present.

Prior to the start of the meeting, Members observed a period of one minute’s silence to reflect on the number of deaths resulting from Covid-19 in the country.

**C/6440
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Alison Talbot, Chief Officer to Citizens Advice New Forest, was in attendance to thank the Council for its continued support and generous grant of £1,000 towards provision of the service. She reported that the service had seen the trends and concerns of a nation since the start of the pandemic, which had included concerns over cancellation of holidays and refunds for tickets; advice on claiming universal credit and a huge range of employment issues; and more recently neighbour disputes and divorce. She said that the service had proven to be both highly relevant and adaptable, with all volunteers working at home and offering advice via phone, email or webchat. Going forward, they were looking at how technology could help to improve the service offered and to work with partners to deliver new services.

**C/6441
APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

All members were present.

**C/6442
DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none declared at this time.

C/6443
MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

C/6428 – It had been suggested to the Town Clerk that this minute might not have fully or accurately captured the meaning of Cllr Heron’s views (see paragraph 5). However, after some discussion, it was agreed that no change was required.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Meeting held on 26th February 2020, having been circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record.

C/6444
RECREATION, LEISURE AND OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Cllr Briers presented the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee meeting held on 4th March 2020.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure and Open Spaces Committee meeting held on 4th March 2020 be received.

C/6445
PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr Day presented the minutes of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee meeting held on 6th March and 1st May 2020.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee meeting held on 6th March and 1st May 2020 be received.

C/6446
POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Cllr Heron presented the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 18th March and 20th May 2020.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 18th March and 20th May 2020 be received.

C/6447
ANNUAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

Members considered a report from the Town Clerk (*Annex A*) explaining that the legal requirement to hold an Annual Town Meeting in 2020 had been removed.

RESOLVED: That an Annual Town Meeting not be held in 2020.

C/6448
STAFFING COMMITTEE

Members considered a report from the Town Clerk (*Annex B*) regarding the need to appoint a member to the Staffing Committee in place of Cllr Day who had resigned from that committee.

RESOLVED: That Cllr Loose be appointed to the Staffing Committee.



C/6449
TOWN CLERK'S BUSINESS

The Town clerk updated Members on developments affecting Council business during the current pandemic.

Allotments

Several complaints had been received about the nuisance caused by bonfires on allotment plots. A report recommending a temporary ban on bonfires would be considered by Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee at its next meeting.

It was noted that some tenants were working their plots enthusiastically, but that several plots had not been cultivated at all. The normal inspection regime was continuing but enforcement would be handled with care and sensitivity. He gave thanks to Ringwood Gardening Club, and its chairman Mr Atack, who had agreed to judge the plots for this year's Allotment Competition.

Cemetery

The Town Clerk wished to put on record his thanks to the funeral directors and stonemasons who had shown great sensitivity and coped well with the difficult conditions under which they were currently operating.

Ringwood Gateway

Discussions were taking place with New Forest District Council, and with Town Council staff, regarding resumption of the information service. Some physical changes would be required, such as the installation of a perspex screen surrounding the reception desk, and other measures put in place to ensure the building was Covid secure and social distancing could be adhered to. This would include a strict door management policy. The service would however be very different to that which people were used to, with no sales of parking clocks or waste sacks for example, and more signposting to relevant services.

There were no plans for the remaining Town Council staff to return to work in the office at this time; all were coping well with working from home.

The HCC Registration Service continued to operate from the building, but only to register deaths over the telephone at present. Ceremonies had not yet resumed.

The drop-in for District and County officers remained closed and it was neither safe nor practical to re-open at this stage.

Grounds Staff

At the beginning of the pandemic, all but essential operations were suspended to reinforce the national 'stay at home' message. Grounds staff had gradually built up their hours and were now working full time with additional precautions in place, albeit that this had changed working practices and made operations more difficult.

Skate Park and Play Areas

These areas remained closed, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to keep people off the skate park and out of the play areas, despite the gates being locked. New measures would be considered over the next few days.

C/6450
COMMUNICATIONS TO BE RECEIVED

The Town Mayor reported the following:

- 1) 75th Anniversary of VE Day – despite the planned street party having been cancelled, a short service had taken place outside the parish church and the community spirit throughout the town had been amazing.
- 2) He thanked all Town Council staff for continuing to provide a service to the community, and congratulated Cllr Haywood and all members of Ringwood Coronavirus Assistance, and all other voluntary organisations for their efforts.
- 3) Feedback from Ringwood Police was that the community had performed marvellously during this time and had been doing the right thing by complying with the restrictions.

C/6451

REPORTS FROM TOWN COUNCILLORS AND STUDENT ADVISORS

Cllr Frederick had been approached about widening footpaths and introducing temporary cycle lanes – this was due to be discussed at the next meeting of Planning, Town & Environment Committee. She thanked Cllr Deboos and the RACE volunteers for watering the new trees at Poulner Lakes

Cllr Turner had received several complaints regarding the removal of barriers from the cycle path between Hightown Road and Castleman Way – it was hoped an update would be available for the next meeting of Planning, Town & Environment Committee.

Cllr Deboos thanked staff for the excellent job they were doing, and Ringwood Police for the effective use of their powers.

Cllr Edge was concerned about reports to the Police not being followed up; litter at Toad Corner (although Cllr Loose stated that it had been spotless the two times he had visited in the last week); signage at Moyles Court and bonfires in Poulner – she was advised of the relevant authorities to raise these issues with.

Cllr Haywood, on behalf of Ringwood Coronavirus Assistance, thanked the Council for its support, which was very much appreciated.

Cllr Day congratulated the Town Mayor and the various religious organisations for arranging the service on VE Day. He said the video made by Ringwood TV had been viewed over 12,000 times and had put Ringwood on the map. He thanked Jay Cox and Jim Stride for their assistance with publicity. Many more events, including the Pedal Car Grand Prix, Ringwood Carnival and Ellingham Show, had now been cancelled and he hoped that these organisations would be supported to ensure their survival. He congratulated RACE and thanked the grounds team for helping to water the new trees at Poulner Lakes; this had been a fantastic community effort.

Cllr O'Reilly queried whether there were sufficient electric charging points in the town.

C/6452

REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

District Councillor Heron updated Members on the situation regarding travellers in the town. The District Council had begun the eviction process for those in the Recreation Centre car park. It was noted that current government guidance had slowed the process, but it was hoped that notice would be served the following day. Those in the Fish Inn car park had now moved on.

He also reported that charges in District Council car parks would be brought back into effect from 1st June. The first quarter clock (January to March) would remain valid in June, and a second quarter clock (April to June) could be purchased online for £12. He advised people to keep their old clocks in the event that the Council introduced a refund system.

District Councillor Rippon-Swaine reported on the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which had considered the re-opening of Waterside Rail as a passenger carrying service. He had pointed out that the Association of Train Operating Companies held a list of branch lines



closed by Beeching in the 1960s that could be re-opened, of which the Brockenhurst to Ringwood line was 9th on this list, so should be given priority.

C/6453
FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces	7.00pm	Wednesday 3 rd June 2020
Planning, Town & Environment	10.00am	Friday 5 th June 2020
Policy & Finance	7.00pm	Wednesday 17 th June 2020
Full Council	7.00pm	Wednesday 24 th June 2020

There being no further business, the Town Mayor closed the meeting at 8.36pm.

APPROVED
24th June 2020

TOWN MAYOR

TOWN COUNCIL**27th May 2020****Annual Town Council Meeting****1. Introduction and reason for report**

- 1.1 By the Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus)(Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings)(England and Wales) Regulations 2020 (“the Regulations”) the legal requirement to hold an Annual Town Council meeting in 2020 has been removed but the Council retains, in effect, the option to hold one if it wishes to do so. It is therefore appropriate for councillors to consider if the wish to hold an Annual Meeting and, if so, when.

2. Background information and options

- 2.1 By the Local Government Act 1972 (“the Act”), the Council would normally be required to hold the Annual Meeting this month. The Annual Meeting is the occasion on which the Council makes various decisions required or recommended to be taken every year including:

- The election of the Town Mayor
- The election of the Deputy Town Mayor
- The appointments of members to committees
- The appointment of councillors as its representatives on outside bodies.

The Regulations remove the legal requirement to hold an Annual Meeting before 7 May 2021. The Regulations also provide that where an appointment would ordinarily be made or is required to be made at the Annual Meeting, the last appointment continues until the next annual meeting or until such time as the Council shall determine.

- 2.2 The Annual Town Council Meeting should not be confused with the Annual Town Meeting (aka the Annual Assembly). The latter is not a meeting of the Council at all (although it is common for it to be convened by it.) The Regulations do not apply to it; with the result that it cannot be held using remote technology and cannot therefore be organized under the current restrictions on public gatherings.
- 2.3 If members wish to have an opportunity (before May 2021) to transact the business ordinarily conducted at the Annual Town Council Meeting and can agree when, the Town Clerk will arrange that. However, there is no requirement to do this and in default of a decision to that effect, the Town Clerk will not arrange an Annual Town Council Meeting until May 2021.
- 2.4 By the Act, a newly-elected Mayor must immediately sign a Declaration of Acceptance of Office in the presence of the Town Clerk. The Regulations make no provision regarding this requirement. It would be near impossible to meet this requirement whilst meeting using remote technology and complying with current “social-distancing” requirements. For this reason alone, attempting to hold an Annual Town Council Meeting at this time (or even scheduling one for a later date earlier than May 2021) is inadvisable.
- 2.5 At the last Annual Town Council Meeting, authority to undertake much of the formal business (other than elections and appointments) recommended to be dealt with then was delegated to the Policy & Finance Committee. Officers have designed a programme for bringing these items to that Committee through the year. Nothing in the Regulations affects this or requires that it be dealt with differently.

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2.6 There is a need to make an appointment to membership of the Staffing Committee and this is the subject of a separate report.

3. Issues for decision and any recommendations

3.1 Whether to schedule an Annual Town Council meeting (or other opportunity to elect the Town Mayor and/or Deputy Town Mayor and/or make other appointments other than in respect of the Staffing Committee) before May 2021 and, if so, when.

RECOMMENDATION: Members are respectfully recommended not to schedule such a meeting unless some compelling reason so to do is adduced at the meeting.

For further information, contact:

Christopher Wilkins, Town Clerk
Direct Dial: 01425 484720
Email: chris.wilkins@ringwood.gov.uk

TOWN COUNCIL**27th May 2020****Staffing Committee****1. Introduction and reason for report**

- 1.1 Cllr. Day wishes to resign from this Committee rendering it necessary that members appoint a replacement for him.

2. Background information and options

- 2.1 Cllr. Day considers it inappropriate that he continue as a member of this committee because he now has two personal friends among the Council's staff. This is potentially problematic because the Committee may be called upon to consider questions about staff competence, performance, remuneration, grievances, discipline, etc. It is important that its members are (and are seen to be) objective, fair and independent and their judgments un-swayed by personal considerations. If Committee members are obliged to declare such interests and be excluded from full participation in its business, meetings may become inquorate and the committee unable to function.
- 2.2 Some decisions that the Staffing Committee may be called upon to make are subject to appeal. In that event, it would be necessary to form a panel of three councillors who are NOT members of the committee (and therefore able to bring fresh minds to bear on the matter). For this reason, it would be unwise to have too many councillors sitting on the Committee.
- 2.3 The Town Mayor and the Chair of the Policy & Finance Committee are appointed to the Staffing Committee *ex officio*. Cllrs. Haywood and O'Reilly are also currently members. It would be desirable that the committee have a fifth member.
- 2.4 Legal or other specialist advice is always obtained for and presented to the committee when this is necessary or helpful.

3. Issues for decision and any recommendations**3.1 Whom to appoint to membership of the Staffing Committee.**

For further information, contact:

Christopher Wilkins, Town Clerk
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