

Minutes of a meeting of CREWKERNE TOWN COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Market Square at 18.45 on Monday 27 November 2023.

PRESENT

Cllrs. A. Samuel (Mayor), S. Ashton, T. Bond, N. Draycott, K. Head, J. Nathan, A. Stuart and S. Woodland.

In attendance: Town Clerk K. Sheehan, Deputy Town Clerk G. Hughes and five members of the public.

OPEN FORUM

A member of the public raised the following issues:

- The energy bills for the George Reynolds Centre and whether they could be reviewed, asking if the previous investigations into potentially zoning the heating system could be revisited.
- That Councillors seriously consider holding a public meeting about the future of the George Reynolds Centre.

95 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

23/24

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs. Best, (personal), Livesley (personal) and Wakeman (work commitments).

Absent: Cllr. Morris.

96 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

23/24

Cllr. Head declared a personal interest in the item relating to the future of the George Reynolds Centre by virtue of being a member of the rugby club.

97 TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 30 OCTOBER 2023

23/24

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 October were deferred to the next Full Council meeting for approval, following a request for additional wording to be included.

98 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM UNITARY COUNCILLORS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORK REPRESENTATIVE

23/24

Cllr. Ashton reported that:

- Financial problems at Somerset Council were ongoing and staffing arrangements were being reviewed in order to identify £70m worth of savings.
- All efforts were being made to avoid a S114 notice being issued, and experiences of other councils in similar circumstances had been noted.
- Parish and Town Councils were being asked by Somerset Council to look at delivering services and taking on assets, and that this would be reflected in council tax bills.

Cllr. Head (LCN representative) reported that:

- The recent LCN meeting held in Ilminster had been dominated by talk of Somerset Council's situation and the potential effect on Town and Parish Councils.

- Queries had been raised over what was included in the higher tier authority's statutory obligations.
- Town and Parish Councils were under pressure with timescales for budget and precept setting, and whether the relevant information would be available in time had been questioned.

It was noted that Ilminster Town Council had suggested it could potentially organise a 'buy in' service for smaller councils to purchase lengthsman type work. The next LCN meeting would take place in January 2023 but an interim working group was being established in the interim. Highways are keen to engage with the LCNs and have requested representatives for a meeting in early December, however, these meetings will not replace the regular meetings that the Town Council has with Highways.

99
23/24

CLERK'S PROGRESS REPORT

The Town Clerk reported that:

- The restoration works to the pillars at Severalls had been completed but would remain wrapped for a week or so to protect the lime mortar from the anticipated drop in temperature.
- A full road closure on South Street would commence the next day and remain in place until 30th November.
- The Christmas events had run well and been positively received. Thanks were expressed to the Deputy Clerk for organising the event, as well as the rest of the staff, all the volunteers and everyone who had visited.
- The Clerk reported that the Neighbourhood Policing Team were unable to attend to give the six-monthly policing report but had supplied data which she would circulate. She summarised the report, noting that the Police were reporting that most of the crime categories have had small increases or have gone down. However, theft is the biggest increase with shoplifting being the main crime type with 34 incidences compared to 14 in the previous 12 months. Waitrose is the main crime venue with 15 of the 34 reported shopliftings, which the officers believe is potentially due to a difference in reporting from Waitrose.

100
23/24

FINANCE

- To approve the accounts for payment for November 2023 as listed
The Town Clerk reported that Cllr. Best had verified the accounts for payment in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations. Accounts for payment for 27 November 2023 in the sum of £48,214.48 were APPROVED. Councillors noted that the baubles workshop had been funded by Taylor Wimpey.
- To report the bank reconciliation for October 2023 has been completed
The Town Clerk reported that Cllr. Best had verified the bank reconciliation for September 2023. It was noted that cash in hand as of 31 October 2023 was £590,815.09.
- To note that the monthly accounts for the War Memorial Commemoration Trust have been checked
The Town Clerk reported that Cllr. Best had verified the Trust accounts and that cash in hand as of 31 October 2023 was £2,620.84.

101
23/24

OPEN SPACES POLICY

To consider adopting a draft Open Spaces Management Policy

Thanks were extended to Councillors Samuel, Nathan and Stuart for producing the draft policy. A number of minor amendments were noted. It was initially suggested that once the Allotments Policy has been reviewed and updated it would be reflected in this document. Some discussion took place around the issue of beekeeping on allotments, and the Deputy Clerk was asked to ascertain whether the Town Council's insurers would cover this activity. As allotments are not publicly accessible open spaces, it was decided that the two documents should remain separate.

The Town Clerk was asked to make amendments to the policy and bring back to a future meeting.

102 **SMALLHOLDINGS AND ALLOTMENTS ACT 1908**

23/24 To receive a report from the Town Clerk following initial contact with specialist solicitors

Councillors considered a report from the Town Clerk outlining the costs and processes associated with compulsory hire or purchase of land adjacent to Henhayes. Following discussion, it was felt that the costs associated with the process were significant and the Town Council was unlikely to be able to finance it without large increases to the precept. Councillors noted that the report highlighted that the landowner should be approached directly about the potential for the Town Council to acquire the land in question to hold as open space on behalf of the community.

It was AGREED that the Town Clerk should write to the landowner and ask if they would be open to the idea of selling the land to the Town Council and if so, to ascertain the price of the land.

103 **GEORGE REYNOLDS CENTRE**

23/24 a. To consider a proposal for a public meeting regarding the future of the GRC and determine arrangements

Councillors discussed whether it would be more productive to hold a consultation event, noting that the Town Clerk had been asked to research the legal position of the Centre and that this required time to complete. Once the information had been gathered, councillors felt that information boards could be provided and members of the public invited to drop in to read the information, talk with councillors and make any suggestions. The Town Clerk was asked to continue researching the matter and make arrangements for a consultation event in February or March.

b. To consider quotations for a replacement hot water heater

Councillors noted that the calorifier in the plant room had broken and was beyond repair. It was AGREED to accept quote A, from the Boilerman for £5,887.83 + VAT. This would be funded from the general reserve.

104 **SOMERSET COUNCIL SERVICES AND ASSETS**

23/24 To consider arrangements for a public consultation on Somerset Council services in Crewkerne

It was AGREED to conduct a consultation to help determine residents' priorities in terms of Somerset Council services being delivered in Crewkerne. The draft survey circulated was APPROVED, subject to the following amendments:

- The addition of a sentence to state that providing services would result in an increase to the precept
- To request top four priorities, rather than ranking all the services
- The addition of a comments box at the end of the survey

The survey would be made available online until 9am on Monday 11th December 2023, with hard copies provided in the Local Information Centre (LIC) and Library.

105 **TO RECEIVE THE FOLLOWING MINUTES AND APPROVE ANY RECOMMENDATIONS THEREIN:**

23/24

- a. Planning & Highways Committee 9 October 2023.
- b. Amenities Committee 11 September 2023.
- c. Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group 19 September 2023.
- d. Joint Burial Committee 6 June 2023.
- e. Reports from Town Council representatives to outside bodies.

All minutes above were duly noted and any recommendations AGREED. No reports from representatives to outside bodies were received.

106 **MATTERS OF REPORT**

23/24

Councillors raised the following issues:

- Chubbs Almshouses had a property becoming available.
- A NHS minor injuries response unit would be set up in Martock to relieve pressures on A&E.
- A public drop-in session would be held by Symphony at the GRC on 23rd January 2024.
- Access to the lift for wheelchair users had not been adequately signed at the recent Lighting Up event.
- Complaints had been received about leaves on the Church steps, the Grounds Team would continue to monitor and clear.

Councillor Bond clarified that she felt that a recent article in The Leveller had not accurately reflected comments she had made. Cllrs Bond and Nathan noted that they were satisfied regarding issues they had previously raised about the cleaning of the GRC.

107 **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

23/24

Monday 11 December 2023, following a meeting of the Planning and Highways Committee, Council Chamber.

It was AGREED that in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted it was advisable that the public and press be excluded and were instructed to withdraw.

CONFIDENTIAL SESSION: EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC – Commercially/financially sensitive information.

108 **YOUTH SERVICE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT 2024-28**

23/24

To receive a report from the tender assessment panel and consider a recommendation to award the Service Level Agreement for 2024-28

The report of the members of the tender assessment panel was reviewed and it was AGREED to award the SLA 2024-28 to Active Learning Skills and delegate to the Town Clerk to finalise the Agreement for signature by the Mayor.

109 **SOMERSET COUNCIL ASSET AND SERVICES DEVOLUTION**

23/24 To receive an update and consider next steps

Councillors noted a report from the Town Clerk and AGREED to delegate to the Town Clerk to continue having informal discussions regarding asset and service devolution to obtain as much information as possible to inform the budget setting process. Councillors AGREED that if the precept setting deadline was extended by Somerset Council, that the Town Clerk could delay the January meeting of Full Council to allow as much time as possible to be spent reviewing available information.

The meeting closed at 20.20.

Signed:

Dated:

TC27November2023