

Minutes of a meeting of CREWKERNE TOWN COUNCIL held in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Market Square at 18.45 on Monday 29 January 2024.

PRESENT

Cllrs. A. Samuel (Mayor), S. Ashton, M. Best, T. Bond, N. Draycott, D. Livesley, J. Morris, J. Nathan, and A. Stuart.

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

OPEN FORUM

A member of the public expressed concerns over the proposal from Somerset Council to close the Household Waste Recycling Centre (HWRC) in Crewkerne. He noted that it was well used and expressed concerns that other facilities in the town, such as the Library, might also be at risk due to the ongoing financial crisis at Somerset Council. He asked if it might be possible for Somerset Council to engage contractors to operate the site.

A member of the public noted that although the town's precept level had increased over the past ten years, the allocated amount for grants to community groups had remained unchanged over the same period of time.

124 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

23/24

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllrs. Head and Woodland (both personal).

125 **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

23/24

Cllr. Best declared an interest in the grant applications relating to CUDOS and the Twinning Association. Cllr. Nathan declared an interest in the grant application relating to Crewkerne and District Rotary Club. Cllr. Morris declared an interest in the grant application relating to the Twinning Association. These interests were all due to the above Councillors being members of the organisations in question. Cllr. Samuel declared an interest in the grant application relating to St Bartholomew's School PTA by virtue of her employment at the school.

126 **TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 18 DECEMBER 2023**

23/24

The minutes of the meetings held on 18 December 2023 were AGREED as a true and accurate record.

127 **TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM UNITARY COUNCILLORS AND LOCAL COMMUNITY NETWORK REPRESENTATIVE**

23/24

Cllr. Ashton reported that:

- The outturn for the current financial year at Somerset Council was looking slightly better than anticipated. However, the authority was still waiting for confirmation from the Government as to whether they could raise council tax by up to 10%, as well as applying to borrow money and move funds from the capital to the revenue budget.

- Following a recent meeting of the Crewkerne and Ilminster Local Community Network (LCN), questions had been raised over its effectiveness compared to more established LCNs such as Exmoor, which had been originally set up as a pilot.

Cllr. Best reported that:

- Somerset Councillors were hopeful that a s114 notice could be averted but that information from the Government was awaited. The financial pressures would continue indefinitely as Adult Social Care costs and demands would continue to rise.
- LCNs were, on the whole, still becoming established compared to the pilot LCNs such as Frome and Exmoor. He felt that the financial crisis at Somerset Council was dominating a lot of the discussion in the LCN, but that there would be better opportunities for smaller parishes to have contact with Highways Officers through a sub-group which was being established.

128 **CLERK'S PROGRESS REPORT**

23/24

The Town Clerk reported that:

- Electoral Services had confirmed that no requests for a by-election had been received following advertisement of the casual vacancy, therefore the Town Council was free to fill the vacancy through co-option. A co-option application pack would be made available in due course.
- The upcoming meeting of the Joint Burial Committee had been moved from 6th February to 13th February 2024.
- A second Councillor was required for the February Council Surgery – Cllr. Bond offered to join Cllr. Ashton.
- A 'Warm Rail' winter coat swap scheme was up and running in the Local Information Centre (LIC), alongside a permanent secure electronics recycling point. Devices would be held securely, data wiped and redistributed for use by community groups.

129 **FINANCE**

23/24

a. To approve the accounts for payment for January 2024 as listed

The Town Clerk reported that Cllr. Nathan had verified the accounts for payment in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations. Accounts for payment for 29 January 2024 in the sum of £72,204.86 were APPROVED. Cllr. Bond noted that the cost of the recent by-election at almost £14,000 was extremely high and proposed that the Council look at warding arrangements to avoid town-wide by-election costs in the future. The Town Clerk was asked to bring a report on Community Governance Reviews to a future meeting. The Town Clerk confirmed that the Neighbourhood Plan Consultant costs were covered by a grant and answered a question relating to a credit note for chains at the cemetery.

b. To report the bank reconciliation for December 2023 has been completed

The Town Clerk reported that Cllr. Nathan had verified the bank reconciliation for December 2023. It was noted that cash in hand as of 31 December 2023 was £489,234.34.

c. To note that the monthly accounts for the War Memorial Commemoration Trust have been checked

The Town Clerk reported that Cllr. Nathan had verified the Trust accounts and that cash in hand as of 31 December 2023 was £3,096.54.

d. To approve the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee for Community Grant Awards for 2024/25

The proposal from the Policy and Resources Committee for the grant awards listed below was AGREED unanimously without change.

Organisation	Purpose of grant	Agreed Award
Crewkerne & District Museum & Heritage Centre	Running costs	£500
Crewkerne in Bloom	New self-watering planters and compost	£300
Henhayes Community Centre	Running costs	£500
Merriott Majorettes	New costumes	£500
Citizens Advice South Somerset	Crewkerne Community Access Point costs	£972
Crewkerne & District Shed	Running costs	£1,000
1 st Crewkerne Scout Group	New tents	£500
Crewkerne Pegasus Karate Club	Floor mats, head guards, mitts	£1,000
CUDOS	Communication system	£200
Speedwell Club	Kitchen upgrade	£250
St Bartholomew's School	Forest School area	£250
Severalls War Memorial Gardening Group	Tools, plants and soil	£400
Severalls Jubilee Bowls Club	Increased seating area and improvements to ramp	£250
Phoenix Brass	New music stands	£250
Crewkerne Gardening Club	Table coverings for flower show	£200
Crewkerne Cricket Club	Renovation/weed killing of cricket square	£500
Rotary Club of Crewkerne District	Contributions towards traffic management costs for the Fair	£750
Crewkerne Wellbeing CIC	Convert kitchen to IT suite and meeting room	£0
Crewkerne & District Twinning Association	Hospitality for twinning visitors	£250
Rockin Daddy's Emporion CIC	PRS Licence	£207
St Margaret's Hospice	Contribution towards Community Nurse Specialist	£0
	TOTAL GRANT AWARDS	£8,779

It was noted that there was some flexibility to meet in-year grant requests from organisations unexpectedly facing hardship; Cllr. Bond noted that the allocation of grants towards 'running costs' year after year was not sustainable and should be reviewed.

- e. To approve the recommendation of the Policy and Resources Committee for the setting of the budget for 2024/25 and;
 f. To approve the overall precept for 2024/25

Items e) and f) were considered together. Cllr. Bond requested a recorded vote in accordance with the Town Council's Standing Orders.

Cllrs. Bond and Ashton stated their opposition to the planned increase in the precept for supporting devolved Somerset Council services. Cllr. Ashton stated that parishes such as Merriott, Wayford and West and Middle Chinnock had delivered zero percent or minimal increase. He also stated that he didn't think the Library would be affected by Somerset Council's situation.

Cllr. Best noted that at Somerset Council six years of freezing council tax had significantly contributed to the current financial emergency. Some discussion took place about nearby towns who were also facing the need to increase their precepts to deliver more services, with Cllr. Stuart noting that the proposed rise in Crewkerne's precept was much lower than these.

The proposed budget as outlined in the supporting report and associated precept calculation of £637,714 for the 2024-25 financial year were both AGREED with Councillors voting as listed:

AGAINST: Cllrs. Ashton and Bond.

FOR: Cllrs. Best, Draycott, Livesley, Morris, Nathan, Samuel and Stuart.

The precept of £637,714 represents a 19.5% increase on a Band D property, equivalent to an additional 79p per week.

- g. To authorise a request from the Responsible Financial Officer RFO to raise limits on the corporate spending card

The request from the RFO to raise the daily limit to £1000 and the monthly cap to £3000 was AGREED.

- h. To appoint an additional bank signatory

It was AGREED to appoint Cllr. Stuart as a banking signatory.

- i. To consider a request from Crewkerne Cricket Club for a reduction in charges for the 2024 season

It was AGREED that, subject to being able to adjust the cleaning schedule to accommodate the reduced usage, that the season fee would be reduced to £633.63. (50% of the requested reduction).

130 HOUSEHOLD WASTE RECYCLING CENTRE (HWRC)

23/24 To receive a verbal update on proposals to close Crewkerne HWRC and consider next steps

Some discussion took place around the proposal from Somerset Council to close the town's HWRC, noting that when this had been considered previously, the cost of removing the concrete from the site had been prohibitive. Cllr. Best reported that he was asking questions to the officers currently responsible for the service and concerns about the increased number of car journeys to Chard or Yeovil were expressed. It was agreed that increased levels of fly-tipping in the area was a real concern and would actually end up costing the Council more. It was also suggested that if other sites had their

opening hours reduced, it would allow Crewkerne HWRC to remain open. It was noted that due to a change in legislation, it is no longer permitted to charge for the service. A petition opposing the closure was being organised locally.

The Town Clerk was asked to write a formal letter to the portfolio holder responsible for waste services opposing the proposal on behalf of Crewkerne Town Council.

131 **EVENTS PROGRAMME**

23/24

a. D-Day 80th Anniversary

A report outlining a suggested event format and a choice of beacons was considered. After discussion, it was agreed that the advice of the local branch of the Royal British Legion should be sought as to a possible 'lamp of remembrance' and proclamation reading at the appropriate time, possibly at Severalls War Memorial Gardens. Following input from the RBL, Councillors would reconsider the format of the event at a future meeting.

b. Plants and Gardens Festival proposal from the Friends of St Bart's Church

Councillors were supportive of the idea and welcomed the ethos of the event. It was agreed in principle to make the George Reynolds Centre available free of charge for the day. Some concerns were expressed about the implications for the use of Henhayes in terms of licensing, security, generators etc. Town Council staff would not be available on the Bank Holiday to support the event. The Clerk would report back to the organisers with these concerns.

c. Summer event

Councillors discussed a Henhayes-based event for the summer. It was suggested that one of the existing summer holiday play days could be enlarged to accommodate fundraising stalls for local community groups. This would entail moving one of the planned play days to a weekend. The Deputy Clerk was asked to contact local groups to see if there was interest in this, and also to contact the play days provider to establish if a weekend date was a possibility.

d. Tennis Courts launch event

The Deputy Clerk reported that the formal opening of the refurbished tennis courts would take place on Saturday 13th April, with a local tennis coach running free to access fun session for both children and adults. Further details would follow, but all were welcome to attend.

132 **TO APPOINT MEMBERS TO VACANT SUB-COMMITTEE, STEERING GROUP AND OUTSIDE BODY POSITIONS**

23/24

The following appointments were AGREED:

Cllr. Draycott to become a full member of the Staffing Sub-Committee

Cllr. Stuart to become the substitute member of the Staffing Sub-Committee

Cllr. Ashton to become the Crewkerne Town Council representative to the Henhayes Community Centre

Cllr. Draycott to become the Crewkerne Town Council representative to Birds Almshouses

The remaining spaces would be filled at a later date, following the co-option of the new Councillor.

133 **TO CONFIRM THE TOWN NEWSLETTER FOR PUBLICATION**

23/24

Subject to a slight change in the order of the articles being made, the Town newsletter was signed off for publication, with Councillors congratulating the Deputy Clerk on producing an excellent first newsletter.

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

23/24

- a. Planning & Highways Committee 18 December 2023.
- b. Policy & Resources Committee 9 October 2023.
- c. Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group 29 November 2023.
- d. Reports from Town Council representatives to outside bodies.
- e. Report from the Youth Service Team.

All minutes above were duly noted and any recommendations contained therein AGREED. No reports from representatives to outside bodies were received but Cllr. Bond noted that Crewkerne Hospital League of Friends was seeking a Treasurer due to the retirement of the incumbent post-holder.

135 **MATTERS OF REPORT**

23/24

Councillors raised the following issues:

- In response to a query relating to a recent spate of anti-social behaviour the Town Clerk confirmed that the police had made some appropriate interventions.
- It was reported that tick warning notices had been removed from Bincombe Beeches, however regular users did not recall these signs. It was agreed to put some 'tick awareness' information on the website and social media closer to the tick season.
- It was reported that an abandoned caravan had been removed.
- In response to a question regarding the upcoming Mayor's Civic event, Cllr. Samuel explained that this is a reciprocal opportunity with nearby towns and that she had attended a few in her capacity as Mayor to represent Crewkerne. She was organising the event as a celebration of community and volunteering and had invited mainly community groups (as well as some dignitaries) as a way of saying thank you for their contributions to the town. She added that she was personally funding the food for the event and other councillors stated that they were contributing from their own money for their attendance. She asked if anyone had any questions about the event that they contact her directly or via the Council offices.
- It was noted that the recent Symphony Healthcare 'drop in' event in the GRC had been well attended and Symphony would be providing information which would be shared online.
- At the recent Council Surgery event a member of the public had complained about not getting responses from Councillors. Councillors were urged to acknowledge emails even if just to confirm no update was available. Alternatively, the Town Clerk would be happy to assist with responses if needed.
- In response to a query about the defunct defibrillator on West One Surgery, Cllr. Bond confirmed that the League of Friends had been trying to get it replaced and was optimistic that this would be done soon. Councillors agreed that the unit should be removed and the Clerk was asked to contact the Surgery to request this.
- The Town Clerk confirmed that she would speak with the Manager of Poundland about the Market Street empty window display and ask them to dress the window.

- Thanks were expressed to former Town Councillor Dan Wakeman for many years of service to the town over several terms of office.

136 **DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

23/24

Monday 26 February 2024, 18.45, Council Chamber, Town Hall.

The meeting closed at 20.22

Signed:

Dated:

TC29January2024