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MINUTES

WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Date: **Monday, 25th November 2024** Time: **7:30 p.m.**

Place: **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Newland Street, Witham, CM8 2FE**

Present: Councillors:

L.	Barlow (Town Mayor)
P.	Barlow
J.C.	Coleman
B.	Fleet
R.	Playle
R.	Ramage
J.	Robertson
E.	Williams
N.	Smith (Town Clerk)
G.	Kennedy (Committee Clerk)
L.	Bamigbele (PA to the Council)

126. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Adelaja, J.M. Coleman, Headley, Heath, Martin and Taylor.

127. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of Town Council held 29th October 2024 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

128. INTERESTS

No interests were declared at the time but later in the Meeting at Minute 141 – Allotment Update, Councillor Playle declared a non-pecuniary interest as his father was the Chairman of the Allotment Association.

129. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was no member of the press or public present.

130. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE

Essex County Councillor Playle spoke about devolution and said that the Government would be producing a White Paper about the possible abolition of Essex County and Braintree District Councils.

The comment was made that at the recent District Council scrutiny of its budget, no mention was made regarding improvements to health services in Witham. Members agreed to register their disappointment that this deficit had not been recognised.

RESOLVED That the information be received and Members disappointment noted.

131. TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS

Details of the Town Mayor's engagements attended for period up to 20th November 2024 were received. The Town Mayor explained that it had been a busy month. She said that this coming Saturday was the Christmas Fayre and Members needed to volunteer to help man the mulled wine stall and she asked for prizes too for the Mayor's tombola.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

132. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's report on matters arising was received. She reiterated the need for help at the Christmas Fayre.

RESOLVED That the report be received and noted.

133. INTERIM INTERNAL AUDIT

The Internal Audit report was received.

Members were pleased to note a clean audit but were unsurprised as robust measures were in place.

RESOLVED That the Internal Audit report be received and noted.

134. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL CONTROLS

Members were asked to review the Statement of Internal Controls.

RESOLVED That the Statement of Internal Controls be adopted.

135. ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS

Members had been asked to consider the Government's consultation on allowing remote and hybrid attendance at local authority meetings.

Local authorities were not permitted to hold virtual Meetings but had been able to do so during the pandemic. Members were broadly supportive of the proposals and thought that residents might engage more. It was recognised that for those with young families the opportunity to attend virtually could be beneficial and the scheme would aid inclusivity however residents would expect the Meeting to be held at the Town Hall so it was important to get the details right.

Members then spoke about proxy voting and how this could be achieved in a transparent manner.

It was noted that the consultation could be completed by the Council, Councillors or residents but not staff.

Members agreed that it was important that individual councils could decide how hybrid meetings could be achieved.

Members then spoke about safeguarding issues for officers and who else should be present at the Meeting, such as Chair and Vice Chair but agreed that by default every Member should be at the Meeting unless circumstances dictated otherwise. The technology of holding hybrid Meetings was mentioned as at District Council the camera would zoom onto the speaker.

Members noted that a formal response to the consultation would need to be agreed at this Meeting and the wording would be circulated for agreement.

RESOLVED That the formal response be – Witham Town Council is broadly supportive of the proposals to increase inclusivity but consider that as a principle Members should attend Meetings in person. Measures would need to be put in place by individual Councils to meet their particular circumstances and would hope that Government would agree to this request.

136. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

Details of Members' attendance at Meetings were received.

The importance of attending every Meeting was stressed as Members were accountable to residents. The Town Mayor said that Members must send apologies for absence.

It was agreed that it would be useful to give additional information as to how many Meetings Members actually attended as well as the percentage figure.

RESOLVED That the details be received and noted.

137. MEMBERSHIP OF THE PLANNING AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Members were asked to consider the current membership of the Planning and Transport Committee as two Members were currently on leave of absence.

The suggestion was made that on a temporary basis other Members be nominated to take their place.

Councillor Robertson would take the place of Councillor Hewitt until he returned and Councillor Playle would take the place of Councillor Sloma, but he stressed that being an Essex County Councillor he had other commitments.

RESOLVED That Councillors Playle and Robertson be nominated to be temporary Members of the Planning and Transport Committee until Councillors Hewitt and Sloma return from their leave of absence.

138. COMMITTEE REPORTS

- (a) **Planning and Transport Committee held 29th October and 11th November 2024**
Minutes 149 to 174 (inclusive)

Councillor P. Barlow, Chairman of the Planning and Transport Committee, gave a report of the Meetings.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Planning and Transport Committee be received.

- (b) **Community Committee held 11th November 2024**
Minutes 37 to 49 (inclusive).

Councillor L. Barlow, Chairman of the Community Committee, gave a report of the Meeting.

Members spoke about Inspector Jackson's report and the original thought that perhaps a public meeting to hold the police to account should be held to include not only the police but youth services. The Town Clerk hoped that Chief Inspector Richards would be attending the February Town Council Meeting and the Town Mayor said that it could be an Agenda item to consider whether to hold a public meeting.

RESOLVED That Chief Inspector Richards, District Commander, be invited to attend the Town Council Meeting on 3rd February 2025.

RESOLVED That the Report of the Community Committee be received.

139. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 S.1(2) and in accordance with Standing Order 3(d), the press and public should be excluded from the remainder of the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

140. LAND TRANSFER

A Land Transfer report was received.

RESOLVED That the Land Transfer report be received and noted.

141. ALLOTMENT UPDATE

Councillor Playle declared a non-pecuniary interest as his father is the Chairman of the Allotment Association.

An update on allotments was received.

RESOLVED That the update be received and noted.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.43 p.m.

Councillor L. Barlow
Town Mayor

NS/GK/28.11.2024

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