



Town Hall | 61 Newland Street | Witham | CM8 2FE  
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## MINUTES

### WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Date: **Tuesday, 7<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

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

Present: Councillors:

L.	Barlow	(Town Mayor)
P.	Heath	(Deputy Town Mayor)
E.	Adelaja	
P.	Barlow	
J.C.	Coleman	
J.M.	Coleman	
B.	Fleet	
L.	Headley	
J.	Martin	
R.	Playle	
R.	Ramage	
J.	Robertson	
B.	Taylor	
E.	Williams	

Also in attendance:

Cllr.	T	Williams	(Braintree District Council)
	C.	Ward	(Eastlight Community Homes)
	N.	Smith	(Town Clerk)
	H.	Andrews	(Deputy Town Clerk)
	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

And one member of the public.

#### **142. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

#### **143. MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes of the Meeting of Town Council held 25<sup>th</sup> November 2024 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Town Mayor.

**144. INTERESTS**

There were no interests declared.

**145. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC**

A member of the public raised the issue of the footpath on the River Walk near Moat Farm Chase. It was previously discussed that a Highway Surveyor had undertaken an inspection in February 2021 and this was a trip hazard which had since worsened. A repair had been arranged and would be carried out when the weather improved in March 2025. In March 2023 authority had been given by Braintree District Council for Section 106 monies to be used but it had proved difficult to find a contractor able to undertake such technical work using flexible materials and dry weather was required.

The resident queried why the Town Council had applied for a grant for improvements to the duck pond and not used this money to improve cycleways. The Town Clerk explained that it had been a special grant specifically for a nature project and could not be used for repairing the footpaths, the Town Mayor added that Section 106 monies had not been made available until more recently.

In response to a question regarding inspections the Deputy Town Clerk explained that it was not a requirement for a trained inspector but staff during their regular work would notice problems and report to the office. She said that in addition there was an annual risk assessment to highlight any problems.

The Mayor thanked the member of the public for his question.

**146. EASTLIGHT COMMUNITY HOMES**

The Town Mayor welcomed Chris Ward, Estate Safety Manager, Eastlight Community Homes, to the Meeting to discuss problems that had arisen last year with ground maintenance.

Mr Ward thanked the Town Council for inviting him to the Meeting. He explained that he was responsible for maintenance and issues such as fly-tipping. Last year, a new contract had been put in place for grounds maintenance, and initially, it had gone well until the spring when grass cutting started. It soon became clear that the contractor was not fulfilling specifications, and eventually, the contract was cancelled. In the meantime, the previous contractor was re-employed, and there was a month's overlap, but with wet, sunny conditions, it took the new contractor a lot of time to catch up. Grass and hedge cutting are up to date, but they were unable to do a final spray of weed killer. He said that this year, grass cutting would be increased, and there would be more focus on weed killing.

Members understood the problems with the contractors, but residents had become frustrated with Eastlight's lack of communication or misinformation. Members asked if there was a better way to report such issues.

Mr Ward acknowledged it had been a difficult year and Eastlight had tried its best to address the problems but they had been inundated with complaints. He said that customers had been let down. Customers would be able to report issues through its portal, there were now key performance targets and areas would be monitored along with the two Safety Officers carrying out inspections. There would be a customer satisfaction survey and he was confident that this year things would be significantly better. He said that they have to respond to questions within 24 hours and measures were in place to mitigate issues.

In answer to a question Mr Ward said that an officer would be attending the Templars Residents Association. The importance of Councils working together with Eastlight was stressed. The

lacking bollard opposite the former Victoria Public House was mentioned as vehicles are churning up the grass to park on the green and Mr Ward would look into this. Members reported that on the Humber Road and Honeysuckle Way estates there was fly tipping and residents were trailing cables over footways to charge their electric vehicles. Members considered that a definitive map was required so that areas of responsibility could be identified.

It was agreed that Mr Ward would feedback through the Town Clerk but he stressed that residents needed to go through Customer Services first. Members asked that information be updated when staff move and one point of contact was important.

The suggestion was made that there should be due process to ensure that last year's issues are not repeated. Mr Ward said that Customer Services record data and monitor the situation which was reviewed monthly.

A suggestion of re-wilding was mooted but Mr Ward said that after last year's problems a pilot scheme would be inappropriate this year.

The Town Mayor formally thanked Mr Ward for attending the Meeting and answering Members' questions. She requested that an annual meeting would be advantageous but in the meantime to keep in touch with the Town Clerk.

**147. ESSEX COUNTY AND BRAINTREE DISTRICT COUNCIL UPDATE**

Essex County Councillor Playle explained that there would be an emergency Essex County Council Meeting on Friday to discuss devolution including the appointment of a Mayor in 2026, combined Authorities, reshaping Councils and the postponement of elections. He said that as part of the Member-Led scheme, repairs would be undertaken in Cressing Road on 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> January. There would be a Local Highways Panel meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January. Signage improvements in Braintree Road will take place on 28<sup>th</sup> January and a new bus shelter had been installed in Cressing Road near Templars School.

Braintree District Councillor Taylor spoke about the proposed changes to waste and recycling collections and the current consultation with residents. He also detailed bulb planting on Hatfield Road, Templars and Blunts Hall Road estates.

Braintree District Councillor T. Williams said that the new solar panels at the leisure centre had been well received. He was asking for updates on the Town Centre improvements. He said that as part of the Community Scheme the Witham Luncheon Club had received funding and was now at the United Reformed Church on a Friday and funding had also been given to the House of Grace which housed the homeless. He was also trying to solve parking problems on the Allectus Way estate.

**RESOLVED** That the information be received and noted.

**148. TOWN MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Details of the Town Mayor's engagements attended for period 21<sup>st</sup> November to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2024 were received.

She explained that in addition she had been asked to attend the Carols by Candlelight service at St Nicolas Church on 22<sup>nd</sup> December and had read the first lesson. The Leader of the Council had also attended Rickstones School on 12<sup>th</sup> December 2024 when the Town Mayor was engaged in Braintree.

**RESOLVED** That the details be received and noted.

**149. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT**

The Town Clerk's report on matters arising was received.

She said that the Town Mayor's quiz would be held on 24<sup>th</sup> January and hoped Members would attend.

On 12<sup>th</sup> January there would be a Police Meet at 11 a.m. for a walk around the town and Members were welcome to attend.

With the cold weather, SWEP had been implemented and rough sleepers had been put into hotels. The street warden had been very proactive in assisting.

The Town Hall was in need of repairs to the front window sills which would involve scaffolding and therefore a pavement licence. The suggestion was made that a management plan for the Town Hall should be considered so that maintenance work could be planned.

**RESOLVED** That a proposed management plan for the Town Hall be taken to the relevant Committee.

Members were informed that Braintree District Council Scrutiny Committee would be investigating the North Essex Parking Partnership which was considered to be not fit for purpose. No change in car parking in Newland Street would be happening at the moment.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and noted.

**150. CLIMATE AND NATURE BILL**

The Climate and Nature Bill was received.

Members considered that this Bill should be supported not only to take the necessary measures to meet the challenges of Climate Change but to reverse the effects.

Members were supportive and agreed that local residents should be informed along with the MP, local authorities and Zero Hour.

**RESOLVED** That the Climate and Nature Bill be supported, the Town Council join Zero Hour, local residents informed and letters written to the MP and Essex and Braintree District Councils.

**151. WASTE AND RECYCLING**

It was noted that the District Council yesterday launched a consultation on the method for Waste and Recycling.

It was suggested that Members take time to consider the implications and to discuss at the next Meeting.

**RESOLVED** That the information be received and the matter discussed at the next Meeting once Members have had a chance to consider the implications of the proposed changes.

**152. STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND**

Members were asked to note the Government consultation strengthening the standards and conduct framework for Local Authorities so councils can sustainably provide decent public services and shape local places, and elected representatives can be fully accountable to the public they serve.

It was suggested that Members and staff complete the survey.

**RESOLVED** That Members and staff be encouraged to complete the survey.

**153. DEVOLUTION**

Members were asked to consider forming a ‘Devolution Working Group’ to help the Council prepare for the possible Local Government reorganisation.

Members were divided as to whether this was precipitous but it was considered important to ensure that the Town Council was prepared for what would be the biggest change in local government for fifty years and it was important that assets were not transferred to Colchester.

After discussion it was agreed to set up a Devolution Working Group to ensure that assets can be managed locally and that other Members could join later should they wish.

**RESOLVED** That a Devolution Working Group be set up with the following Members –

Councillors	L.	Barlow
	P.	Barlow
	J.C.	Coleman
	B.	Fleet
	L.	Headley
	P.	Heath
	T.	Hewitt
	R.	Playle
	R.	Ramage
	J.	Robertson
	B.	Taylor.

**154. PRECEPT 2025 – 2026**

The Minutes of the Estimates Sub-Committee Meeting held 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024 were received along with recommendations to Town Council.

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes of the Estimates Sub-Committee Meeting held 17<sup>th</sup> December 2024 be received and noted.

Members recognised the importance of this coming year with possible devolution and major changes in local government.

The Leader of the Council read a prepared statement explaining the consistency in terms of strategy to enhance community safety and quality of life focusing on the vulnerable and those who were struggling financially. He spoke of the success of the street warden who works with police and businesses as well as the homeless. He spoke about the planned improvements for the River Walk and James Cooke Wood which would be part funded by Section 106 monies.

He explained the background in setting the budget for next year culminating in the recommendations being put to Council. A number of contracts would be up for review along with salary rises and extra National Insurance contributions but these would be offset by increased income and cost reductions.

He then spoke about events. He recommended that the 80<sup>th</sup> D day commemoration budget of £2,500 would be carried forward for the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of VE but a further sum was suggested to commemorate VJ day. The Twinning budget would be reduced to £500 and the Pride event would no longer be a separate event but part of the music event.

Concerns were raised with regards to civic events and the difference between the reception and service. Members then spoke about the costs of the Newsletter and how it would be refreshed and then reviewed for the next issues. The Town Clerk added that as part of the Local Council Award Scheme it was necessary to prove community engagement.

**RESOLVED** That the proposed budget for Admin and Central Services for 2025/2026 be accepted.

Members then discussed the Community Committee Budget. It was suggested increasing the VE Day budget by £500, not having a Pride event and to increase the VJ Day budget by £500.

**RESOLVED** That the following changes to the Community Budget be agreed –that £5,000 to create a Pride event be removed from the budget and to increase the Victory Celebrations to mark the end of WW2 be increased by £1,000.

**RESOLVED** That the amended budget for the Community Committee for 2025/2026 be accepted.

Members noted that the Witham in Bloom budget had not been increased. The Town Clerk said that watering the winter planting had been brought in-house as it was so expensive. It was explained that a survey was required of the River Walk as it was half way through its ten year management plan but it was hoped that any findings would be carried out by staff. The Town Clerk said that the current contractor for unmetered supply of electricity which included CCTV cameras, Christmas Lights and Street Lighting would not renew its contract so the amount had to be estimated.

**RESOLVED** That the attached budget for the Environment Committee for 2025/2026 be accepted.

Members spoke about the difference between a civic reception and a civic service which would normally be held towards the end of the Civic Year to recognise the work of organisations.

**RESOLVED** That the proposed budget for the Policy and Resources Committee for 2025/2026 be accepted.

In view of the time it was agreed to suspend Standing Orders.

**RESOLVED** That Standing Order 3x be suspended to allow business to be completed.

Members were informed that as Police had purchased a Tru Cam the budget had been reduced accordingly.

**RESOLVED** That the proposed budget for the Planning and Transport Committee for 2025/2026 be accepted.

It was explained that Maltings Lane Community Centre could be built by the end of 2025 and therefore set up costs would be required. Income would be achieved through hire of the football pitches.

**RESOLVED** That the proposed budget for Maltings Lane for 2025/2026 be accepted.

Councillor Adelaja then left the Meeting.

**RESOLVED** That the proposed reserve balances for 2025/2026 be accepted.

Members then discussed the proposed 7.77% increase in the Town Council element of council tax. It was stated that more than required should not be charged and it was thought that there had been insufficient opportunity to question or debate the budgets.

**RESOLVED** That the Precept for 2025/2026 of £1,037,265.74 be approved with a net increase in the Band D Property of £8.02 to £111.26, an increase of 7.77%.

## **155. COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **(a) Planning and Transport Committee held 25<sup>th</sup> November and 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024** Minutes 171 to 198 (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) Policy and Resources Committee held 10<sup>th</sup> December 2024** Minutes 60 to 68 (inclusive)

Councillor P. Barlow, Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee, gave a report of the Meeting.

**RESOLVED** That the Report of the Policy and Resources Committee be received and noted.

## **156. 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.

Councillor J.C. Coleman left the Council Chamber.

## **157. LAND TRANSFER**

A report was received.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and noted.

**158. MALTINGS LANE COMMUNITY CENTRE**

An update on the Maltings Lane Community Centre was received.

**RESOLVED** That the update be received and noted.

Councillor J.C. Coleman returned to the Council Chamber.

**159. LOVE YOUR BUS GRANT FUND**

Details from Essex County Council concerning grant funding for a new or improved bus service were received.

**RESOLVED** That the details be received and noted.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 9.50 p.m.

Councillor L. Barlow  
Town Mayor

NS/GK/13.1.2025