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Minutes of the Council Meeting held on Monday 16 December 2024 at 6.00 pm at the Parish Office, 2 Knowle Park Lane, Fair Oak

Present: Cllrs Anderson, Barrett, Bird, Broomfield, Couldrey, Douglas (Chair), Forfar, Higby, Marsh, Meech, Scott, Smith & Stupple

Absent: Cllrs Chivuchi & Tennent

Apologies: None

Officers in attendance: Jo Cahill, Finance Officer & Melanie Stephens, Clerk.

101 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Forfar and Higby in Minute No 106.

102 MINUTES (PAPER A)

RESOLVED:

(a) That the minutes of the Full Council meeting held on 18 November 2024 be signed by the Chair as a correct record;

(b) That the minutes of the Finance Committee and the recommendations therein, held on 2 December be approved and signed as a correct record; and

(c) That the delegated planning decisions for week ending 8 November 2024 be noted.

103 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was one member of the public present who spoke under item 106.

104 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair congratulated staff on the success of the Christmas lantern parade and gave thanks to Councillors who supported the event. Special thanks were given to Kirsty Evans and Linda Greenslade for masterminding and organising the event which, due to its popularity and success, would be delivered next year.

105 CLERK'S UPDATE

The Clerk gave a presentation, attached at Appendix 1 to these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the contents of the presentation be noted.

106 KNOWLE PARK LANE MAINTENANCE

Cllrs Forfar and Higby disclosed disclosable pecuniary interests on the grounds that they lived on the road and were members of the resident committee. They did not participate in the discussion and did not vote.

A member of the public, representing the residents committee of Knowle Park Lane was in attendance and addressed the Council on a proposal regarding future grounds maintenance in light of the increasing use of the road and the need for residents to offset its maintenance costs.

The member of the public explained that Knowle Park Lane, being seven years old, was starting to show signs of wear and tear. The road received frequent traffic from members of the public, namely those visiting the park and parents using the car park, which was owned by the Parish, during the school run. Knowle Park Lane was a private unadopted road and as such, repair and maintenance was funded by all 17 residents.

Having access to the car park was a direct benefit to the residents of Fair Oak and Horton Heath. However, its increased use had a negative impact on the fabric of the road and therefore its maintenance costs. The residents therefore requested that the Council consider providing grounds maintenance services to the various strips of land, adjacent to Knowle Park and land near the Parish Office, pro bono, so residents could better fund and budget for the road's repair and maintenance. The resident provided a map of these areas, and this was displayed for members.

The Operations Manager had provided an indicative quote for the maintenance of these areas at a cost of approximately £1k per annum. This did not include weed spraying and was at a much lower frequency of cut/visit than the current maintenance provider, contracted by the residents.

Discussion ensued regarding the history behind the location of the road during the planning process and the negative legacy of prioritising dwelling numbers over access and frequency of use of the road. Whilst some members conceded that residents' use of the car park sited at the end of the road was unique, others raised concerns regarding setting a precedence over agreeing to the proposal.

As such, it was suggested that the matter be deferred whilst the Clerk seek further legal advice on this matter. The Chairman also requested all Councillors to visit the site to further familiarise themselves with the area.

RESOLVED:

That the item be deferred pending legal advice.
Action: Mel Stephens

107 FINANCE REPORT (REPORT B)

The Council considered the finance report which highlighted the Council's latest budgetary position.

The Finance Officer explained that the national pay settlement would be backdated to staff

in the January pay. This totalled £12,444.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the contents of the report be noted; and

(b) That the BACs payments be approved.

Action: Jo Cahill

108 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS (REPORT C)

The Council considered the internal audit report and the actions undertaken by staff to address the recommendations therein.

RESOLVED:

(a) That the contents of the Internal Auditors interim report be noted; and

(b) That the Council notes the Internal Audit Action Plan.

Action: Mel Stephens/Jo Cahill

109 GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION - ENABLING REMOTE ATTENDANCE AND PROXY VOTING AT LOCAL AUTHORITY MEETINGS (REPORT D)

The Council considered the Government consultation on enabling remote attendance and proxy voting at local authority meetings. The consultation would close on 19 December 2024.

Members supported proposals to reintroduce hybrid/online meetings however, where not supportive of allowing proxy voting. The risks associated with proxy voting such as the absent member missing new perspectives raised during the meeting, which could have impacted their vote if they were present for the debate, far outweighed the benefits.

As such, the Clerk was instructed to respond to the consultation in that vein.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk complete the consultation questionnaire setting out the Council's support of hybrid/remote meetings but opposing proxy voting.

Action: Mel Stephens

110 MEETING DATES 2025-2026 (PAPER E)

RESOLVED:

That the meeting dates be agreed.

Action: Mel Stephens

111 WORK PROGRAMME (REPORT I)

The Council considered the work programme.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

Action: Mel Stephens

112 TREE PLANTING PLAN (REPORT G)

The Council considered the current tree planting process and the tree planting schedule for the 2024/25 tree planting season.

Members were fully supportive of the schedule and current process.

RESOLVED:

That the tree planting schedule for 2024/25 be approved.

Action: Mel Stephens

113 UPHAM VILLAGE DESIGN STATEMENT PUBLIC CONSULTATION

RESOLVED:

That no comments be submitted.

Action: Mel Stephens

EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC AND THE PRESS

RESOLVED:

That, under Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act 1960, the public and the Press be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information which would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of its confidential nature (personal/individual data).

114 STAFFING MATTERS

The Clerk updated members on the recruitment process for part time (15 hours per week) caretaker post following a recent resignation. The 20-hour caretaker post had also recently reduced hours to 15 hours per week. This reduction in hours could be managed by the remaining team.

Members were given an update on the contract review process following decision by the Council to move staff salaries to the National Joint Council (NJC) pay scales. To ensure that the correct HR procedures were followed in undertaking the review, the Council agreed that the Clerk instruct Peninsula, the Council's HR support provider, the provide an additional face-to-face service at the cost of £995. This could be met within the legal and professional

fee budget.

RESOLVED:

That changes to caretaking support be noted; and

That Peninsula undertake a contract review process at the additional cost of £995.

Action: Mel Stephens

Signed …… Chair.

Dated: …….

This was all the business, and the meeting closed at 19.10 pm.

Attachments:
Appendix 1 – Clerk's Update