



**POLICY & RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held remotely on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 commencing at 7pm.

Present

Chair – Councillor C Jones

Councillors A Bassett, D Chopping, J Clark, J Eastwell, D Hare, R Houlbrooke, S Matthews, and A Mickleburgh.

In attendance: J Friend (Town Clerk), E Carroll (Deputy Town Clerk) Jess Friend (Senior Operations Support Officer), R Fryer (Democratic Services Officer), Councillor G Littler and Councillor K Yabsley.

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77. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillor Jones presented Councillor Maher’s apologies for absence.

78. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

79. **PUBLIC FORUM**

No members of the public were present.

80. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 11<sup>th</sup> November 2020 were confirmed a true record and approved for signature by the Chair. As the country is currently in lockdown, the Chair authorised the application of an electronic signature to the Minutes.

81. **COVID-19 - UPDATE**

81.1 **Help Shop**

Members noted that, in accordance with the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (No. 3) and (All Tiers) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2021, the Town Council Helpshop had been closed to visitors in person from 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021. Officers continue to be available to assist residents and answer queries by email and telephone. Consideration was given as to how best to signify to residents that the Council offices were open whilst the Help Shop was closed and it was agreed that, in addition to the notices currently on the town council website, another would be added to the homepage.



81.2 Recreation

Councillors noted that adult and junior football bookings had been suspended with effect from 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021, and that the position would be reviewed as and when government guidance was amended. It was noted that parks, playgrounds and the Nature Reserve remained open, and that the Town Clerk had requested the Borough's Covid Marshals include Sol Joel Park and Meadow Park in their patrols. The Town Clerk confirmed that government legislation required skate parks, BMX tracks and Multi-Use Game Areas to close.

81.3 Community Centres

The Committee noted that, as a result of lockdown, the hiring of all the Town Council's community centres had been suspended with effect from 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021. An exception had been made for the two pre-schools operating at Maiden Place Community Centre and Silverdale as registered early years settings were permitted to operate during lockdown. The Town Clerk reported that she had been liaising with Wokingham Borough Council over the use of one of the town council's community centres as a pop-up lateral flow testing site. Negotiations were continuing and Councillors discussed a reasonable charge to cover costs.

**82. DRAFT BUDGET AND PRECEPT**

82.1 Budget Working Party

Members noted that Budget Working Party meetings were held on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2020, 10<sup>th</sup> December 2020 and 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at which detailed income and expenditure records and estimates for the Council's business 2020/21 and 2021/22 were provided.

82.2 Budget 2021/22

The Committee considered the recommended budget arising from the Budget Working Party meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and the recommendation that a Covid Recovery Earmarked Reserve should be established. The Chair thanked those who had attended the Budget Working Party meetings, and the Officers for preparing the documents used at those meetings. It was

**RESOLVED** that the budget, as recommended by the Budget Working Party, including the creation of a Covid Recovery Earmarked Reserve, be recommended to Full Council for approval at its meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

82.3 Town Precept 2021/22

Councillors considered the recommendations arising from the Budget Working Party meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2021 in relation to the Town Precept for 2021/22. It was

**RESOLVED** to recommend to Full Council, an increase of 1% to the Town Precept for the financial year 2021/22. The precept figure to be formally approved at the Full Council meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

**83. BANK RECONCILIATIONS**

It was noted that the Bank Reconciliations for October and November 2020 had been provided to the Chair of Policy & Resources Committee for information.



**84. IT UPGRADE**

Members were pleased to note that the planned upgrade of the Council's IT system was progressing. The broadband change had been commissioned and indicative costs for new hardware and software had either been received or would be received imminently.

**84.1 Broadband**

It was noted that the Town Clerk, in conjunction with the Chair of the Council and the Leader, had used delegated powers to approve the broadband installation excess construction charge of £524. The contractor is currently awaiting a Street Works permit in order to carry out the work.

**84.2 IT Upgrade Budget**

Councillors considered the Town Clerk's suggestion that the IT upgrade project may exceed the budgeted figure, and that, in order to meet this shortfall, a sum be drawn from the General Reserve. The Town Clerk will keep councillors updated when more precise figures are known. Members noted that the pandemic had highlighted the limitations of the current IT setup and that some of the up-front costs would pay for themselves through reduced support package charges. It was

**RESOLVED** that should the IT upgrade costs exceed the budgeted figure, a sum to meet the shortfall may be drawn from the General Reserve.

**85. TOWN COUNCIL GRANTS**

Members noted that applications for grants from Earley Town Council for 2021 were now being invited. The Town Clerk reported that promotional information had been posted on the Town Council website and noticeboards. In addition previous recipients were being informed by email. It was confirmed that the closing date for receipt of applications was 24<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

*Councillor G Littler entered the meeting.*

**86. EARLEY SCARECROW TRAIL**

Councillors considered a request from the organiser of the original Earley Scarecrow Trail that the Town Council consider funding the insurance costs associated with the event, a sum of approximately £400. The Committee noted that the organiser had considered holding the trail earlier in the year, possibly around Easter, as 2020 had seen the arrival of a Halloween hunt which had proven popular with residents. Whilst supportive of the proposal in principle, councillors discussed the possible impact on such events of Covid-related restrictions or lockdowns. Consideration was given to using the Youth & Community budget to fund this request. It was

**RESOLVED** that, in principle, Earley Town Council will fund the insurance costs associated with the Earley Scarecrow Trail for the year 2021, up to a cost of £400, funds to be paid from the Youth & Community budget, this decision being subject to satisfactory discussions with the organiser around the appropriate timing for such a community event.



**87. ORDERS FOR PAYMENT**

Councillors received details of Orders for Payment made since the last meeting of the Town Council (Vouchers 3565 – 3599, 3600 – 3630, 3631 – 3638, 3639 – 3674, 3675 – 3676, 3677 – 3678, 3679 – 3705) and Imprest Account (Vouchers 535 – 555).

**88. PUBLICATIONS**

It was noted that the following communications had been received and were available for perusal from the Council Offices:

Maiden Erlegh Residents Association	Electronic Minutes – 14 <sup>th</sup> January 2021
Involve Community Services	Electronic newsletter – 15 <sup>th</sup> January 2021

**89. PRESS RELEASES**

No press releases were requested.

**90. EXCLUSION OF PUBLIC AND PRESS**

There were no members of the public or press present. It was agreed that the remaining items on the Agenda be taken under Part II.

**PART II**

**91. CONFIDENTIAL MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

**92. CENTREPOINT HIRER – AFTER SCHOOL CLUB**

**93. FORMER TOWN CLERK**

**94. STAFFING MATTERS**

**95. TERMINATION OF MEETING**

The meeting was declared closed by the Chair at 8.34 pm.

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Chair, Policy & Resources Committee