



MINUTES of the **EXTRAORDINARY MEETING** of the **TOWN COUNCIL** held virtually on **THURSDAY 16 APRIL 2020**

Present: Roger Cartwright Town Mayor
Anne Eves Deputy Town Mayor

Graham Allen
Andrew Barrett-Miles
Emma Coe-Gunnell White
Matthew Cornish
Peter Chapman
Robert Duggan
Robert Eggleston
Lee Gibbs
Janice Henwood
Simon Hicks
Tofojjul Hussain
Joseph Foster
Sarah Lawrence
Sylvia Neumann
Max Nielsen
Kathleen Willis

* *Denotes non-attendance.*

(18.00)

106. **OPEN FORUM**

The following issue is, at the request of Councillor Eggleston, currently subject to an independent enquiry by the Monitoring Officer of Mid Sussex District Council, and therefore only a summary has been provided so as not to prejudice that enquiry:

A member of the public addressed the Council to raise concerns over governance. The following points were made:

- In the Register of interests, Councillor Eggleston disclosed a pecuniary

- interest as he owned and ran a business called Live Arts.
- On January 16 2020 in an MSDC Planning Committee meeting Councillor Eggleston declared an interest in the Beehive arising from his business. After acknowledging this interest he participated in discussions about the finance of the project in Town Council meetings on January 27 2020 and gave support for it in the KAG on February 19 2020, without declaring an interest.
- On March 9 2020 Councillor Eggleston declared to the Town Council that he had an interest in the Beehive, but only that he wished to advocate for the project as an individual and not that he had a pecuniary interest arising from his business. After declaring an interest, he participated in the discussion on the Beehive and left the room for the vote.
- The member of the public believed that this was a breach of the Code of Conduct and Section 31 of the Localism Act.
- The member of the public contended that Councillor Eggleston must resign immediately or be required to step aside while an independent enquiry was held into his conduct.
- Councillor Eggleston responded, stating that under the Code of Conduct, Councillors were entitled to make representations and answer questions, but remove themselves from further discussion and debate. At the full Council meeting on March 9 2020, he had removed himself from the meeting. Likewise at the MSDC Planning Committee meeting he had presented the case for the planning application and then removed himself.
- He no longer had a pecuniary interest, he had given an undertaking to the Monitoring Officer at MSDC and BHTC that all of his live arts interests would cease as of 11.59pm on 12 June 2020, but had effectively now permanently ceased due to Covid-19. To clarify, he stated that his activities in Live Arts were not a profit-making enterprise.

After the meeting Councillor Eggleston provided the following statement:

My register of interests includes my paid employment with Maxxia Limited and my private consultancy Galanthus Consulting (where I am a sole trader). I also run a social enterprise alongside Galanthus Consulting called Snowdrop Music (which includes the Live-arts brand). This is a not for profit venture. As it is not operated for profit or gain I do not believe that it gives rise to a disclosable pecuniary interest. I have referred myself to the Monitoring Officer and will be fully co-operating with the enquiry.

107. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

108. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Janice Henwood declared an interest in Item 7 of the Agenda, as she was a trustee of the Burgess Hill Community Foodbank.

109. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Councillor Robert Eggleston gave a brief update that he, along with the senior officers at the Town Council, had had conference call with Mims Davies MP to update her on what was happening in Burgess Hill, most of which was summarised in the agenda papers. They had raised issues with BHTC trying to link up with MSDC and WSCC, which Mims Davies MP would follow up on, and see if the authorities could be better connected.

The Chair, Roger Cartwright, thanked the Town Council Officers for doing a great job keeping people informed, coordinating the Town's response, and doing a good job working from home. He wished to congratulate the whole team, and asked CEO Steve Cridland to pass on this thanks.

110. **COUNCIL MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Ordinary Meeting of the Council held on 9 March 2020 were **AGREED** and signed as a correct record.

111. **PLANNING COMMITTEE MINUTES**

Councillor Henwood commented that three Councillors, including herself, had called this extraordinary meeting as they were concerned about certain aspects of governance. She raised that normally agendas came out 3 days before the meeting. She would like other Councillors to be able to put items on the agenda for future meetings.

Councillor Roger Cartwright responded that this Agenda had to go out before Easter, which was why it was earlier than normal. If there were other points Councillors wished to raise these could surface during discussion.

Councillor Robert Eggleston commented that Councillors should bear in mind that if they wanted to add an item to an Agenda, there needed to be context, and there needed to be a background paper written.

Councillor Janice Henwood responded that CEO Steve Cridland had asked for more info, but the Agenda had been published before she was able to supply any background papers.

CEO Steve Cridland responded that there was a 3-day clear period needed to get an agenda out. He had discussed with Councillor Janice Henwood the date and time of the meeting, and she did not mention any other Councillors wishing to participate in agenda.

The Minutes of the meetings of the Planning Committee held on Monday 16 March 2020 and Monday 6 April 2020 were **AGREED**.

112. **COVID-19**

The Town Council had taken numerous actions to support the local community and community groups during this period of uncertainty, as set out in Agenda Item 7 dated 16 April.

A concern was raised about the Emergency Committee – there was no Terms of Reference. When committees had been set up in the past, there had been a Terms of Reference with the important details.

It was answered that the Emergency Committee was not a Committee of the Council, rather it was a working group of people that the Community Development department already worked with. This had already been communicated to all Councillors. It was an extension of the existing day to day work of the Community Development department, which ensured that all groups working on the Covid-19 response were communicating with and supporting each other, as well as identifying gaps for support needed.

It had been raised that some members of the group were retired politicians, and was noted that these were the representatives of the community groups that the Town Council normally liaised with.

It was asked who made the decisions on how the £10,000 Covid-19 emergency fund would be spent, was this the Emergency Committee? It was answered that it was not the Emergency Committee.

A question was raised over what Officers should be allowed to spend without seeking Council approval.

It was answered that this was debated at the last Council Meeting, where the Council had come to the conclusion that the Officers worked on delegated responsibility, and could spend money that Councillors had set in the budget. If the Officers required further steering from the Councillors, they would come back to them. There was a delegated responsibility to CEO Steve Cridland and the Officers which covered expenditure under this £10,000 emergency fund, which had been agreed.

It was commented that micro-managing showed a lack of trust in Officers and the Leader.

It was questioned why this was being debated again.

It was reiterated that according to the Standing Orders, the Town Clerk had full responsibility, and this included purchases within an approved budget. When Officers were in doubt, they would come to the Council. Micro-managing the Officers could lead to them leaving the Council.

Further concerns were raised over communication – some Councillors were initially unaware that the Emergency Committee had been set up. Councillors weren't shown the official leaflet which had been distributed. There was a lack of information flow. An example of this was the information in the Agenda on the Food Bank was now out of date, and there had not been an update. The William Hill unit was now out of the picture – where would the Food Bank go, would it be for more than 3 months, and were they happy with this? To what extent would the Town Council be involved with running the Food Bank, as they had not done this in the past.

It was noted that an update on the Food Bank had been sent to all Councillors, to say that the William Hill was off, and it had not yet been agreed where it would move to. In this update it was stated that they planned to move to new premises on April 27 2020, subject to an agreement on licence terms. They may move into the old LJ's café unit, but this was subject to change. The intention on both sides (NewRiver REIT and the Food Bank) to come up with a solution that would provide with them premises until the development of the Martlets took place. The Town Council were not involved in the operation of the Food Bank.

It was asked if the Food Bank wanted freezers, as this could cause issues with food hygiene rules? It was answered that in the Emergency Committee meeting that had said they wanted them.

It was raised that a Syrian family had come to the Food Bank, and it was asked if they had been put in touch with the mosque. Were all of the groups joining up, and was this reaching Syrian families? This could not be answered at this time. This should be asked to the Food Bank not to the Council.

A question was asked if the Town Council were planning to support the Food Bank more, and would some of the emergency fund be spent on this?

It was noted that as the Food Bank could suffer from a drop in donations, the logistics of running it could become more difficult. The Town Council could offer assistance and increase support, particularly if the economy goes into recession.

CEO Steve Cridland noted that the Town Council had offered the Food

Bank and other organisations assistance. To date they had not needed it but the offer was there. The situation would go on way beyond the next few weeks, and the Town Council should be ahead of the game now.

It was suggested that as the Town Council had not been spending as much money as normal, perhaps more funding could be diverted to the Covid-19 response.

Regarding concerns over the flow of information, attention was drawn to the weekly Briefing Note which was sent to all Councillors and staff. All of what had been mentioned at this meeting had been included in this briefing. Additionally there was a regular informal Councillor update call on Thursdays, which had discussed the Emergency Committee and all of the items in this meeting's Agenda. Councillors should be reading and responding to all information being put out.

Additionally it was noted that all Councillors could email Robert, CEO Steve Cridland or the management team with any questions or for updates. There was also a weekly update being sent from CEO Steve Cridland, the minutes from the Emergency Committee were being distributed, and Councillor Robert Eggleston was sending updates.

A question was asked over whether the item relating to the sandpit from Councillor Robert Eggleston's update should go to a Community Engagement KAG. It was noted that this was not on the Agenda for this Council meeting, but should be discussed at a Customer Services KAG if necessary.

A question was asked over whether Town Councillors could be doing more to check in with the community groups in the town, both those involved with the Covid-19 response and others. A lot of community groups relied on the Summer Fayre and other events for fundraising, so may need additional support going forwards. Could Councillors check in with these groups on their financial state and see what support they may need. This could be divided so that each Councillor reached out to a few groups.

Councillor Peter Chapman proposed an amendment to the resolutions, which was seconded by Councillor Robert Eggleston, as follows:

3. That the Town Councillors identify community groups in the town, and each be allocated groups to check in with. They should check if they have any needs now, or will do in the future, and how the Town Council could support them.

The Council wished to make a note of thanks to the Burgess Hill and District Lions Club for their offer of funding towards the Covid-19 response.

It was noted that a resident of St Andrew's ward was co-ordinated a

PPE drive, as part of the group 3D crowd. They were 3D printing face shields, and needed a hub to assemble these.

The resident had spoken to Councillor Robert Eggleston, who had spoken to the Centre Manager for the Martlets and was looking at securing the group use of the old William Hill shop unit until May 22, after which they could be moved elsewhere if necessary. This should be sorted in the next few days.

Councillor Emma Coe-Gunnell White stated that she had access to a warehouse which could be used by the group if they were unsuccessful securing a shop unit.

It was noted that there were a lot of groups whose activities may slip under the radar. There should be a log kept of the efforts of these groups, in order for them to be recognised.

It was noted that both Councillors and Officers were scouring the town to make sure the Council was aware of groups, and Judy Pointing was checking in with the safeguarding practices of these groups.

Councillor Andrew Barret-Miles left the meeting during this item.

RESOLVED THAT:

1. That the Council formally approved the allocation of £10,000 for an emergency fund to assist the community during the Covid-19 crisis.
2. That the actions of the Town Council to support the community during the Covid-19 crisis were noted.
3. That the Town Councillors identify community groups in the town, and each be allocated groups to check in with. They should check if they have any needs now, or will do in the future, and how the Town Council could support them.

Councillor Joseph Foster proposed the resolutions be passed, and Councillor Anne Eves seconded this. The resolutions were passed.

113. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE DISTRICT COUNCIL

A question had been raised about the Town Council's relationship with the District Council during this period, as set out in Agenda Item 8, dated 16 April.

It was commented that there had been a lack of feedback from MSDC. There was an impression from Officers that they did not know what MSDC were doing.

It was noted that several Councillors who were also District Councillors had been participating in software tests for virtual meetings, but they were unsure why this had taken so long. There was some progress, but this was slow.

Councillor Tofojjul Hussain referred to the earlier point regarding a Muslim family seeking help from the foodbank, and asked to discuss this after the meeting. There was a Food Bank in Haywards Heath which could help.

Councillor Anne Eves noted that she had asked MSDC for a weekly conference call with opposition-group leaders, however the leader of the Council had refused this. He would take questions by email.

114. Meeting terminated at 19.10 hours.