



NEWPORT (Shropshire) TOWN COUNCIL

(draft until signed at a subsequent meeting)

MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING

This Town Council meeting was held via Zoom (Virtual Platform).

held on
Wednesday 26TH August 2020

Town Councils are temporarily permitted to hold remote meetings due to the current pandemic Covid-19 health crisis: –

“The Local Authorities and Police and Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulations 2020”

PRESENT: Cllrs: Peter Scott – Town Mayor
Susan Bailey
Lyn Fowler
Nick Garvey
Jeremy Good
Thomas Janke
Tom King
Alan Lloyd
Tim Nelson
Sarah Syrda

IN ATTENDANCE: Sheila Atkinson –Town Clerk (CiLCA)

TC/11/20-21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE were received from: Cllr Bill Harper & Cllr Ian Perry – both with Work Commitments

TC/12/20-21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - none

TC/13/20-21 Members acknowledged receipt of the notes from a meeting of the Pandemic Crisis Management Team held on 8th July.

TC/14/20-21 ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. Cllr Scott reminded members of the impending visit from the Shropshire High Sheriff, Mrs Dean Harris, taking place on Thursday 27th August and the extended invitation for member to join the group at the end on the tour of the town in the council chamber for light refreshments.
2. Members noted the “save the date” announcement from the Citizen Advice Bureaux regarding their AGM which will be held via ZOOM on 23rd September. Further details will follow.

FINANCE

TC/15/20-21 Members noted the July finance statement and the payments therein:

Revenue Fund balance b'fwd (30 th June)	377,685.92
Less: Payments	-
Out of Meeting Payments - chq No's (307 to 334)	-10,883.00
Direct Debits	-15,773.17
Receipts	+5,570.48
Revenue Balance c'fwd (31 July)	356,600.23
Ear Marked Reserves balance b'fwd (1 July)	(149,889.19)
Ear Marked Reserves balance c'fwd (31 July)	149,889.19
Managed Funds balance b'fwd (1 July '20)	(3,006.87)
Payments	-
Receipts	-
Managed Funds balance c'fwd (31 July)	3,006.87
Total Balance in Hand (31 July)	509,496.29

Investments held as asset: CCLA Property Fund	£100,000.00
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TC/16/20-21 Cllrs Allowances – The following Members confirmed their wish to claim the 2nd instalment of the annual Members Allowance payable in October, aligned with the Report, Review and Recommendations of the Independent Parish Remuneration Panel of Members Allowances in Town and Parish Councils in Telford & Wrekin adopted in November 2019:-

- a. Cllr Susan Bailey
Cllr Lyn Fowler
Cllr Nick Garvey
Cllr Jeremy Good
Cllr Thomas Janke
Cllr Tom King
Cllr Alan Lloyd
Cllr Tim Nelson
Cllr Sarah Syrda
Cllr Peter Scott

b. Chairman's Allowance –LGA 1972 - S15 (5)

“A Parish Council may pay the chairman (Mayor) for the purpose of enabling him to meet the expenses of his office such allowance as the council think fit”

Cllr Scott will also receive the Mayor's Allowance consistent with the recommendations of the Remuneration Panel, November 2019.

TC/17/20-21 Barclays Bank – Credit Balance

Members were informed that following the closure of the High Street branch of Barclay Bank, the town council switched its accounts to Lloyds Bank. The Barclays active saver account, (*the feeder account used to maintain cash flow into the current account*) although “closed” was kept suppressed, by the bank, for a minimum of a year to ensure that no transactions were overlooked or lost. The town council have been informed that there is now a credit balance of £821.85 which is made up accrued interest and compensation payments.

Members considered several options and **RESOLVED to leave the funds in the Barclays Bank account for the present time and instructed the Resource Finance Committee, within the next 2 weeks, to review current banking arrangements and evaluate the associated level of risk if our bank fails and is unable to pay back money other than the Financial Services Compensation Scheme (FSCS) threshold of £85,000.**

TC/18/20-21 “Make it Sparkle Cleaning Ltd”

Members were informed that following the retirement of the former caretaker, and due to the current health crisis, a replacement has not been employed. However, a company has been hired to undertake general cleaning duties in the Guildhall. As with many businesses their preferred option for payment is by bank transfer. This town council does not allow for any online payment transactions, or any unauthorised disbursement transactions. Payment of most invoices is made by cheque. **Members authorised and agreed the set-up of a monthly payment by Direct Debit/Standing Order for this company.**

TC/19/20-21 Contractual Compensation

Members confirmed the **RECOMMENDATION that a one off payment for both the Clerk & RFO be provided following a review of job descriptions and an agreement to a change of contract which increases the notice period requirement for termination of employment from one month to three months.**

TC/20/20-21 Grant Award – Laptops for Schools

Members **supported and agreed to a allocate grant funding of £1000 from the “Kindle Fund allocation” to provide 5 laptops for schools in Newport, for the Telford & Wrekin Laptops for Leaning schools’ project.**

TC/21/20-21 Budget Setting and request from Food Frenzy

Member noted correspondence from the Town Team regarding a request to roll-forward to 2021 the pledged grant allocation of £1,000 to enable a resumption of the artistic element of the Food Frenzy community event in 2021. It was Unanimously agreed to support their request, expressing disappointment that this popular event, as so many others in the town was unable to go ahead this year.

Members also considered that the funds earmarked in this year's annual grants allocations, which have not been paid should also be carried forward to the next financial year.

Following prolonged debate regarding the budget for the next year, Members considered it imperative that the Resource and Finance Committee meet as soon as possible either with a formal meeting or a working group meeting to discuss an analysis of the current financial year and if an increase in the precept should be by the inflation figure (2%) or retained as this year with no increase.

TOWN COUNCIL BUSINESS CONTINUITY UPDATE ON SERVICES

TC/21/20- 21 Choose Newport

- a. Members received verbal updates from Cllrs Scott, Nelson, and Fowler regarding the "Choose Newport Campaign". Members were advised that this town council initiative has resulting in a targeted scheme to promote and encourage shoppers and visitors into town during the gradual easing of restrictions following lock-down. Editorial in several publications have been purchased, including Nova News, Shire Magazine, and the Scene. Paper bags, badges, beer mats and napkins have been purchased and distributed to the independent retailer. The gateway signs have had additional panels added to promote the logo and *#choose Newport*. *(Members complimented Cllr Janke on his input to design of the logo)*. A video of Newport has been commissioned by a local firm which will be used on the website, and as a promotional resource. The campaign is set to continue during the run-up to Christmas with festive carrier bags being ordered, and a more festive editorial is being produced for magazines.
- b. Members requested that the Clerk write to the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and the Town Team to ascertain their thoughts on the success or otherwise of the campaign, and request that they survey their membership to provide comments and feedback to the council.

TC/22/20-21 Sandbags for Emergency Use

During the torrential rainstorms and flash flooding in the earlier part of the month, Cllr Scott secured delivery, to the Guildhall, approximately 100 sandbags from Telford & Wrekin for Newport residents with difficulty getting to Ketley for personal collection. Most have now been distributed on a "first come first served" self-collection with a recommended limit of 6 per household. Cllr Scott is to request a further supply as a contingency for future use. These will be stored at the fire station.

TC/23/20-21 Christmas Light Switch-on

Members considered officially announcing that the entertainment and pageantry associated with the switch-on of the Christmas Lights will **not** take place this year.

Members decided unanimously that considering the recent government announcement, that it will likely be November at the earliest before decisions on public gatherings can be taken, consequently it is not possible to plan a Christmas event for this year. Therefore, in the interest of public safety, and whilst there is still concerns over large crowds, the councillors felt that the well-being of the public was paramount to all other considerations.

The Christmas lighting display will still be installed with an anticipated “switch-on” in a phased way during the daytime of November 27th and will remain on for the festive period as usual. It was felt that the customary children’s Christmas “card” competition for the lower schools can still be delivered and should still be embarked upon.

TC/24/20-21 Clerk’s Report

- a. Members noted receipt and acknowledged a comprehensive report from the clerk on essential service delivery, which has been undertaken during the present health crisis and provided protracted debate with discussion various items. copy **attached** at **Appendix ‘A’**

- b. Members and **RESOLVED** that **as the new IT system is in place, providing a updated equipment with more capability to use virtual platforms, monthly meeting of the Town Council via “Teams or Zoom” should recommence in line with the proposed dates set for 2020-21 municipal year.**

Signed

Dated

**Town Council Business Continuity Update on services
Report for Meeting
Wednesday 26th August via Zoom**

The government guidance on reopening offices is here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres>

Guidance changed from 1st August when the Government began encouraging offices to reopen.

All staff members have returned to our offices and are working their contracted hours from the Guildhall.

Several recommended “protection” measures have been put in place, and this is working out well for companionship and productivity. As well as providing the necessary requirement i.e. the photocopier and access to files and documents - not readily available from a “home working” perspective. The office has not opened to the general public unless by appointment and this will continue, reinforced by the latest appeal from T&W issued to local people to help avoid a local lockdown.

The Hub building has not reopened. Mrs Debbie Bundy has been employed as the Hub Manager and started work officially on 3rd August. She is making inroads to come out of the lock-down for a “covid-19” secure re-opening both for youth club, café and the other users, hoping to bring back some of the groups from September. The café element is also looking to start a phased approach to returning, with maybe takeaway and outside seating.

The lease for No. 3 has now been signed, and the new tenant, is preparing to re-open, and is having “make-over” work carried out at the premises.

Since lockdown began someone has been in the office daily - Monday to Friday during normal office hours. We have not had our front door open to visitors, but telephone and e-mail contact is available to make contact. We have continued answering queries, signposting, and reporting issues. To date, I am unaware of any complaints or concern about how we are running things - we are paying bills and running our services. We have complied as far as is reasonably possible with the COVID-19 guidelines and implemented reasonable adjustments, installed a screen, and have put the required sign up to demonstrate our compliance with the guidance. All staff have undertaken a one-day course on first aid in the workplace. The New IT equipment and software have been installed and website is under construction. There have been some technical issues with the transfer and also “user error” however, the support from the IT has been prompt and efficient.

Public Toilets - re-opened on 15th June in line with the re-opening of essential shops. They are however, operating on reduced hours and increased cleaning regime has had to be put in place.

Allotments – We have tried to maintain regular visits to the site, and engagement with our allotment tenants through the Allotment Society.

A conscious decision was made not to evict or re-let plots during the health crisis, and we have kept both sites open throughout. However, as the lock-down is lifting and people are beginning to get a “*little exasperated*” with restrictions coupled with coming to the end of the growing season, the Allotment Society are expressing their concerns regarding some plots which in their opinion need some attention.

The matter is in hand, some letters have been sent out, however, not as warnings as we are aware that people are still shielding. The invoices are sent out in September as the billing year is from 1st October. This usually results in some surrenders. Report **attached**.

Cemetery – The Cemetery has remained open and operational. Chairman of L&ES and the Cemetery Officer have carried out an informal inspection. Report **attached**.

Amenity Areas & St. Nicholas Church Yard – Maintenance on the amenity areas has continued and areas monitored. Uplighter replacements and associated electrical works in the Church grounds have now been completed. Report **attached**.

Street Lights – The annual maintenance of the NTC owned street lights has been carried out several lamps have been identified as requiring essential maintenance, repair and replacement. 8 concrete columns have cracks and/or pieces of concrete missing from around the door area or are leaning. One column in particular, unit 444 Pen Y Bryn Way, has had to be reduced to just above door level due to the severity of the damage. The costs of the works amounted to £6769.22 (excluding VAT) paid from the non-routine budget for Street Lighting. There are to date, no outstanding faults. There is an issue with foliage obscuring the light on Granville Close which is being addressed.

Finance – The month end finance statement and the payments have been carried out in the usual manner, have been sent electronically to all member and required documents uploaded to the website. Cheques have been signed and authorised as required by two Cllrs. The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) (*the Annual Financial Return*) has been submitted and is with PKF Littlejohn LLP the external auditor for processing.

Planning –50 applications relating to Newport have been lodged with the LPA, since January 2020. Most of which have been granted, there have been 2 refused, one of which was a TPO, 2 applications have been withdrawn and 12 are awaiting a decision.

The Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government have issued a new consultation on changes and reforms to the Planning System. The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) have sent out information and briefings regarding the White Paper and their proposed consultation response asking local (parish and town) councils to respond to NALC on this very important issue.

Changes to the current planning system (NALC deadline for responses 17 September)

Planning for the future - the planning white paper (NALC deadline for responses 15 October)

Transparency and competition: a call for evidence on data on land control (NALC deadline for responses 16 October).

Telford & Wrekin are also currently consulting on a new draft housing strategy for the Borough up to 2025, which launched on the 22 June and will close 12pm, Monday 31 August 2020. The Newport Regeneration believe that this consultation should be suspended until the details of the reform are fully understood and what impact these modifications will have on the Borough, and regional neighbours' as a whole, and as such have expressed their concerns to the LPA and T&W councillors.

https://www.telford.gov.uk/info/20457/housing/4015/future_of_housing

All information in relation to the Planning Reforms is being studied and reviewed by the Clerk, Mrs Barker and Cllr Nelson in his capacity as Chairman of the Planning & Economic Development Committee.

Members are asked to provide feedback and comment to the Clerk.

Highway Improvements

An update on the position of each of the outstanding highway improvement schemes has been obtained: -

- 1) **School Safety** – *Mostly complete. One set of School Warning Signs still require works to provide an electrical connection as this work was delayed when the contractor placed all work on hold at the start of lockdown.*
- 2) **20mph Speed Limit** – *This scheme is not being progressed due to a number of objections received during consultation.*
- 3) **Wellington Road 30mph Extension** – *The Legal Order and Terminal Speed limits are now in place. Due to the speed limit running through a section of road with a system of Streetlighting we will be unable to install additional repeater signs. To mitigate this, we have raised a job with our contractors to install the attached signs on both approaches and new 30mph Roundels along with additional road marking changes will be installed shortly. We are currently working with the contractors and the Permits Team to find suitable dates for this work to take place as it is likely a Road Closure will be required. T&W will provide an update on this as soon as possible.*
- 4) **St Peter and St Paul Safety Scheme** – Complete
- 5) **Stafford Street Long Stay/Short Stay** – Complete
- 6) **Station Road Crossing** – Complete
- 7) **Pave Lane Gateways & HGV Restriction** – Ongoing but likely to be completed by the end of 2020.
- 8) **Gateway SIDs** – Complete

At this time, T&W are not in a position to bring forward any additional schemes such as the One-Way systems or New Street Car Park Scheme.

Mobile SID's the two mobile units owned by NTC are remaining in situ at present on Wellington Road/Station Road. Broomfield Road is not a suitable location due to the camber and other street "furniture" which inhibits the functionality of the equipment. There is £750 remaining in a legacy pre-payment made to the company employed for maintenance, storage and charging/changing of batteries.

CCTV Upgrade – work is continuing the set-up of the up-grade across the Borough and within Newport. An expectation of the situation and progression is anticipated for beginning of September.
