

Kendal Town Council

Town Hall, Highgate, Kendal LA9 4ED
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Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held on Tuesday, 30 May 2023, at 7.30 p.m., in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Highgate, Kendal.

Cllr A Blackman	Present	Cllr H Ladhams	Present
Cllr S Coleman (Chair)	Apologies	Cllr S Long	Present
Cllr J Dunlop	Present	Cllr D Rathbone (Vice-Chair)	Present
Cllr A Finch	Apologies	Cllr C Russell	Present
Cllr E Hennessy	Apologies		

Also present: Cllr G Archibald acting as substitute for both Cllrs A Finch and E Hennessy.

In attendance: Chris Bagshaw (Town Clerk), Inge Booth (Democratic Services Assistant), Helen Watson-Moriarty (Development Manager) and Cllr J Cornthwaite, who took no part in the debate, nor in voting on any of the items, as not a Member of the Committee.

M1/2023 Apologies

Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Cllrs S Coleman (Chair), A Finch and E Hennessy.

M2/2023 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were raised.

M3/2023 Exclusion of Press and Public (Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960)

The Committee considered whether to exclude the press and the public from any items related to a confidential matter and attention was drawn to Agenda Item No.11 (Employment and Staffing Matters), copies of the report for which had been circulated to Members of the Committee on 26 May 2023.

Resolved: To vote on moving into Part Two for consideration of Agenda Item No.11 (Employment and Staffing Matters).

M4/2023 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Attention was drawn to M77/2022 (Budget Processes) and to a proposal which had been made for a Full Council budget meeting to take place in late November/early December. This process had happened in previous years, the purpose being to provisionally set the precept which would be confirmed at the January meeting. It was raised that this discussion had not been reflected within the minutes. Whilst the Town Clerk explained that Full Council had already agreed to the timetable for meetings, which included such a meeting, Members still felt it of importance to amend the minutes of the Management Committee and, in addition, for it to be made clear on the Council's Website that this would be a budget meeting.

Resolved: Subject to the changes outlined above being made, to receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Management Committee held on 6 March 2023 and to authorise the Chairman to sign them as a true record.

M5/2023 Minute Action Sheet

Members considered a report on actions taken by officers on resolutions or recommendations made at previous meetings.

M43/2022 (Report on the Work Programme)

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that, with regard to seeking clarification on the Town Council's representation on Brewery Arts, a conversation had yet to take place and that he hoped that this would take place soon.

In response to a query, the Development and Delivery Manager explained that tenders were expected from four different designers in relation to the Visit Kendal leaflets and that, once the contract was awarded, the aim would be for a first draft to be produced before the summer holidays.

M74/2022 (Office Telephony) –

In response to a query, the Town Clerk advised that this was a priority issue and one which related to Agenda Item No.10 (Property, Accommodation and Building Use). The Town Council's telephony system, currently hosted by the former District Council's platform, would have to be taken out of the landlord's hands and become fully virtual and remote.

Resolved: To note the report.

M6/2023 Council Activity Report

The Town Clerk presented a report on progress made across the various actions the Council was involved in.

Members welcomed the new format of the document.

A query was raised in relation to Kendal Futures and the action regarding the Vision process requiring ongoing engagement. This, it was felt, needed to be outcome focussed and it was questioned as to what was being proposed in relation to ongoing engagement on this very important issue. The Town Clerk explained that clarification was required with regard to how to move forward, as well as a need for re-affirmation of the relationship in terms of the direction in which Kendal Futures was heading and where Kendal Vision fitted in, particularly bearing in mind the fact that the Town Council funded both areas. It was, however, recognised that Kendal Futures' role was not as deliverer, but rather enabler. A lengthy discussion ensued during which it was acknowledged that this matter required addressing, that there was a clear need to establish a better strategic partnership and that it was time for Kendal Town Council to become a strategic player with Kendal Futures as its partner. The need to ensure that the work being carried out was consistent with the Plan for Kendal was stressed. It was felt that all Members should become involved, potentially through a Member briefing session. However, it was suggested that initial, informal discussion should take place between Members of the Management Committee, committee chairs and other Members with significant responsibility together with Town Council and Kendal Futures officers, in order to gain an understanding of the current situation and to set out expectations. Also to be invited to this meeting would be Westmorland and Furness Members Jonathan Brook and Doug Rathbone. It was proposed that the Chair and Town Clerk be authorised to establish an appropriate date and to make the necessary arrangements. It was further proposed that, moving forward, Kendal Futures be included on all agendas of the Management Committee as a standing item.

Resolved: The Chair and Town Clerk be authorised to establish and appropriate date and to make the necessary arrangements for an initial informal meeting of Members and officers, as outlined above, for discussion in relation to Kendal Futures, to be followed up in due course by a Briefing Session for all Members.

Resolved: To note the report.

M7/2023 Budget 2023-24

The Committee reviewed the expenditure against budget in the current year. The Town Clerk drew attention to an inconsistency within the report, explaining why details in relation to the Mayoralty and Arts budget appeared part way through. This was down to an irregularity in relation to coding and would be dealt with moving forward.

It was raised that the Committee had asked for the Reserve Statement to be included within future budget reports due to the importance of ensuring that reserves were maintained at an appropriate level. The Town Clerk explained that he had thought that this had been a request from the Audit, Grants and Charities Committee, however, undertook to include this information within future agendas.

Resolved: To include the Reserve Statement within future budget reports to the Management Committee.

Resolved: To note the report.

M8/2023 Committee Terms of Reference

The Council had been considering differing approaches to delivering its services now that it has published an overarching plan. Some committees had drawn attention to their Terms of Reference and had suggested that reforming these to match the Council's aspirations more clearly may be the correct approach. Previous proposals had included wholesale reform of the Committee system, but this has not been supported by the Committee in the past. Officers had re-drafted existing Terms of Reference as a starting point, but these proposals had not yet been widely distributed, and may require further work before bringing them into the public domain.

It was recommended that the Committee convened a Task and Finish Group to complete the review of the Committee structure, Terms of Reference and appropriate staffing support levels, with a view to ensuring any new structures were in place by the mid-point of the year.

The Vice-Chair in the Chair drew attention to the importance of this matter being addressed in time for the next budget. The Town Clerk also raised the need to carry out the work during June so that consideration could be given to the matter at the next meeting of the Management Committee in July. Concern was expressed regarding the need to ensure that the Membership of the Task and Finish Group was all-party. The necessity to move forward apace was acknowledged, as well as the need for a small group of Members to give consideration to the matter, prior to opening up discussion more widely.

Resolved: A Task and Finish Group to be convened by the Town Clerk and the Chair of the Committee to complete the review of the Committee Structure, Terms of Reference and appropriate staffing support levels, with a view to ensuring that any new structures are in place by the mid-point of the year, the Membership to comprise Cllrs S Coleman, J Cornthwaite, J Dunlop, H Ladhams, C Russell and R Sutton and either Cllrs S Blunden or L Hendry.

M9/2023 Employment Support

Kendal Town Council had decided to cancel its Human Resources (HR) contract with Moorepay in 2021. The decision had been informed by best practice from elsewhere and a value for money analysis. Additionally, at the time, the Cumbria Association of Local Councils (CALC) had provided HR services which provided adequate HR coverage. CALC had now removed HR case support from its membership benefits. They continued to offer generic advice.

As a result, Kendal Town Council had no external HR case support to inform best practice and/or policies and procedures. In practice, this meant that Council officers were not supported should any grievances be raised, the Council's staff handbook was not updated in a methodical and systematic way and Council officers were only aware of updated HR policies on an ad hoc basis, leaving possible gaps in compliance. Strong HR policies and procedures strengthened teams and helped to create a harmonious working environment. This boosted productivity and created an insurance against possible costly and damaging grievance procedures.

A proposed solution was to engage a local HR firm which had the capacity and time to engage with the Council's staff and management. Details of services provided were included within the report. The indicative cost was up to £3,560 per annum.

There were several suppliers in the remote servicing model across the North of England. Generally, the cheaper they were, the less personal and bespoke the service, meaning that like for like comparisons were difficult. Details and costings in relation to two sample services were provided within the report. However, these were services akin to the version the Council had in place up to 2021. The level of service, attention to detail and resource support were of the same generic category, and there was little scope for face-to-face interaction with the advisors.

The service being proposed would enable Kendal Town Council to effectively employ an in-house HR service, instead of requiring significant staff time to ask the right questions, review the current documents and write new policies. The service provided would be bespoke and detailed, taking time to understand the Council's needs and tailor accordingly rather than providing templates for officers to interpret and implement. The proposed service was Kendal-based, enabling easy access for staff when required. The face-to-face service enabled relationship building and the recruitment of HR management as part of the team, rather than a faceless online service.

Members welcomed the proposal.

Resolved: To allocate a budget of £3,600 to the appointment of an HR support service and to support the proposal to seek a Kendal-based provider, the allocation to be funded from the subscriptions budget and by anticipated underspends elsewhere in the overall budget.

M10/2023 Property, Accommodation and Building Use

Note – At this stage in the proceedings, Cllrs G Archibald, H Ladhams and D Rathbone declared an interest in this item of business by virtue of the fact that they were Members of the Westmorland and Furness Council, the landlord. Cllr Archibald took no part in the discussion or voting on the item, being a Cabinet Member of that Authority.

The Council currently had a Tenancy at Will on its office in the Kendal Business Hub. It had tenancy agreements on other parts of the Town Hall, which were no longer serviceable, and

had User Rights to the Mayor's Parlour and meeting rooms through the Local Authorities (England) (Property etc) Order 1973, SI 1973/1861.

Previously these User Rights had been described as 'archaic', but attempts to extinguish them appeared to have stalled in 2019 and had not been renewed.

The Tenancy at Will in the Business Hub had been a convenient vehicle for avoiding the need for complex lease negotiations while the principal authorities were going through Local Government Reorganisation, and had allowed the Town Council to re-establish the offices it formerly occupied in the Town Hall, prior to renovation. However, it did not provide security of tenure for the Council, nor security of continuity for the landlord (now Westmorland and Furness Council).

The Committee was being recommended to authorise the Clerk to open discussions with the new principal authority, with the long-term aim of establishing a secure base for the Town Council's administration, its historic rights to use of the Town Hall and its facilities and other related matters, including the safe and secure home of the Town Hall Collection. This would include establishing what legal advice would be required, what the aspirations of the new Authority may be, what the ongoing cost implications would be and any other issues that required consideration.

Members expressed support for the proposal.

Resolved: To authorise the Town Clerk to open discussions with the new principal authority, as outlined above.

Part Two

The next item was considered following a resolution to exclude the Press and Public, due to the confidential or commercial sensitivity.

M11/2023 Employment and Staffing Matters

Copies of the confidential report had been circulated to Members of the Committee on 26 May 2023.

The Committee considered a number of alterations to the establishment level hours, details of which were contained within the report. There was a small financial implication for this change, because the officers are on different increments in their salary scale, however, the variance was within the budget window set.

In addition, the report contained details relating to staff who had met the criteria for their increments to be increased in line with their contracted salary scales. The report further referred to staff where increments should be accepted subject to completion of appraisals.

During discussion, Members raised the need for suitable protocol to be developed in relation to consideration about individual employees at Committee meetings, attention being drawn to the fact that the relevant individuals should not be present during discussion. Also raised was the question of the Town Clerk's appraisal, which was overdue, and the need to identify two people with the relevant knowledge to undertake this. It was suggested that a report be brought to the next meeting of the Committee so that an appropriate decision could be made. Members, however, supported the proposals contained within this report.

Resolved: A report to be brought to the next meeting with regard to suitable protocol in relation to consideration about individual employees at Committee meetings.

Resolved: A report to be brought to the next meeting on the process for the Town Clerk's appraisal.

Resolved: To approve the recommendations contained within the report.

Part One

The next item was considered following a resolution to re-admit the Press and Public.

M12/2023 Newsletter and Publicity

The Development and Delivery Manager reported that the deadline for submission of items for the next Newsletter was mid-July.

Raised was the need to introduce the Plan for Kendal within the next edition following its launch at the recent Town Assembly. However, the importance of ensuring that every residence within Kendal received a copy of the Plan in its current format was stressed, it being suggested that the leaflet be either included as a supplement to the Newsletter or distributed in place of the Newsletter. The Town Clerk believed that the additional cost would be in the region of £3,000 and that there may be potential to fund this through reserves. Also raised was the need for inclusion of an introduction within the leaflet by the Mayor, as well as promotion of the Plan via the Council's Website and through social media, and a suitable press release. It was reiterated that the Plan was a quality document which provided a clear and transparent view of the work carried out by the Town Council and that it was important that all people in the Town were given an opportunity to see it. The Development and Delivery Manager further suggested the potential to reformat the headings within the Newsletter to match those included within the Plan. The Town Clerk also made reference to the possibility of reformatting the Newsletter which was currently produced in A4.

Resolved: Arrangements be made for copies of the Plan for Kendal to be delivered to every residence in Kendal, included as a supplement to the Newsletter and with the addition of an introduction by the Mayor.

Resolved: The Plan to be promoted via the Council's Website and through social media, as well as through a press release.

Resolved: To reformat the headings within the Newsletter to match those included within the Plan.

Resolved: To look into the possibility of reformatting the Newsletter which is currently produced in A4.

The meeting closed at 9.04 p.m.