

Kendal Town Council

Town Hall, Highgate, Kendal LA9 4ED
www.kendaltowncouncil.gov.uk



Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held on Monday, 6 March 2023, at 7.30 p.m., in the Council Chamber at the Town Hall, Highgate, Kendal.

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

Also present: Cllr G Archibald (arrived at 7.40 p.m. during consideration of Agenda Item No.6 (Council Activity Report) acting as substitute for Cllr A Finch.

In attendance: Chris Bagshaw (Town Clerk) Helen Watson-Moriarty (Development Manager)

M67/2022 Apologies

An apology for absence was received and accepted from Cllr A Finch.

M68/2022 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were raised.

M69/2022 Exclusion of Press and Public (Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960)

No issues were considered for exclusion.

M70/2022 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Resolved: To receive the minutes of the previous meeting of the Management Committee held on 9 January 2023 and to authorise the Chairman to sign them as a true record.

M71/2022 Minute Action Sheet

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

The Town Clerk referred to M45/2022 (Outside Bodies) and the third action regarding seeking clarification on the Town Council's representation on Brewery Arts, advising the Committee that this was an ongoing conversation. He further drew attention to M46/2022 (Land at Mintsfeet and Vicarage Drive), and pointed out that Land at Vicarage Drive formed an item later in the agenda for the meeting.

Resolved: To note the report.

M72/2022 Council Activity Report

The Town Clerk presented a report on progress made across the various actions the Council was involved in. He referred to the section of the report which sat outwith the proposed thematic headings and to the action relating to Committee Structure, explaining that the Christmas Lights and Festivals Committee had, at its last meeting, discussed the issue of community resilience and the need for the Council to address the issue through an appropriate committee structure. Management Committee was being asked to examine the matter in order to share suggestions with the wider Council.

It was raised that this was an opportunity to formalise informal discussions and to bring the matter into the public domain, as well as to put things in place for the Council's annual meeting in May, at the same time as the Council Plan for Kendal.

A lengthy discussion followed, and whilst some Members were of the opinion that the matter should move apace, others felt that there was a need for more careful planning and a step by step approach in order to achieve the correct focus. Also raised was the question as to whether an entirely new committee structure was actually necessary, attention being drawn to the fact that the Council delivered effectively in its current format. It was suggested that the contents of the new Plan could be appropriately divided amongst the current committees. Attention was drawn, however, to frustrations as a result of the current committee structure being unable to deal effectively with social issues, with a recent example provided. To this end, it was suggested that only one committee may need renaming in order to encompass the issue of community resilience. The majority of Members remained keen for approval of the proposed Council Plan to take place at the Annual Meeting of the Council in early May, prior to consideration of an appropriate committee structure to deliver that Plan being considered by the Management Committee in late May. Also raised was the fact that, whilst the existing budget supported the work currently carried out by the Council, any future changes to what was delivered may result in other work having to be ceased. The need, therefore, to discuss any changes prior to the commencement of the 2024/25 budget cycle was stressed.

The Town Clerk sought direction from the Committee in relation to formal consideration of the Council Plan prior to presentation of the document at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May, potentially by a group of Members of the Management Committee.

Once have the Plan for Kendal, discussions could then take place with the Town Clerk and officers on how the contents could be delivered.

Discussion turned to the strategic land purchase at Mintsfeet and the Town Clerk informed Members of the current situation regarding the four ponies that remained on the site. He was encouraged to have heard that there had been some work carried out recently in tidying the land and he informed Members that, whilst this had been a long process, he felt that an end was in sight.

Reference was made to the challenges with regard to In Bloom and the watering regime and the Town Clerk explained the situation in this regard and the need to reconsider how to manage this aspect moving forward. Continental were unable to continue carrying out watering for the Town Council and the question was whether to put this out to tender again or to deal with watering in-house. Attention was drawn to the fact that hot, dry weather could be imminent and to the need to act quickly. Also raised was the potential for the Council to consider products which helped to retain water which, it was suggested, may help from a manpower perspective.

Resolved: The Management Committee to make a decision with regard to a proposed new Committee Structure at its meeting in late May.

Resolved: A group of Members of the Management Committee be established to examine the draft Council Plan prior to presentation of the document at the Annual Meeting of the Council in May.

Resolved: To note the report.

M73/2022 Land at Vicarage Drive

The Town Clerk sought authorisation for the necessary sealing of the contract for the acquisition of the land at Vicarage Drive. He explained that this was a piece of land which had been acquired by the Town Council in the previous year, the owners having gifted it on the condition that the Town Council paid the solicitor's fees and placed a bench on the land in their name.

Resolved: To authorise the Town Clerk to seal the contract for the acquisition of the land at Vicarage Drive.

M74/2022 Office Telephony

The Town Clerk presented a plan to deliver telephony for the Council's administrative team. The report provided the background for the need to seek a new solution to the existing temporary provision which was no longer sustainable.

Modern telephony was now voice over internet protocol (VOIP) as standard, with calls being directed over the internet and handled by software rather than dedicated telephones. This could be installed on a laptop, smartphone, tablet or any other smart, internet-connected device.

The report outlined a number of solutions, the preferred option being to use both VOIP and supplied work smart phones. This was more expensive (each phone had to have a SIM card and a phone contract), but all members of staff would then be contactable when required, over a system controlled by the Council, and have access to a work phone when working away from their desks, which was a provision of the Town Council's lone-working policy, among other things. The report provided a breakdown of the costs involved; the Committee was being asked to agree to spend up to £4,500 from the 2023-24 IT and Telephony Budget in April 2023, and to allow approximately £4,000 in the budgets for 2024-25 and 2025-26. After this point it was anticipated that costings and renewals would be reviewed. The Committee is being asked to agree to spend up to £4,500 from the 2023-24 IT and telephony budget in April 2023, and to allow approx. £4,000 in the budgets for 2024-25 and 25-26. After this point it is anticipated that costings and renewals will be reviewed.

Discussion ensued during which the Town Clerk responded to questions and concerns raised by Members. Acknowledged, however, was the importance of ensuring that telephone calls to the Council were answered in a timely manner and by the correct personnel.

Resolved: To agree to spend up to £4,500 from the 2023-24 IT and Telephony budget in April 2023, and to allow approximately £4,000 in the budgets for 2024-25 and 2025-26, costings and renewals to be reviewed after this point.

M75/2022 Town Assembly and Annual Report

The Town Clerk drew attention to the 1972 Local Government Act which obliged the Civil Parish of Kendal to hold a parish meeting, at least once per year, between 1 March and 1 June 'for the purpose of discussing parish affairs'. The report provided the finer details of the requirements of the legislative requirements.

The Town Clerk explained that, traditionally, Kendal Town Council had convened the “Town Assembly” meeting prior to a meeting of the Full Council in April. These meetings had been poorly attended by the general public, and appeared mostly to have been a vehicle for dialogue between councillors about their various committees and activities. One feature of the meeting had been the presentation of an ‘annual report’ on the Council’s activities.

The Town Clerk reported that, following discussion with the Mayor, it was now proposed to change the format of both the Annual Report and the Parish Meeting. It was being suggested that the Annual Report consisted of fewer pages and fewer words, with some simple graphics and pictures explaining what the Council had done in the last year, and what it intended to do in the next. The Mayor had suggested that the venue of the Parish meeting be changed to a neighbourhood meeting room. It was further being suggested that this could change every year, perhaps visiting the various community halls in the Town. The format could be less formal and more engaging, with presentations on specific aspects of community interest, and an opportunity for Members to engage with the public. As a starting position, the Mayor was proposing that the first meeting be held at the Beck Community Centre in Heron Hill, on a day and date to be agreed. A starting presentation theme might be on the need for biodiversity in the context of climate change. Other themes could be taken from the Council’s Plan for Kendal.

As the Council’s Management Committee, the date, time and format of the annual Parish Meeting could be reasonably seen as being within its remit. The legislation did not preclude its facilitation being delegated to a Committee and did say that the meeting may be convened by the Mayor (as Chairman), or any two councillors. It was being recommended, therefore, that the Committee endorse this change of approach, and delegate the exact date, venue and format to the Mayor and the committee chairs, in conjunction with officers and such others as they saw fit.

During discussion, raised was the potential to bring on board the Council’s principal partners, Kendal BID and Kendal Futures and, in addition, to launch the Council’s Plan for Kendal at the event. Further raised was the opportunity to turn the event into a celebration about what the Council had done in the past year. Other ideas were for the provision of food and a guest speaker, all suggestions creating reasons for the public to attend. Also proposed was the possibility of holding the event on the same day as Mayor Making, although it was acknowledged that the Assembly Room may not be a large enough venue and that Mayor Making was by invitation only. The possibility of carrying out research into what other similar-sized councils did in relation to the legislation.

The Town Clerk suggested that he should work up an appropriate plan, without the involvement of the Beck Community Centre, but possibly involving Mayor Making.

Resolved: To work up an appropriate plan for the Town Assembly, without the involvement of a community centre, but possibly involving Mayor Making.

M76/2022 Budget 2022-23

The Committee reviewed the expenditure against budget in the current year. The Town Council drew attention to an overspend on IT and a number of underspends.

Resolved: To note the report.

M77/2022 Budget Processes

The Chair, Cllr J Dunlop, presented a report with regard to a review of the Council's Budget setting process. This review could be seen as a launchpad for continuing efficient budget monitoring and evaluation leading to effective budget planning in future years.

In order to start the review process, all Councillors, together with the Town Clerk and Finance Administrator had been contacted. They had been asked to suggest ways in which the process could become more effective and efficient. A number of contributions had been received and the Chair thanked those involved. The points made and questions raised could be summarised and grouped under key headings, as follows:-

(1) Timelines

- Consideration should be given to tightening timelines, with work towards the next year's Budget beginning once the previous year's accounts have been completed in the summer.
- Throughout the year data will be made available to each Committee via budget statements.
- Committees will need to review spending plans in the Autumn. Then, ideally, the bulk of Budget planning will be in November with a provisional Budget discussed at Management that month.
- The Budget can't be finalised until the Collecting Authority has confirmed the level of Council Tax Support Grant and the Council Tax Base. This information may not be available until the end of the year.
- The Clerk circulates all necessary information to Management for the January meeting, then the Budget can be confirmed at Full Council in February.

(2) Roles and Responsibilities

- The roles of Management and Audit Committees in the Budget-setting and monitoring process may need clarification.
- Is there a need for a small, focused Budget-monitoring group?
- Should Chairs of Management and Audit Committees meet regularly with Town Clerk and Finance Administrator?
- What is the best way to monitor Reserves/Development Fund?

(3) Communication

- It might be helpful if Budget data was supported by explanatory reports to 'flesh out' the story behind the figures.
- Budgetary reporting should be in a standardised format – which should be made easier by using the Rialtas software programme.
- Do enough Councillors have sufficient understanding of and involvement in the process of Budget-setting?
- Are timelines and deadlines sufficiently clear to all those involved?

(4) Other points

- Budget planning should be set within the context of the Town Council Plan and should support key, agreed priorities.

Having considered the points raised in the consultation, it was now for the Management Committee to decide on how to move forward with the review process and to make recommendations on any necessary changes to systems and procedures to Full Council.

The Chair pointed out that this was by no means a finished piece of work and further stressed the need now to look forward rather than back and find ways to improve the process so that roles, responsibilities and communications channels were clear.

A lengthy discussion ensued during which the Chair was thanked for her efforts in this regard.

The Town Clerk expressed the need to set out procedures, as well as an appropriate timeline for information, also ensuring that the information tallied across committees. He stressed the need for a system whereby the information provided could be trusted to clearly reflect the Council's finances, also pointing out that the recent introduction of the Council's new financial system would assist in making the required improvements.

A strong opinion was voiced with regard to the importance of learning lessons from the past in order to address the weaknesses which had been identified, as well as the need to consider carefully the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) in June.

Other comments related to the importance of training for councillors on finance and ensuring that information was presented in a manner that was easy for both Members and the public to understand, including narrative in order to explain all of the elements to ensure that all were able to see how the money was being spent on delivery of the Council Plan; consistency in the presentation of figures; ensuring that a suitable process was place prior to AGAR; the need for the Audit Committee to examine risk management. It was raised that the fact that the Council was now moving away from spreadsheets and extracting data directly from the new accounting system, without the need for transposing of information, would provide more accuracy. Attention was drawn to the point within the report with regard to roles and responsibilities and that of clarification being required regarding the roles of the Management and Audit Committees in Budget-setting and the monitoring process. It was highlighted that it was certainly a key task of the Audit Committee to monitor the Council's budget on a quarterly basis. Pointed out was the need to bear in mind the fact that suggestions relating to the role of the Audit Committee could result in the need to reconsider its Terms of Reference, and also its meeting dates, to ensure that data could be seen before being presented to the Management Committee.

The opinion with regard the need to look back and learn lessons of what had happened in the past was again stressed, however, a majority of Members felt that more important was the need to look forward and to agree now some of the recommendations contained within the report. It was, therefore, proposed to set a date in November for the Budget and Precept Setting Meeting; for Management Committee to appoint a small sub-group of Members to develop a budget and bring to Management late October early November; and for a quarterly report to be presented to the Audit Committee on spend against budget, with an update to all committees at each of their meetings on their own spend. These proposals, it was felt, would provide a framework on how to prepare the budget for 2024/25.

The Town Clerk further raised the need for meetings to take place in swift order and suggested, therefore, the potential for a sub group to be formed with Members of the Audit, Grants and Charities Committee to examine the issue of risk management, as well as health and safety aspects. He was keen for Audit to get on top of the situation and to develop an appropriate timetable for meeting deadlines. He further drew attention to the fact that it was year end this month and for the need for the process to move on, and he again stressed the need for Audit to set out the process. He further raised the need for this work to be carried out in short order and suggested that a small group of Audit, Grants and Charities Committee Members could make timely recommendations to the Committee and Council on the budget process and on risk assessment. He recommended, however,

an addendum that the work proposed earlier in the discussion with regard to looking back, if this was the Committee's wish, be carried out straight away. The majority of Members, however, still felt that there was nothing to be gained from going back over what had happened in the past and felt that now was the time to set out a new direction and move on. They were also content to take on the Town Clerk's suggestion for a sub group of Members of the Audit, Grants and Charities Committee to look at the issue of risk management.

The Town Clerk finally warned Members against setting a precept in November, as the appropriate information would not be available at that time. Members accepted this caution.

Resolved: To set a date in November for the Budget Setting meetings.

Resolved: To establish a small sub-group of Members appointed by Management Committee to develop a budget and to bring this to a meeting of the Management Committee in late October early November.

Resolved: To bring a quarterly report to Audit Committee on spend against budget, with an update to all committees at each of their meetings on their own spend.

Resolved: To establish a sub group of Members of the Audit, Grants and Charities Committee to look at the issue of risk management, as well as health and safety aspects.

M78/2022 Employment and Staffing Matters

There were currently no employment and staffing matters that required reporting to the Committee.

M79/2022 Items for the Next Newsletter

The Development and Delivery Manager reported that the April edition of the Newsletter was almost ready to be printed and published.

Resolved: To note the verbal update.

The meeting closed at 9.10 p.m.