

# UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the meeting of **UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL** held  
on Monday 13 January 2025 at 7.00 pm  
in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Uckfield

**PRESENT:**

Cllr. K. Bedwell (Town Mayor)	Cllr. S. Mayhew (Deputy Mayor)
Cllr. D. Bennett	Cllr. B. Reed
Cllr. B. Cox	Cllr. P. Selby
Cllr. D. French	Cllr. A. Smith
Cllr. J. Love	Cllr. P. Ullmann
Cllr. M. McClafferty	Cllr. D. Ward
Cllr. D. Manvell	

## **IN ATTENDANCE:**

District Councillor K. Williams  
1 member of the public  
Sarah D'Alessio      Assistant Town Clerk & Responsible Financial Officer  
Holly Goring      Town Clerk  
Minutes taken by Holly Goring

The Town Mayor, Councillor K. Bedwell, welcomed those in attendance. Councillor Bedwell explained that there was a full agenda so asked for members to try and avoid duplication, and speak if they wished to add value to the discussion or a differing perspective.

Members were reminded that budget setting was and could be a highly emotive subject so they needed to be sensitive to this. Members had had the opportunity to attend three meetings (Full Council and two Finance Sub-Committees) and had the opportunity to ask questions of the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk in the previous 6-8 weeks.

When they reached agenda item 16.0 (the annual budget), the Town Mayor would ask the Chair of Finance Sub-Committee to present the recommendations from their committee on 7 January, and then follow this by asking each individual Councillor to make a short statement (no more than 1 minute) on their thoughts on the budget proposals.

## **1.0 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members and officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interests that they may have in relation to items on the agenda. They were advised that notice should be given at this part of the meeting of any intended declaration and that the nature of the interest should then be declared later at the commencement of the item or when the interest became apparent. Councillor Selby declared an interest in agenda item 12.0 as a result of his role as the Town Council representative for Wealden Volunteering.

Councillor Smith also declared an interest in agenda item 12.0 as a result of her role as the Town Council representative for Wealden Citizens Advice. The Town Clerk confirmed that they could participate in the discussion, but not vote.

## **2.0 STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON MATTERS ON THE AGENDA AT THE MAYOR'S DISCRETION**

There were no statements from members of the public.

## **3.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM EAST SUSSEX COUNTY COUNCIL AND WEALDEN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**FC.79.01.25** It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to enable updates to be provided by County and District Council representatives.

County Councillors Chris and Claire Dowling were unable to attend, but the Town Clerk read out a brief update on their behalf. This featured an update on the six monthly SLR meeting with ES Highways that had taken place that afternoon. This focused on addressing existing issues raised by members. They referred to the previous week's meeting at ESCC around the establishment of a Mayoral Combined Authority, and local government reorganisation. This was now in the hands of the UK Government in terms of the unitary proposals but also the cancellation of the County Council elections, which would be decided upon by the Secretary of State.

District Councillor K. Williams attended the meeting to provide an update. The proposals around local government reorganisation were also critical to Wealden DC. Wealden DC was now having to reassess its priorities. Wealden DC felt the suspension of the county elections was undemocratic. They were currently looking at what support they could provide to parish and town councils in this process. By taking out a layer of local government, there would be implications for the lower tier.

Equally in their considerations were the physical assets held by Wealden DC, and how the district authority could ensure their protection during this process. They were keen to ensure that funds collected for the benefit of Wealden residents, such as through Community Infrastructure Levy, were still utilised in Wealden.

They were also mindful that they needed to push forward on the Leisure facility contracts, and ensure strong contracts were in place. He also reminded members that they were one of the key funders for local voluntary groups such as Wealden Citizens Advice.

They were being advised by the UK Government that despite the changes, they should continue to progress with the Local Plan, and it would provide some protection for Wealden residents.

Councillor Reed spoke of the priorities around sports and leisure for Uckfield Town Council and improvements required to existing assets within the town.

Councillor Love raised her concerns in relation to the County Council's position on the Leisure Centre contracts, to which Councillor Williams reminded members that it would not be the County Council's decision, but a new Unitary authority. At

this point, the decision of the UK Government was uncertain, as to whether Sussex would feature in the fast-track programme. It was advisable to plan for the worse-case scenario to ensure the support of local assets.

The Town Clerk confirmed that Uckfield Town Council would remain engaged with Wealden DC, and work had already begun prior to this process to look at the town's infrastructure requirements. The Town Clerk asked members to keep an open mind.

Councillor Cox referred to the Wealden DC Overview & Scrutiny Committee, where they received an update on the management of the flood defences at Pevensey levels. They had also discussed the issue experienced over the Christmas period with Council Tax payments. Staff had come into the office over the Christmas period to rectify the issue, but staff were also being impacted by the proposals around local government reorganisation. It was therefore asked that members be mindful of this.

Councillor French was grateful for one of her fellow Wealden District Councillors raising a case relating to an Uckfield resident who had been affected by the Council Tax error.

Councillor Manvell advised that the council tax billing issue fell within his portfolio. He welcomed the feedback received from Town Councillors when it happened. Wealden DC were upset by the lack of trust that had been created from this error. They had undertaken an initial review, but would be undertaking a further review to look specifically at communications. A process had been created for residents to apply to have any bank charges refunded.

Councillor Bennett felt it was very important that those staff involved in the issue were being appropriately supported by Wealden DC. Councillor Reed added that Town and Parish Councils were key in these situations for assisting in communications.

Councillor Reed had met the Forestry Commission at Boothland Wood. She had also met with the Naturespace Partnership. Councillor Reed had attended the Conservators for Ashdown Forest's fundraising event, and she had advised them of the Town Council's Community Grant programme should they wish to make an application. She had also had a conversation with Sustrans about active travel for Uckfield, and the creation of a Masterplan.

**FC.80.01.25** Members **RESOLVED** to reinstate Standing Orders.

#### **4.0 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies had been received from Councillors V. Frost and C. Macve due to personal commitments. The County Councillors sent their apologies due to another meeting.

#### **5.0 MINUTES**

5.1 To resolve that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 2 December 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Town Mayor.

**FC.81.01.25** Members **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of Full Council on 2 December 2024 be taken as read, confirmed as a correct record and signed by

the Mayor.

5.2 Action List

Members noted the action plan.

5.3 Forward plan

Members noted the proposed forward plan for future Full Council meetings. From this plan, members could identify suitable meetings for strategic or topical discussions.

**6.0 COMMITTEE MINUTES**

6.1 To note the acts and proceedings of the following committee meetings:-

(a) Plans Committee of the 6 January 2025

**FC.82.01.25**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the Plans Committee of the 6 January 2025.

(b) Environment & Leisure Committee – no meeting held.

(c) General Purposes Committee of the 16 December 2024

**FC.83.01.25**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the acts and proceedings of the General Purposes Committee of the 16 December 2024.

**7.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES TO OUTSIDE BODIES**

(None received).

**8.0 TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM FULL COUNCIL WORKING GROUPS**

(None received).

**9.0 TO RATIFY DOCUMENTATION CONSIDERED BY STANDING COMMITTEES:**

**General Purposes Committee**

(i) Risk Management Policy –No. 29

**FC.84.01.25**

It was **RESOLVED** to ratify the decision of General Purposes Committee on 16 December 2024 and to adopt the Town Council's updated Risk Management Policy.

**10.0 TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WEALDEN PARISH REMUNERATION PANEL ON TOWN AND PARISH COUNCILLOR ALLOWANCES FOR 2025/26**

Members were presented with the report of the Independent Remuneration Panel who met on 12 November 2024. This report recommended a 3.0% increase on the figures set in for 2024/25. Uckfield Town Council had not followed the recommended increases for around four years, which meant that the starting position was different to that within the Panel's report for 2024/25.

Due to the Christmas period, the Town Clerk had posed a number of options to members by email prior to Christmas, to obtain an indication for budget setting on what position members may wish to take.

OPTION	DESCRIPTION	BASIC ALLOWANCE	CHAIR ALLOWANCE
A	Freeze member allowances at the current rate	£1,415.61	£1,954.73
B	Increase the current rate of allowances by a further <b>5%</b> ( <i>to move us closer to the Panel's suggested figure</i> )	£1,486.39	£2,052.46
C	Increase the current rate of allowances by a further <b>3%</b> ( <i>so we stay behind the recommended figures, but align with the Panel's proposed percentage increase</i> )	£1,458.08	£2,013.37
D	Increase member allowances to the current figure recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel	£1,537.00 ( <b>8.6%</b> )	£2,122.00 ( <b>8.6%</b> )

Fourteen responses had been received out of 15 Town Councillors by email. The responses received were as follows:

Option A	Option B	Option C	Option D
2 in favour	4 in favour	6 in favour	2 in favour

A fourth option was also proposed by a member, which suggested that new councillors did not receive an allowance in their first year.

Members discussed the matter, prior to taking a vote. They understood that Councillors who were self employed for example, lost out by doing public service. A balance was needed to make the role attractive, and ensure that it was inclusive.

Some members were supportive of some increase, but conscious that too great an increase would not be well received by tax payers, in the current financial climate.

Due to the lack of indecision or steer in one particular way, three votes were taken, on the three options of A, B and C.

Councillor Manvell proposed Option B (5%), which was seconded by Councillor Bennett. Five votes were recorded in favour.

Councillor Ullmann proposed Option A (to freeze the current allowance), which was seconded by Councillor Selby. Two votes were recorded in favour.

Councillor French proposed option C (3%), which was seconded by Councillor Ward. This saw 5 votes in favour.

Due to a tie, the Town Mayor took the casting vote, and voted in favour of Option C (3%).

**FC.85.01.25** With 5 votes in favour and the casting vote of the Town Mayor (Chair of Full Council), it was **RESOLVED** to agree to an increase of the basic member allowance and the Chairman's allowance by 3% which would set the basic allowance at £1,458.08 and the Chair's allowance at £2,013.37 for 2025/26.

**11.0 TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE AND APPROVE THE CONSOLIDATION OF EARMARKED RESERVES**

Members had been presented with the Town Council's earmarked reserves. In line with a recommendation from the Internal Auditor, staff had been working on the consolidation of the Town Council's earmarked reserves. This would see the reduction from in the region of 76 separate descriptions to, around 26. This would make reviewing the earmarked reserves much clearer for both staff and elected members. By prioritising the reserves by the necessity of the works required, it also highlighted the importance of the funds allocated for specific projects, as well as the limited funds the Town Council would be left with, if all this work was undertaken promptly. The Chair of Finance Sub-Committee was pleased with the consolidation exercise.

Councillor Reed requested that the description for 'Climate Change Initiatives' be expanded to include 'and nature' or 'and biodiversity' due to the parallel workstreams. The Town Clerk had already created a consolidated earmarked reserve titled 'Conservation and wildlife monitoring' which incorporated work around nature, but nevertheless, members had approved the expanded term.

**FC.86.01.25** Members **RESOLVED** that subject to the broadened description for 'Climate Change Initiatives', that the consolidation of earmarked reserves be adopted.

**12.0 TO CONSIDER PROPOSED DRAFT SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS FOR WEALDEN CITIZENS ADVICE AND WEALDEN VOLUNTEERING**

The Town Council had received presentations from both organisations to understand more about their work. There had also been a number of discussions surrounding the figures attached to the service level agreements during budget setting and by Finance Sub-Committee. Members were being asked three things at this meeting:

- (i) to agree to a term of 12 months for both service level agreements in order to provide all organisations with the opportunity to review their position in the autumn;
- (ii) to approve the recommended sums attached to the service level agreements for 2025/26, by Finance Sub-Committee, and;
- (iii) consider the content of the service level agreements, and nominate two Town Councillors to sign these once the agreements had been finalised by all parties.

Further to the presentations by both organisations, members discussed the amounts attached to the service level agreements. Some members felt that the amount attached to Wealden Volunteering should be increased. But members recognised that the overall budget had already increased enough for the new financial year. It was therefore proposed that the funding set aside for the wider community grants be reduced to reflect this increase.

Councillor Smith proposed to increase the sum allocated to Wealden Volunteering by £1k (to £9k), to meet their requirement for 2025/26, and to reduce the allocation under the General Power of Competence for general community grant funding to £22k. Councillor Reed seconded this proposal.

Councillor Manvell spoke on the recommendations of the Finance Sub-Committee which sought to retain the sum allocated to Wealden

Volunteering for £8k, based on their broadened catchment across the district, and funding received by Wealden District Council. Councillor Ward seconded this proposal.

In taking a vote on Councillor Manvell's proposal, a total of five members voted in favour.

In taking a vote on Councillor Smith's proposal, a total of six members voted in favour.

**FC.87.01.25** Members **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) agree to the term of 12 months for both service level agreements;
- (ii) increase the funding allocation for Wealden Volunteering to £9k from the existing £8k, and to reduce the general Community Grant funding pot to £22k from £23k, as a result;
- (iii) approve the signing of the service level agreements with two nominated Councillors, once the content of the agreements had been finalized. The agreement must include monitoring in both agreements, and reflect the level of support provided to the different parish areas.

**13.0 TO REVIEW THE RESULTS OF THE RESIDENTS' SURVEY 2024**

Due to the large agenda that evening, the Town Clerk had presented further highlights from the residents' survey results. The proposed budget supported the feedback from residents, with more emphasis placed on grounds maintenance and improvements to sports facilities, play areas and community assets such as CCTV and Christmas lights etc. The feedback from the survey aligned with the priorities for 2025/26, and the Town Clerk suggested that an informal meeting be held with members in February to work through the results in more detail.

Members noted the highlights and agreed that an informal workshop type setting would be useful to look into the results in more detail.

Councillor Reed also asked that the results of Wealden DC's recent surveys be obtained.

**14.0 TO ADOPT THE CONTENT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN 2025-30 PRIOR TO COMPLETION OF THE DOCUMENT**

Members considered the content of the Strategic Plan 2025-30, which set out the priorities for the next five years. Further to discussions at the December meeting, members were keen to separate out the objectives which the Town Council could deliver for the town, from the longer-term community aspirations. In the latter situation, the Town Council's role would be to lobby or to present to key stakeholders.

The Town Clerk explained that before staff created the final design and layout of the document, it was important to obtain feedback from Town Councillors on whether the objectives were right, and whether they were content with the split of deliverables and community aspirations.

Councillor Reed requested the inclusion of:

- (i) Weald to Waves
- (ii) 30by30 United Nations Target

- (iii) Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- (iv) A22 bypass – and concerns for adjacent green corridors

The Town Clerk advised that the 30by30 target was already referenced within the Strategic Plan, and asked for clarity on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy work as the Town Council was already a pilot for the Sussex Local Nature Partnership's Green Spaces project. Councillor Reed explained the difference, and the Town Clerk advised that items (i) and (iii) could be further included. However the Town Clerk felt uncomfortable incorporating large subjects such as the dualling of the A22 bypass, when this had yet to be discussed by Full Council, and there could be a difference of opinion around the table.

Councillor Smith added the need to include an up to date Sustrans study – to review sustainable modes of transport (walking and cycling networks). Councillor Reed further requested the inclusion of air monitoring within the town centre.

Members requested more detailed discussions on some of these subject areas, notably – 30by30, the dualling of the A22 bypass, and Local Nature Recovery Strategies.

**FC.88.01.25** Subject to the inclusion of (i) and (iii) above, members **RESOLVED** to: approve and adopt the objectives for the 2025-30 Strategic Plan, and would await a finished design in its publication.

**15.0 TO ADOPT THE TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PLAN FOR 2025/26**  
Members reviewed the annual priorities for the organisation in 2025/26.

Councillor Mayhew noted that the community grant and service level agreement figures needed to be updated following the Town Council's earlier decision.

**FC.89.01.25** Subject to the change in the figures, members **RESOLVED** to adopt the Annual Plan for 2025/26.

**16.0 TO CONSIDER THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE FINANCE SUB-COMMITTEE AND FORMALLY SET THE ANNUAL BUDGET (PRECEPT) FOR 2025/26**

The Chair of Finance Sub-Committee was given the opportunity to present the recommendations of the Finance Sub-Committee. Councillor Manvell advised members of the lengthy discussions taken by the sub-committee in relation to this year's budget. He also advised that the decision had not been taken lightly. It was a case of looking at what Uckfield Town Council needed in terms of resource to just stand still let alone meet the growth of the town. This would be further exacerbated by the potential devolvement of services in the future from the local government re-organisation. Finance Sub-Committee members were certain that we needed to place less reliance on the Council's reserves (capital). At present the Town Council did not hold any contingency fund, and needed to start putting money aside.

The Chair thanked the Chair of Finance Sub-Committee and invited members to provide their thoughts on the proposals one by one.

Staff were commended for their work and despite the difficulty in setting these



proposals, members were in the main supportive in order to meet service needs. Members also recognised the need for any communications around the precept/budget figures to be jointly supported and co-signed by councillors.

Members recognised that there were still gaps within the budget, in terms of:

- risk of pension liability changes;
- the need for contingency;
- this was only Phase 1 of resource/staffing to meet service needs;
- further investment in buildings such as the Signal Box and Osborn Hall;
- reviewing hospitality services;
- the changes to the Public Right of Way across Ridgewood Farm;
- River Uck/Rivers Trust work to clean up the watercourses and retain biodiversity;

**FC.90.01.25** Bearing in mind the very difficult decision, members unanimously **RESOLVED** to adopt the annual budget for 2025/26 of £1,986,904 with a precept of £1,321,884. This would result in an increase of £30.30 (15.95%) per annum for the average Council Tax Band D household (approx. £3.03 per month).

**17.0 TO ADOPT THE ASSET MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR 2025-30**

**FC.91.01.25** Members **RESOLVED** to adopt the Asset Management Plan for 2025-30.

**18.0 QUARTERLY PROGRESS UPDATE ON UCKFIELD TOWN COUNCIL'S ANNUAL PRIORITIES FOR 2024/25 (Q3)**

Members were presented with an update for quarter 3 (Oct – Dec) for 2024/25. Subject to discussions surrounding the Christmas lights and dissatisfaction with the contractors, members noted the report.

**19.0 TO CONSIDER THE BEST METHOD FOR RESPONDING TO THE FOLLOWING CONSULTATION**

**(i) Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for Local Authorities in England (deadline 12 February 2025)**

**(ii) Draft Transport Strategy Consultation (deadline 7 March 2025)**

**FC.92.01.25** It was **RESOLVED** to suspend Standing Orders to extend the meeting by 15 minutes, should the agenda continue past 9.00pm.

Members suggested that these consultations could be considered at the same informal workshop that would be held with members to review the Residents' Survey results. Councillor Reed also spoke of a further consultation on the Nature Recovery Green Paper.

**20.0 TO NOTE THE MAYOR'S ENGAGEMENTS**

Members noted the report.

**21.0 SIGNING OF GRAVE CERTIFICATES AND TO NOTE TRANSFERS OF DEEDS OF GRANT**

Two deed of grants had been received:

Jeremy Mercer

Ms Connie Deman

**FC.93.01.25** It was **RESOLVED** for three councillors to sign the above deeds of grant.

**22.0 QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS PREVIOUSLY NOTIFIED**

None received.

**23.0 TOWN CLERK'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

None received.

**24.0 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair, Councillor Bedwell advised members that her project 'People need People' was due to be launched on 23 January 2025 at the Uckfield Chamber of Commerce meeting. The Uckfield Chamber of Commerce had offered to sponsor the project for one year. The project aimed to get businesses supporting local charities and voluntary groups, but also for their volunteers to share expertise with the businesses.

The meeting closed at 9.01pm.