

BRIDGNORTH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held in the Annexe, College House on Tuesday 27th September 2022 at 7.15pm.

Present:

Aked
Baines MBE
Barlow
Buckley
Buffey
Chetter
Connolly
Cooper D
Cooper N
Ireland
Marshall
Sawbridge BEM (Chair)
Wellings

In Attendance:

Mrs R Follette, Interim Responsible Financial Officer
Miss E Overton, Cemetery, Property & Grounds Administrator

3 members of the public
1 member of the press

Councillor R Seabright Absent

0155/2223 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was proposed by Councillor S Barlow, seconded by Councillor J Buckley, and unanimously **RESOLVED**: to accept the apologies below:

Councillor L Rochelle – Work Commitment
Councillor L Neal – Family Commitment

0156/2223 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Nil

Cllr A Chetter joined the meeting

0157/2223 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

Members noted receipt of a written public question from Mr Anthony Daniels of St Leonards Close:

“If the Town Council, having previously given public undertakings to remove all the statues of the Arts Trail, resolves now to keep some of them permanently, what confidence in its future undertakings does it expect the public to have?”

Councillor Sawbridge confirmed that the Town Council will respond to Mr Daniels in writing in due course.

0158/2223 **SHROPSHIRE COUNCILLOR**

Members received and considered a verbal report from Shropshire Councillor Julia Buckley.

0159/2223 **MINUTES**

It was proposed by Councillor C Baines, seconded by Councillor I Wellings and majority

RESOLVED: to approve the minutes of the meeting of Bridgnorth Town Council held on Tuesday 6th September 2022.

0160/2223 **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chair passed on her thanks to Councillor A Buffey who will be formalising her resignation in writing shortly.

0161/2223 **MEMBERS QUESTION TIME**

Councillor Ireland read the following:

“As some of you know I have been asked several questions by members of the public about the grant for the Carnival Committee, bunting for the High St. etc.

I sent an email to our previous Town Clerk in July which along with his reply were copied to Events Committee members.

Here are copies of those e mails and the financial forecast from the Carnival Committee dated 28th February this year which is referred to.

My original questions have not been answered yet but action is being taken to recover most of the £5,000 paid so these first questions are more or less satisfied.

In addition to the concerns raised in July I have some further questions about the absence of public record relating to the release of this payment.

A brief timeline of events is as follows

6.7.21 Council meeting.

The Grants budget was increased by £7,500 to allow seed funding for a community group to co-ordinate and run the Town Carnival.

27.7.21 Events Committee meeting

Members were advised that a fruitful discussion had occurred and the community group (Bridgnorth Carnival Committee) had been advised of some governance requirements that they would need to satisfy before the Town Council would release any of the funding that it had budgeted for the event.

1.3.22 Events Committee meeting

A MoP (Mr. Ron Richards) asked four questions concerning the Carnival - questions 3 & 4 being:-

3. What are the criteria for grant funding of council funds to the Bridgnorth Carnival, to whom and for what purposes are they granted and what steps are taken to ensure that they have been properly spent?

4. Have any funds been disbursed for the Carnival so far, and if so for what purpose?

4.3.22 Town Clerk gave a written reply as follows:-

3. The Town Council have asked for evidence of; a formal constitution, minutes of meetings and an appropriate bank account in the name of the community group that requires at least 2 signatories to authorise spend.

4. No

31.3.22 A cheque was issued for £5,000, signed by The Chair and a member of the Events Committee.

This implies that the documents required were provided, scrutinised and the payment authorised sometime between 4th and 31st March. Presumably one of the documents was the forecast of 28.2 showing a shortfall of £50 without the grant?

However, despite recording twice there will be a process of scrutiny, there is no public record of this being carried out. Council was not informed. The Vice Chair of the Events Committee was not informed and in fact had not seen the Forecast dated 28.2 until I sent him a copy on 16th of June.

The point is that even though the grant was approved in principle last year it was with conditions that had to be met before being paid.

The Town Clerks email to me of 20th July says, "Earlier this calendar year the Town Council (as a result of a recommendation from the Events committee) agreed to pass on the £5k to the Carnival Committee based on some indicative anticipated income and expenditure provided by the Carnival Committee."

However, there is no public record of this recommendation or record of how or by whom the scrutiny referred to last July and in the reply to Mr. Richards of 4th March was carried out prior to releasing the money.

The only public record is in the agenda of 26.4.22 Council Meeting Appendix A Retrospective approval of Accounts paid records the cheque for £5,000. I was at the meeting, I don't remember any discussion of this item but if we did discuss there is no written record.

6.6.22 Events Committee meeting

PUBLIC QUESTION TIME the questions asked by Mr. Richards on 1st March and replied to on 4th March were noted. I was there to ask a question of my own and his questions and the replies were read aloud.

Mr. Richards was also at this meeting and several though not all of the 6 councillors present and the Town Clerk knew that since he asked and had replies to his questions the paperwork was submitted, approved and £5,000 paid, but no mention of this was made.

Draft Minutes of the Events meeting of 5th September

RESOLVED: To recommend to Town Council to ask the Town Carnival Committee to return £3,552 to the Town Council – all recorded correctly on our website

My additional questions to those in my email of 15th July are –

- 1. Why was the process and reasoning behind the final approval of this payment not publicly debated or recorded?*
- 2. Why was the decision not recorded at subsequent Events Committee meetings, why weren't all Events Committee members informed, why wasn't full council informed?*
- 3. Why was the significant Subsequent Event (ie. scrutiny and payment) not disclosed during the meeting of 6th June when reading the questions and answers from March? Bearing in mind the MoP who had asked the questions was also at the meeting.*

Apart from anything else it would have been polite to clarify this for the original questioner as he was there.

I have been asked what the purpose of asking these questions is: -

Very simply I would like us all to try to be as open as possible, as our code of conduct states - we should give reasons for our decisions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands.

There was no public interest in withholding information concerning this process.”

The Chair noted Councillor Ireland's comments. It was suggested these matters be deferred until the next meeting for further discussion.

Councillor Ireland accepted this.

0162/2223 **ANNUAL TOWN MEETING**

It was proposed by Councillor J Buckley, seconded by Councillor K Sawbridge and unanimously

RESOLVED:

1. To hold the Annual Town Meeting for the current Municipal year on Wednesday 1st March 2023 at the Bridgnorth Community Hall at 6.30pm.
2. To include the date and location of the Annual Town Meeting in the schedule of Council meetings.

0163/2223 **FINANCE**

1. Accounts Paid – August 2022

Members received notification of items which have been paid in accordance with Financial Regulation 5.5.

It was proposed by Councillor S Barlow, seconded by Councillor A Buffey and unanimously

RESOLVED: That the accounts amounting to £50,877.24 be retrospectively approved for payment.

2. Members noted receipt of Cashbooks 1, 2 & 3.
3. Members noted the Budget Summary report, including earmarked reserves.
4. Balance Sheet

Members noted the balance sheet as of the 31st August 2022 (£1,029,955) comprising:

General Fund	£654,507
Earmarked reserves	£202,815
Useable Capital Receipts	£172,633

5. Town Bank Reconciliation Statements

Members noted the bank reconciliation statements as of the 31st August 2022. (Reconciled sum of all bank accounts £854,211.61)

6. Accounts for Payment

Members noted receipt of a list of payments for approval. It was proposed by Councillor N Cooper, seconded by Councillor S Barlow and unanimously

- i) **RESOLVED:** That the accounts amounting to £9,547.37 be approved for payment.
- ii) **RESOLVED:** To authorise Councillors C Aked and N Cooper to sign the cheques on Friday 30th September 2022.

7. Accounting and Audit

Members noted that Councillors A Chetter and N Cooper, on Friday 19th August 2022, verified/signed the bank statements for July 2022 and signed those cheques approved by Council at the meeting held on Tuesday 16th August 2022 and authorised payroll for August 2022.

8. Budget Issues

Members considered a report from the Chair of the Finance Committee, Councillor N Cooper. Members were asked to give a steer on the approach to

- the immediate issues identified
- which (if any) service reductions should be explored

Members expressed concerns about discussing priorities further at this point in time. Information relating to the potential gap along with costings for the services is required so that a more meaningful cost/benefit analysis process can be conducted.

It was suggested that this is looked at by the Finance Committee on Tuesday 11th October 2022 and that this exercise is re-visited at a subsequent Town Council meeting.

0164/2223 PUBLIC BODIES

It was proposed by Councillor C Baines, seconded by Councillor I Wellings and majority

RESOLVED: in terms of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, the following items will be likely to disclose exempt information relating to establishment and contractual matters and it is, therefore, **RESOLVED:** that pursuant to the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded.

Councillor J Buckley abstained.

Rachel Follette and Emily Overton left the meeting at this point.

Members received a brief from the chair of the Workforce Committee Councillor Aked, regarding the Town Clerk recruitment and approved members of the interview panel.