

Woughton Community Council

Operations & Resources Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 11th March 2024, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, the Council Chamber, 60, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.

Present: Cllrs Sue Smith (Chair), Liz Simpkins (Vice-Chair), Eamonn Bobey, Tony Coughlan, Luke Louis, D'Anne Mordecai, Deanna Norris, April Rennie, Alan Williamson

Also present:

Steve McNay (Council Manager)

Marta Sobis (Responsible Finance Officer)

OC 99/24 Apologies:

Cllr Ruth McMillan (unwell)

Agreed and accepted.

OC 100/24 Declarations of Interest:

There were no declarations of interest.

NOTED

OC 101/24 Chairs Announcements:

The Chair reported that:

- Coffee Hall Meeting Place would close on Thursday 14th March, to reopen after Easter. This is to enable refurbishment of the toilets.
- Solar has been installed at Tinkers Bridge Meeting Place and is performing well.
- Sam Rogers (Food Coordinator) has her last day this week.
- The Council Manager collected a cheque from the Police and Crime Commissioner to cover the costs of installing CCTV at all council buildings.

OC 102/24 Questions from the public (Max. 10 minutes):

No questions received.

OC 103/24 Minutes of the previous meeting:

The minutes of the Operations & Resources Committee meeting held on Monday 12th February 2024 Were **AGREED** as a true and correct record and signed by the Chair.

RESOLVED

Proposed: Cllr Sue Smith. Seconded: Cllr Tony Coughlan

OC 104/24 To agree the List of Payments, Bank Reconciliations for the month of January / February 2024:

Due to the delays for January's sign offs (due to absence of RFO), all were signed by Cllr Sue Smith and agreed by all.

RESOLVED

OC 105/24 To recommend use of PAYE for councillor allowances.

Following the RFO investigating the situation with allowances, and to follow best practice and guidance from governing bodies, the RFO proposed that councillor allowances should be paid through PAYE, as they are considered to be 'taxable income' in law.

There was significant discussion around the issue, with questions relating to self-employment, impact on benefits, the potential to move people into higher tax brackets, impact on pensions, etc. The RFO explained that the individual circumstances would be managed through the systems and each situation would be different, but that it should be declared whatever the circumstances. By using PAYE, this covers the council and complies with best practice.

Cllr Smith stated that previous attempts to move councillors to PAYE had caused difficulties and so tabled a proposal:

Proposal: 'That Woughton Community Council continues to offer councillors the choice of having allowances paid through PAYE OR that they sign a declaration stating that they are individually responsible for ensuring that the allowance is declared to all relevant authorities'.

**Proposed by: Cllr Sue Smith Seconded by Deanna Norris
RESOLVED by way of majority vote.**

It was noted that this was against the advice of the RFO and Council Manager.

OC 106/24 Training provision update for the new council year.

Following agreement at the previous meeting that the Council Manager would collate training options that are available through external agencies, alongside details of any training that can be provided locally, a paper was provided with details of these sessions. Due to the number of different sessions suggested and the pressures of time, the committee was asked to prioritise which sessions were most important (with some legal duty ones already agreed). As a result, the following sessions were suggested, to take place on Wednesday evenings on a monthly basis:

First Aid (this also should include the community members noted previously)
Communications and Social Media
GDPR and Data Protection
Standards in Public Life
Meetings, motions and debate – how to work within Standing Orders
Safeguarding*
Anti sexual harassment*
PREVENT*

Charing Meetings training was also suggested but can be provided via BMKALC.

There was also agreement that the previously discussed sessions would form part of this programme:

Domestic Abuse (MK Act)

Modern Slavery
Bystander training

The Council Manager will create the programme and send a calendar of training round to all parties.

RESOLVED

OC 107/24 Legal updates for March 2024

The Council Manager provided updates on procurement limits, meeting dates, references, foreign convictions / bankruptcy, funding to schools and the use of Clerks home addresses for correspondence.

RESOLVED - NOTED

OC 108/24 Prevention of Sexual Harassment policy update

The Council Manager spoke about the paper provided, that details new expectations and legislative demands around protecting employees from sexual harassment. There is a process that the council needs to undertake and to meet these standards, the following proposals were made:

Proposal:

- **That the committee tasks officers with the development of a suitable policy and procedure, engaging with the organisation widely (officers and councillors) to help define the policy.**
- **That this should include a shortened version that can be displayed within buildings to ensure all are aware of their duties.**
- **That these are brought to this committee prior to the proposed implementation in October, with an agreement in place by July 2024 (on the understanding that this may change once law is implemented).**

Proposed by: Cllr Sue Smith Seconded by Cllr Liz Simpkins
RESOLVED by way of unanimous vote.

OC 109/24 Biodiversity Duty update paper

The Council Manager spoke about the papers provided, including the possible template for use around ensuring that WCC, as a local authority, complies with its duties under the 2021 Environment Act. This includes an assurance that WCC is 'considering' what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

To this end, the following was tabled:

Proposal:

- **That the committee tasks the Green Working Group with developing an approach to ensure compliance with the new duty, building on what has happened to this point**
- **That this approach, including details of what / where / when / whom, is presented to this committee for formal ratification.**

Proposed by: Cllr Sue Smith Seconded by Cllr Tony Coughlan
RESOLVED by way of unanimous vote.

OC 110/24 To discuss possible proposals for applications to the Shared Prosperity Fund for public realm improvements

Following a drive around the parish with MKCC representative who help manage the spending of the Shared Prosperity Fund, a paper was created that identified potential areas for improvements to be made. This paper was intended to promote discussion about priorities.

There was considerable discussion around this proposal, with a number of councillors suggesting that spending money on public realm was inappropriate, as this was a duty of MKCC who they stated had failed to maintain appropriately. It was stated that this money should not be spent on anything that MKCC has responsibility for.

It was suggested that this decision could be discussed at the annual meeting in May, that the money be split across the seven estates and have further travels around the estates to identify areas needing work.

The Council Manager explained that this money comes via central government and that there are specific guidelines for spending – what it can / can't be spent on and criteria that needs to be met.

No decision was made. The Council Manager will undertake further work to identify the process that needs to be followed.

Date of next meeting:

Monday 15th April 2024, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, 60, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7.30 PM

Chair _____ Date _____