

Full Council

Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 12th December 2022, 6:30pm at the Woughton Community Council Hub, Council Chamber, The Local Centre, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes

Present: Cllrs Sue Smith (Chair), Maggie Ferguson, Donna Fuller, Brian Hepburn, Luke Louis, Ruth McMillan, Nick Scott, Liz Simpkins, Pam Wilson, Alan Williamson.

Also present:

Steve McNay (Council Manager)

Brian Barton (Committee & Member Services Officer)

FC 137/22 Apologies for Absence:

Cllr Elina Apse (personal) (attended via Zoom Video Call)

Cllr Jeanette Bobey (unwell)

Cllr Jordan Coventry (personal) (attended via Zoom Video Call)

Cllr Penny Glasgow (unwell)

Cllr Amber McQuillan (personal)

Cllr John Orr (personal)

Cllr Terri Parish (unwell)

Cllr Lauren Townsend (personal)

AGREED

FC 138/22 Declaration of interests:

There were no declarations of interests.

NOTED

FC 139/22 Minutes of the previous Full Council meeting:

The minutes of the meeting held on Monday 14th November 2022 were **AGREED** and signed by the Chair as a true and correct record.

FC 140/22 Chair's Announcement(s):

The Chair informed the meeting of the various Santa Sleigh tours taking place this week.

The waste collection service has fallen behind due to the bad weather, Milton Keynes City Council are updating on their social media the revised collection dates, the Chair asked the public to only put their rubbish out on the dates specified.

The Chair asked residents to look out for their neighbours during the cold weather especially if they are elderly, vulnerable and living on their own.

NOTED

FC 141/22 Questions from the public:

There were no questions from the members of the public.

NOTED

FC 142/22 Ward Matters arising:

Cllr Liz Simpkins – Residents are finding it difficult to obtain GP appointments is there anything the Community Council can do to assist?

It was suggested to contact Healthwatch.

NOTED

FC 143/22 Milton Keynes Council Ward Councillors report:

Cllr Donna Coventry – attending most Community Café sessions attendance is growing, also the same for the Games Evenings at the Coffee Hall Community Centre, looking for volunteers for events next year, on the 28th December is a festive games theme, and there will be a Bingo night held this week.

Casework mainly centres on the cost of living crises and housing issues, attending a lot of Milton Keynes City Council meetings.

NOTED

FC 144/22 Feedback from meetings with Outside Bodies:

- a) Woughton Welfare Trust - **Cllr Elina Apse** – No report
- b) MKALC – **Cllr Sue Smith, Cllr Pam Wilson** – Recent meeting held discussed the future it was felt there was still a need to continue.
- c) Parishes Forum - **Cllr Liz Simpkins, Cllr Sue Smith** – No report as both representatives could not attend the last meeting, but will report back in three (3) months when the next meeting takes place.

NOTED

FC 145/22 To note the minutes from the following Committees:

Planning, Licencing & Development Committee – Monday 7th November 2022.

NOTED

FC 146/22 Council Manager's report:

Planning the Warm Spaces project for January – March 2023.

Budget 2023/2024 is challenging due to unknown variables such as salaries, inflation etc.

Meeting Places – gas servicing has been completed, electrical tests are being undertaken, buildings are showing their age and lots of maintenance work is required.

Received feedback that Members are getting too many emails, just delete if not interested will identify the important ones.

All staff one to one's have been completed.

NOTED

FC 147/22 To provide an update on the proposed budget and precept setting for 2023/2024:

This is the third version of the budget that has come to council for consideration and, as with previous versions, this one includes some additional updates. Which include more accurate figures for staffing costs (reduced significantly following work from the Accounts Officer on national insurance contributions) and some, but not full, information about the likely budgets for landscaping. There is also some potential cost savings in key areas, but these decisions have yet to be ratified (e.g. a move to a different phone system, which will save around £3,000 per year).

This budget brings in some level of 'balance', without any level of safety net. With the current issues around inflation, the potential new Landscape contract, wage increases and the impending loss of LCTRS, building a level of savings into the budget is key, it is advised that the council considers a budget that includes both full cost coverage and a level of reserves security.

Discussions at other committee and Full Council meetings have included the real threat that inflation brings, other local councils at a district and unitary level have seen millions in savings lost and at Woughton Community Council costs outstrip income in key areas (e.g. landscape contract increase below the increased cost of wages, let alone fuel, repairs, running costs, etc.).

In addition, the current fuel cap that has seen the worst impacts of the current increases held off, will come to an end at the start of the new financial year. With this playing a significant part of the running costs for all buildings, increases will put further pressure on budgets.

This budget places LCTRS as reducing over three (3) years at a loss of £60,000 in year one (1) and then further reductions of £50,000 for the following two (2) years. In the event that this is lost in one hit (distinctly possible, if not probable, given pressures on the principal authority), this will significantly impact on the council, leading to reserves at a dangerously low level (just over £100,000), this would mean removing money from the long term savings scheme (CCLA), which is intended to be for long term security.

These issues should be balanced against the impact on residents and whilst increases are low in monetary terms (a 5% increase equates to less than £1 a month for the majority of residents), for many within the parish, any increase would place additional pressure on already stretched budgets. Whilst inflation is significantly higher than any suggested increase (food inflation noted at 12.4% this month), these are considerations that council should include within discussions.

The full range of options can be found by changing the cells within the budget sheet this was provided on the evening of the meeting so that all variations can be seen and considered.

The full exploration of the service provided will not be able to be completed prior to the final budget setting, but will continue and can be considered as part of the delivery of services next year (and beyond) with any variations included in any reforecasting.

The Council Manager to supply Cllr Elina Apse separate National Insurance and pension costs which will be provided without identifying individual members of staff.

The Council Manager will ensure that these costs in future are shown in the budget separately.

RESOLVED

- 1. That council notes the updated budget sheet.**
- 2. That council acknowledges the ever changing nature of the budget preparations, and that more information is needed prior to being able to finalise the budget, especially regarding the landscape contract.**
- 3. That council considers the long-term impact of any decisions made regarding the precept, noting the LCTRS situation and eroding levels of reserves.**
- 4. That the suggestion from the Operations Committee of a percentage increase was not agreed and was postponed until greater clarity was reached.**
- 5. That the Full Council meeting in January 2023 must produce an agreed level of precept so as to inform the principal authority.**

FC 148/22 To update council on Survey Feedback for consideration when doing service and budget planning:

The annual 'priorities survey' was, this year, agreed to be focused on the Cost of Living crisis, with questions focused on trying to gain an idea of what residents feel the council should prioritise over the coming winter. Whilst there has been some feedback that sits outside this, the majority has been in response to questions posed specifically around cost of living and as such, using this feedback for more general service and budget planning may be difficult. However, the feedback is excellent in terms of planning for any support over the coming months, this links to the 'winter programme' that is also being discussed at this Full Council meeting.

So far there has been a total of 153 responses (126 responses reported at the last meeting) which were fairly representative of the seven (7) estates of the parish.

The respondents were split in terms of their employment status too.

Almost everyone considered the cost of living situation cause for concern. 94.5% of respondents said that they were quite or very concerned about the situation. This hasn't shifted much since the last time. The biggest concerns were unsurprising, with food and utilities the biggest worries, as noted at the last Full Council meeting.

One of the more surprising results was the things that people want to see Woughton Community Council provide, with mental health and wellbeing support the biggest one, but closely followed by the heating and grub hubs. Grub hubs has been the area with the highest increase since the report to the last Full Council meeting.

One area that will contribute to the longer term planning is the question around which services are most important. It is noticeable that this year, with the question specific to the cost of living issue, that the priorities have changed; community food remains top (in part due to the number of responses from people attending those sessions), with advice, community support coming out on top, with youth, environment and

landscaping also valued. Grants, events and community centres finished towards the bottom. It should be noted that people could choose up to three on this question.

These haven't changed since last time.

Alongside these statistical responses, there were also a number of written comments, varying from very positive to very condemning. There were also comments about what might help that fall way outside the remit of Woughton Community Council levels of benefits, council tax funding policies, housing repairs, costs and improvements and fining people for dropping litter are all areas that council may wish to comment on but have no power to change.

There were positive comments by people on the community fridge and community café, with suggestions that they should extend the hours to enable more people to access them and the idea that provision of heating and food 'hubs' could be hugely beneficial.

Negative comments included a view that all this was pointless, that Woughton Community Council is a 'thieving lot' who steal the food from people's mouths whilst feathering their nests and topping up their pension pots and a recommendation that we should freeze the parish precept. One comment also suggested that we only focus on youths and ignore pensioners.

There were also some comments about wider issues, such as

"The cost of living crisis has not badly affected me at the moment. I am more concerned about the environmental crises. We will all have to suffer to put things on a better track for the natural environment, but few are prepared to." This was echoed by a suggestion that we should focus on rewilding areas and focusing on plant based food initiatives.

This feedback, whilst limited, suggests that ensuring that there is access to mental health support, warm spaces and food for those that need it would be welcomed. In terms of longer term, the services that are provided are seen as valuable in terms of the cost of living, but some were valued more highly than others (grants, community centres and events came lowest but may reflect the impact on cost of living, rather than wider value).

Given the focus on cost of living with this survey, it is recommended that during 2023, a fuller, more in depth survey is undertaken to try and gather views on long term issues for the parish. This could take a similar approach to the current survey, but with a more general tone to questions and a request for contact details for follow up questions for those that are happy to do so. This would and could help focus the work around long term service planning and budgeting.

RESOLVED

- 1. That council notes the report and feedback offered.**
- 2. That council considers this feedback when planning focus for both the coming winter and the coming year, both in terms of service provision and budgets.**

- 3. That council considers a return to a more general priorities survey from March 2023, running through until September 2023, to gain a fuller picture of priorities for residents.**

FC 149/22 Internal Audit Report:

Each year, as part of the governance checks and balances, Woughton Community Council has two internal and one external audit, which lead to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and oversight.

The interim audit, undertaken around October / November has been undertaken by Auditing Solutions Ltd (the company that has undertaken internal audits for the past few years) and has come back with nothing noted as a concern, with a 'clean' audit. Thanks are due to the Accounts Officer, the Responsible Financial Officer and others for ensuring that all was in place for this. This report has already been circulated to Members.

It is recommended that, in the absence of a Responsible Financial Officer currently, to 'roll over' the agreement with Auditing Solutions and continue to appoint them to undertake internal auditing of Woughton Community Council for the coming year. It may be helpful to consider a review in 2024/2025, but the Council Manager is aware that there is a lack of suitable auditing capacity within the sector and Auditing Solutions have always been efficient, helpful and reasonably priced.

In addition to the internal audit, there is also an annual external audit. This can be with any suitably qualified auditor, but the sector appoints agreed auditors at agreed fees, which tend to be more effective and affordable.

Smaller Authorities Audit Appointments (SAAA) is the independent, sector led organisation responsible for the appointment and contract management of external auditors to smaller authorities since the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 established new arrangements for the accountability and audit of local public bodies in England. Smaller authorities are those whose gross annual income or expenditure is **less than £6.5 million**.

Under the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015, SAAA is responsible for appointing external auditors to all opted in smaller authorities, for setting the terms of appointment for limited assurance reviews and for managing the contracts with the appointed audit firms.

SAAA has appointed an external auditor to the authority for the five (5) year appointing period from 2022-2023 until 2026, following a procurement exercise to appoint auditors to each contract area from 1 April 2022. For Buckinghamshire, this will be PKF Littlejohn (this is the same company that has been delivering this service for the past few years, as with Auditing Solutions, they have provided a service that fits with sector demands, is more affordable than others (due to the SAAA agreement) and ensures that Woughton Community Council meets its obligations).

It is recommended that Woughton Community Council uses this scheme for external auditing.

Auditing continues to be an essential element of governance within the sector and within Woughton Community Council. This process, with the two organisations noted, provide reassurance internally, externally and for residents that Woughton Community Council is acting lawfully, effectively and within the best interests and financial constraints necessary.

RESOLVED

- 1. That council notes the Internal Auditors report.**
- 2. That council agrees to retain Auditing Solutions for internal auditing for the coming council year (2023/2024).**
- 3. That the council notes that PKF Littlejohn have been appointed by the Smaller Authorities Audit Authority (SAAA) for external auditing purpose for the local council sector for the next five (5) years and that Woughton Community Council continue to use this scheme for external auditing.**

FC 150/22 To update council on Eaglestone Activity Centre and the proposed transfer:

Woughton Community Council has been managing the Eaglestone Activity Centre for several years, without any formal agreement in place. Discussions have been ongoing for a number of years with regard to formalising the agreement, with a 'transfer' on a long term lease proposed by Milton Keynes City Council. Woughton Community Council has concerns about the potential for significant financial liabilities and, as a result, has declined the offer to this point.

The last report that was presented to council proposed that an agreement with a 'break clause', allowing Woughton Community Council to pass the building back in the event that it becomes unaffordable be included. This was proposed to Milton Keynes City Council who have now included this and requested Woughton Community Council's agreement to progress this.

This clause enables Woughton Community Council to give twelve (12) months' notice at any point after the first five (5) years. This links to the Milton Keynes City Council clause that allows them to give twelve (12) months' notice for any redevelopment.

This is a route that allows a level of security for both parties and appears a reasonable compromise.

The Chair suggested to seek outside funding sources to refurbish the kitchen, equipment and garden.

The Council Manager highlight that in the Heads of Terms that Woughton Community Council's address needs to be updated.

RESOLVED

- 1. That council notes the report, previous discussions and the 'Heads of Terms'.**
- 2. That council agrees to this proposal and works with Milton Keynes City Council to arrange a formal transfer.**

3. **That council includes the Eaglestone Activity Centre within the Community Centre Improvement project (NB this is already in place, but was considered a possible).**
4. **That after five (5) years, the council reviews continuing involvement with the Eaglestone Activity Centre.**

FC 151/22 To propose the replacement of two (2) water dispensers at the Hub and the installation of a further dispenser within the café space:

There are two hot water dispensers within the Hub that have both stopped working.

They have been checked and they are both burned out and need replacing / removing.

In addition, provision of hot water dispensers within community buildings has been spoken about for several years. Whilst work continues in terms of a broader improvement programme, installation of a dispenser within the community café space would be extremely useful.

They are not cheap, with the quote being around £1000 per unit, this does include additional work around fitting (raising the existing ones to enable filling of flasks) and the units cost around £800 each.

An alternative option could be that one is replaced within the Hub, with the other being removed / replaced at a later date.

This issue was raised within the Council Managers report at the last meeting, but with quotes now in place and the proposal for an additional unit, agreement in full can now happen.

RESOLVED

1. **That council agrees to the replacement of the existing dispensers.**
2. **That council agrees to the installation of a water dispenser within the Community Café kitchen.**
3. **That installation of similar systems within all Community Centres is included as part of any refurbishment project.**

FC 152/22 To update council on the Woughton Winter Programme:

Following the last Full Council meeting, further discussions and contacts have been made to extend the programme around 'warm rooms' and similar approaches, to support people across the parish over the winter months. Due to the pressures on time at the last meeting, there was limited discussion or agreement from council with regard to the specifics. The tabled report aims to build upon those early discussions, clarifying the current proposal and asking for any further considerations from councillors.

Woughton Community Council was awarded a sum from Milton Keynes City Council to support the extension of 'warm rooms', with a focus on providing warm spaces and food. For some other councils, this has simply been to open a room and allow people access. Woughton Community Council discussions suggested that a more inclusive and innovative approach would be preferred, with activities and a diverse range of options available.

Current provision includes the community cafes (Coffee Hall, Eaglestone, Tinkers Bridge), Games Night(s), youth service offer and some existing provision within the churches / family centres (separate from Woughton Community Council, but part of the 'parish offer').

Proposals for new sessions include:

- Extending hours on café sessions at Christ the Vine Church, with volunteer support and additional funding
- A new session on Monday afternoons at Netherfield, covering the 'school run' and leading into the youth session
- Extending the hours at Eaglestone Café into the evening with additional support from Woughton Community Council
- A new session that has already started at Tinkers Bridge on a Thursday evening
- A new art class session at Coffee Hall, run by a volunteer with support from Woughton Community Council
- A 'slow cooker course' run by Lisa Lovell at a venue to be confirmed (Netherfield is suggested)
- Community Cinema evenings at all venues (ideas for films being discussed online).

Additional hours where spaces are open, especially where there is existing staffing in place, could also happen relatively easily (e.g. extending hours of the cafes beyond 2:00pm).

Some spending has already taken place, with a portable cinema screen, games and planning for spending to ensure all centres have kitchen equipment.

Any other ideas, for volunteers or additional staffing support or proposals for different activities would be welcome to be included for future delivery.

There may be some need for additional officer support, especially where delivery sits outside the usual delivery hours. This may be able to be covered by officers working more flexibly, but, as has been noted previously, additional delivery means that additional resources may be needed. Some officers have agreed that additional hours would be possible, but not within existing hours (e.g. part time hours currently used but could extend with extra hours). It is recommended that additional hours could be paid specifically for this delivery, utilising the additional funding available.

The Netherfield Chapel are extending their Thursday afternoon warm space session to 3:00pm so this needs to be added to the activities sheet.

It was suggested to add activities onto the warm spaces website.

To ensure details are provided on set up costs on the activities sheet and circulate it, although there is a budget available.

Slow Cooking course costs seems quite high need to re look on how it is delivered as £140 seems expensive, perhaps have an online option.

At Christ the Vine Church it may be useful to have Woughton Community Council volunteers as some residents may not feel comfortable going into a church.

It was agreed not to proceed with the slow cooking course as it was too expensive, and not to use Christ the Vine Church, although the Council Manager will liaise with the Church as a warm space venue.

Councillors are welcome to be volunteers.

Other venues need to be considered for warm spaces, ideas welcomed, perhaps use the community centres.

To change the small grant amount from under £500 to £200.

RESOLVED

1. That council notes the report and associated papers.
2. That council considers the proposals and ideas and adds any additional suggestions.
3. To take off the activities sheet the slow cooking course as it is too expensive to run.
4. To add the list of warm spaces venues onto the warm spaces website.
5. That the Community Services Manager, Council Manager, Community Development Officer and others continue to develop ideas, working with partner organisations where possible.
6. That council agrees to payment of additional hours to officers if needed to extend the delivery out of hours and only where existing hours are insufficient to cover.
7. That council agrees to provide small amounts of funding (under £200) to support this delivery, utilising the grant via Milton Keynes City Council, payable to partners where appropriate.

Date of next meeting:

Monday 16th January 2023, 6:30pm, at the Woughton Community Council Hub, The Council Chamber, the Local Centre, 60, Garraways, Coffee Hall, Milton Keynes, MK6 5EG.

THE CHAIR CLOSED THE MEETING AT 7:46PM

Chair _____ Date _____