

Middlewich Town Council
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Minutes of the Five Hundred and Nineteenth Meeting of Middlewich Town Council, held via Zoom video conferencing on Monday 18th March 2020, commencing at 7.15 pm

PART ONE

Present

Councillors Mike Hunter (Chairman), Jonathan Parry, Sean Boyle, Graham Orme, Vicky Perez, Carol Bulman, Pauline Hickey, Jonathan Parry, Chris Jones, Gareth Williams and David Latham,

In attendance Council Officers:

Lisa Benskin Town Clerk, Nicola Antoney Administration Assistant and David Thompson Events Manager

ANNUAL REQUIREMENTS

1. To elect a Chairman of the Council

Resolved 8330

Following a proposal by Cllr Perez which was seconded by Cllr Boyle, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Mike Hunter be appointed Chairman of the Council for the year 20/21.

2. To receive the declaration of acceptance of office from the Chairman

Cllr Hunter gave and signed the Declaration of acceptance of office.

3. To receive any announcements to be made by the Chairman

Cllr Hunter began by thanking everyone who has voted for him and his proposer and seconder. And noted that in the first meeting that had taken place during lockdown, as a result of the Coronavirus, it would be amiss not to thank those people nurses, doctors, carers, volunteers in our Town, and the Council officers Lisa, Nicci and Bev for the all the work they have put in. "It just goes to show that when trouble does hit us, we do all pull together and we do all move in the right direction, so on behalf of the Town Council I would like to say thank you to all those who have gone the extra mile in this really extreme time."

4. To receive a vote of thanks for the outgoing Chairman

Cllr Hunter thanked Russell for stepping into the breach, when Rachel had to resign from the Council due to personal reasons. He was the ideal applicant because of the experience he had on County, Borough and Town Council previously, to get us through what has been a very turbulent time because of the audit and the financial mess that was left to us. Russell along with Helen and Lisa have done sterling work in getting us to a position where going forward things will be done above board, open and transparent and we are setting the Town Council up onto a firm footing.

The Town Clerk then made an announcement on behalf of councillors Helen and Russell Watkinson

We both resign as councillors from Middlewich Town Council. Councillor Helen Watkinson has decided that continued health problems preclude her continuing as a productive and energetic councillor. She has always been fully committed to the role, especially through difficult circumstances.

Russell too feels he cannot continue to serve as a Town Councillor, he has his own health concerns and also feels he needs to fully support his wife in her recovery.

We would like to thank the electors of Middlewich for giving us a second opportunity to serve them and our Town. We have always had the Towns interest at heart and are proud to have been part of the Councils determination to improve its legal and financial obligations.

We thank the staff for all their hard work through trying times. We wish the Town Council every success in the future.

5. To elect a Deputy Chairman of the Council

Resolved 8331

Following a proposal by Cllr Bulman which was seconded by Cllr Latham, it was **RESOLVED** that Cllr Jonathan Parry be appointed Deputy Chairman of the Council for the year 20/21.

6. To receive the declaration of acceptance of office from the Deputy Chairman

Cllr Parry gave and signed the Declaration of acceptance of office.

7. To appoint Committees, Sub-Committees and Bank signatories as detailed in Annex A

Resolved 8332

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint the Committees, Sub-Committees and Bank Signatories are detailed on Annex A.

8. To appoint members to active Working Groups as detailed in Annex B

Resolved 8333

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Members to active Working Groups as detailed in Annex B.

9. To appoint Members to External Bodies as detailed in Annex C

Resolved 8334

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Members to External Bodies as detailed in Annex C subject to the addition of Cllr Orme to replace Cllr Russell Watkinson on the ANSA Liaison Group and Cllr Bulman to replace Cllr Helen Watkinson on the Middlewich Heritage Trust.

The complete Annexes are attached to these minutes for clarity.

FEEDBACK AND REPORTS

10. To receive and approve apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Russell Watkinson and Helen Watkinson (Health)

11. To note any Declarations of Members' Interest on any agenda item

Cllr Hickey declared an interest as a property owner on Kitfield Avenue

Cllr Latham declared an interest as a property owner on Kitfield Avenue, a member of the ANSA Liaison Committee, FAB Working Group and owning a Company within Middlewich.

Councillor Orme declared a personal interest as his wife is employed by the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, he is a former employee of Compass Minerals and is now a member of the ANSA Liaison Committee.

12. Public Participation

Those members of the public who submitted questions in advance did not attend the meeting as such, their questions will be responded to in writing. There were no other public questions.

13. To receive and adopt the Minutes of the Five Hundred and Eighteenth Meeting of Middlewich Town Council held on Monday 16th March 2020

Resolved 8335

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on 16th March 2020 be received and confirmed as a true record.

14. To ratify the appointment and contract of the Town Clerk from 1st April 2020 following the recommendations made by the Recruitment Sub-Committee.

Resolved 8336

It was **RESOLVED** that the decision of the Recruitment Sub-Committee to appointment and offer a contract to the Town Clerk from 1st April 2020 be ratified.

15. To note the decisions made by the Town Clerk using the delegated powers afforded since the last meeting

Resolved 8337

It was **RESOLVED** that members note and ratified the decisions made.

16. To consider an amendment to the Document Retention Policy with respect to the retention of meeting recordings

Resolved 8338

It was **RESOLVED** that the proposed amendments to the Document Retention Policy with respect to meeting recordings as detailed in report F2003 be approved.

17. To consider the postponement and any other issues arising with respect to the Folk and Boat Festival 2020

Resolved 8339

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The current postponement of the Event be maintained, and this decision be reviewed at each month's Full Council meeting based on changes in Government advice.
- b) The FAB Fringe registration fee be reduced from £250 reduced to £100 for this year.
- c) The Wheelock Street Market will take place on Sunday 27 Sept in addition to Saturday 26th Sept (assuming the retailers would open to support the event).
- d) That free stalls be offered to Schools /PTA groups.

It was noted that a final decision on whether the event will take place in September would need to be made at the July Council meeting at the latest.

18. To consider the postponement or cancellation of other upcoming events

Resolved 8340

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) the Classic Car and Bike Show be postponed from July until October,
- b) all events be reviewed monthly based on changes in Government advice, and
- c) the abortive costs for the What's On Guide be paid in the sum of £300

19. To set up a working group to consider and report upon the Town's Christmas Light's contract which is due for renewal

Resolved 8341

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) A Working Group be set up consisting of Cllrs Bulman, Hunter, Perez and Orme to obtain a new Christmas Lights supplier to work within the budget set of £14000.
- b) The Terms of reference for the Working Group should include;
 - to review the contract/purchase options and prices available and make recommendations to Council as to which provider they would recommend entering into a contract with.

- that the possibility of a sponsor or sponsors for the Town Tree and/or some elements of the lights should be considered.
 - that the group should consider the Town Council purchasing their own Christmas lights and obtaining a contractor for installation and maintenance
- c) That authority to enter into and complete the new Contract should be delegated to the Town Clerk once a decision has been made by Council.

20. To consider the Council’s membership of the Cheshire Association of Local Councils

Resolved 8342

It was **RESOLVED** that the Council continue to be a member of ChALC and that payment of the Annual Fee be approved.

21. To receive an update on the work being carried out to provide support to the residents of Middlewich during the current Coronavirus pandemic

Resolved 8343

Members noted the update provided and **RESOLVED** to record their thanks to Nicola, Lisa, Beverley and the Town’s volunteers for their hard work in supporting the Town during the Coronavirus pandemic.

22. To receive a Heritage Update Report

Resolved 8344

Members noted the detail in the fantastic report from Kerry and **RESOLVED** to note and receive the same.

23. To consider any Members’ Items previously submitted in writing

23.1 To request a full and proper response to the detailed FOI request submitted by Middlewich Town Council to CEC on 16th March 2020

Resolved 8345

Members **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk write to Simon Davies at Cheshire East Council to request the missing information from the FOI request so that the Highways Consultation Groups have access to all the required information to enable meaningful consultation to take place.

23.2 To request Nationwide Building Society to respond to the following questions;

- a) **Why is the Middlewich branch currently closed?**
- b) **what is the proposed reopening date of the Middlewich branch?**

Cllr Jones advised that since the motion had been submitted, Nationwide had advised that the branch would be opening 2 days per week.

Resolved 8346

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Members **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk write to Nationwide to gain their confirmation that the branch will open fully 5 days a week once the Coronavirus crisis is over and their assurance that there are no plans to close or consider the closure of the branch.

24. To receive verbal reports from Members of Cheshire East Council

Cllr Parry advised that Cheshire East Council had been conducting some meetings using Teams and are intending to hold a Full Council meeting in June online. Regular updates being received on Covid19 from Council officers that Cllr Parry has been sharing with the Town Clerk due to their relevance to Middlewich. Cllr Parry has been appointed Joint Mental Health Champion at CEC to ensure the Council is doing as much as they can to support it. The new pages related to Covid19 Mental Health issues have been launched this week during Mental Health Awareness Week and are available on the CEC website.

Cllr Bulman advised that her work with Children and Families has been ongoing using online meetings. Cllr Bulman is now on Audit and Governance as vice chair of the scrutiny committee for corporate parenting. There have been a number of long Cheshire Pensions scheme meetings given the recent stock market turmoil. There is also ongoing Cheshire Pensions training.

Cllr Hunter has been carrying out lots of Teams training, but his main role has been as Chairman of strategic planning and working with the planning team to look at application numbers and consider when they can be heard. Considering bringing forward the June Strategic Planning Meeting as the applications are building up. CEC has been doing a lot and people like Julie Walker have been immense value to CEC while this lockdown has been done.

Cllr Parry also added that CEC and the Town Council had been regularly contacting Care and Residential homes to check they were ok and had sufficient staffing levels and PPE or if they needed any assistance. Also spoken with Cllr Laura Jeuda who is the portfolio holder covering this area and she has been providing updates that the care homes are ok at the moment and everything is being done as a council to ensure that they can continue to help these homes.

25. To review the Resolutions Log

Resolved 8347

Members **RESOLVED** to review the Resolutions Log and report back to the next meeting on the status of items, whether they needed to remain on the log and to specify which should be priorities for officers.

26. Member questions to the Clerk

Cllr Latham asked as to whether the issues he had raised previously namely, writing to Mr Bailey with respect to the hording round his unsafe property on Lewin Street and resolving the issue with respect to the damage to Victoria Hall roof.

The Town Clerk advised that due to her extremely high workload and the Audit and AGAR priorities she had not been able to progress either of these matters. The Town Clerk noted that she is also struggling to obtain the information required to progress the issues. She needed Mr Bailey's address and details of the dates of the storm that it is though caused the damage to the roof to be able to contact the insurance company and respond to the queries that will inevitably be raised.

FINANCE

27.To consider and approve invoices due for payment

Resolved 8348

Members **RESOLVED** to receive and approve payment of the invoices due.

28.To note payments made

Resolved 8349

Members noted the payments and **RESOLVED** to receive them as detailed.

29.To consider the second report of the Internal Auditor and actions taken as a result

Resolved 8350

Members reviewed and noted the report and **RESOLVED** to receive it as detailed.

Members reviewed the report contents and noted the work carried out to resolve the majority of the issues.

Members requested that the Town Clerk write to the Cemetery Board to provide a deadline for a response to Rialtas RBS with respect to the Cemetery Data.

30.To note the revised procedure for approval of the Annual Accounts and Annual Governance and Assurance Return 2019/20

Members noted the changes and inevitable delays to the procedures as a result of the Covid19 restrictions.

31.To review and authorise the list of Direct Debit payments to be made

Resolved 8351

Members **RESOLVED** to authorise the list of Direct Debit payments to be made by the on behalf of the Council, as they fall due, for the financial year 20/21.

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORTATION

None

PLANNING

32. To consider delegating the responsibility for responding to Planning Applications to the External Committee

Resolved 8352

It was **RESOLVED** that the responsibility for Planning Applications be transferred to the External Committee, subject to appropriate Terms of Reference.

33. To consider the following Planning Applications:

It was **RESOLVED** to submit the following comments:

20/1702C

The Council raises no objections to the proposal subject to neighbours' comments, particularly with respect to the potential loss of privacy as a result of the dormer window.

20/1777C

The Council raises no objections to the application subject to neighbours' comments, and the Planning Officer being satisfied that there is still sufficient parking within the curtilage of the property in light of the loss of the garage.

34. To note the latest Planning Decisions

Members noted the decisions and Cllr Hunter indicated that progress was being made with respect to the bypass.

ENVIRONMENT

35. To consider a report and recommendation from the External Committee with respect to Air Quality

Resolved 8353

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) Members agree that the Council carry out a fundamental review of air quality and focus on measuring all DEEE's;
- b) Member agree to set up a Working Group to carry out this review, which includes members of the Public. This working group will report to the External Committee.
- c) Consider purchasing a suitable fixed monitoring station at an estimated cost of £4000 to provide the required data, subject to the obtaining of best value. The Working Group to report back to the External issue on any such purchases.

- d) Deliver an Air Quality presentation to the public.
- e) Seek consultation from Cheshire East Council for support with respect to funding and installation

FUTURE MEETING DATES

36. To note dates of forthcoming meetings

The dates were noted.

PART 2

To make a resolution to move into Part 2 session and exclude the public and press from the meeting on the grounds that the matters to be discussed contain confidential information relating to staffing and financial matters and commercially sensitive information.

37. To consider the confidential elements of the second report of the Internal Auditor

An update was provided to Councillors and it was noted that these items were being progressed as far as possible in the current circumstances.

38. To note the increase in the National Living Wage and to approve the application of this increase to £9.30 per hour for staff members who receive the Living Wage rate from 1st April 2020.

Resolved 8348

It was **RESOLVED** that the increased Living Wage rate of £9.30 be paid to those staff and that this be backdated to the 1st April 2020.

39. To consider the latest advice with respect to Employee working arrangements during the Covid19 Pandemic

It was noted that the recommended course was for staff to continue working from home and an updated Risk Assessment be provided for consideration at the June meeting.

40. To consider any additional staffing items arising

The Town Clerk provided an update on two staffing issues.

Resolved 8349

It was **RESOLVED** that an Occupational Health report be obtained for one member of staff and advice be sought from Wirehouse with respect to another member of staff.

Members requested that the Town Clerk review the current staffing arrangement of the Council and reported back to Full Council on the same.

41. To consider the recruitment of a Deputy Town Clerk

Resolved 8350

It was **RESOLVED** to promote the Administration Assistant to the role of Deputy Town Clerk subject to contractual terms to be agreed by the Internal Committee at their next meeting.

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