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**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

Minutes of the Meeting of Lewes Town Council held on Thursday 16th December 2021 at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Lewes Town Hall

Present:

Councillor Dr J Baah

Councillor M Bird

Councillor R Burrows (joined at 19:45)

Councillor S Catlin (Mayor)

Councillor G Earl

Councillor R Handy

Councillor J Herbert

Councillor J Lamb

Councillor I Makepeace

Councillor Dr W Maples

Councillor S Sains (Deputy Mayor)

Councillor K Wood

In attendance:

Town Clerk

Committee Administrator

78. Filming of Council Meetings Use of Social Media and Mobile Phones

The procedures were noted.

79. Members' declarations of interest

Councillors Earl, Lamb, Makepeace and Maples all declared an interested in item 7 on the Agenda in that they are all owners of Lewes Football Club.

80. Apologies for absence

There were apologies from Councillors Mayhew and Vernon who were both shielding from COVID-19, Councillor Milner due to COVID-19, Councillor O'Keeffe who had a family commitment and Cllr Waring due to a family member having COVID-19.

81. Question time

There were none.

82. Minutes

Minutes of the Council meeting held on 11th November 2021 were received and agreed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

83. Mayoral Announcements

83.1 The Mayor requested that Members promote the Energy Advice Services from the Climate Hub. This service was now being offered by telephone, email or online only, due to COVID-19. The Communications Officer would be sending a link to a Facebook post for Members to share and offered to create content for Twitter and Instagram for Members that used those platforms.

83.2 The Mayor was delighted to announce that Grace Nichols had been awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. The Mayor had written to Ms Nichols congratulating her on this achievement.

84. Committees, Working Parties & Outside Bodies

84.1 Grants Panel 1st December 2021

Members considered report FC015 containing recommendations for payments of grants for the third cycle (of four) for the year 2021 to 2022. **It was resolved that:**

The Grant payments recommended in report FC015 as shown in column H of the table appended to the report be approved.

85. Lewes Football Club

Members considered a notice of motion (NOM011/2021) that Council resolves to hold a launch event for Lewes Football Club at the Town Hall in support of their Impact Report and the recently received 'Culture Pioneers for Inclusion' Award.

85.1 Lewes Football Club had recently published their Impact Report for the season 2020 to 2021 and were seeking a local venue to launch the report and present it to their partners to illustrate how both the Women's and Men's teams and the activities that they were implementing at the club were effecting change in the local community. **It was resolved that:**

The Town Council offers the Council Chamber free of charge in support of the launch event.

86. Urban Grass Cutting Service Options

86.1 Members considered report FC016/2021, Urban Grass Cutting Service Options, which the Town Clerk summarised.

86.2 East Sussex County Council (ESCC) were offering three different options to the Town Council (outlined in section 4 of the report). For the previous three years the Town Council had opted for option 1 – standard cut.

86.3 The urban grass cut normally happens twice a year, usually in June and September/October. However, if there was a Health and Safety issue i.e. sightlines for drivers, an extra cut would be provided. In some of the urban areas there had been wildflowers planted and these verges had a different cutting schedule.

86.4 Currently, the Town Council did not have the resources to take on responsibility to deliver all urban grass cutting as outlined in option 3 of the report but wished to investigate this in the future. It was noted the grass cutting service was currently operated by three local authorities using six contractors and this can be problematic and confusing. It was suggested that Council also look at the possibility of carrying out the maintenance of 'Rural Verges' and 'Wildflower Verges'.

- 86.5** **It was resolved that:**
Council agree Urban Grass Cutting option 1 for 2022 – standard: Two cuts over the course of a year to be carried out by ESCC at no cost to the Town Council. Urban grass would be managed for safety purposes only.
- 86.6** Council explores option 3 – self delivery for future years. Options to explore include urban, rural and wildflower verges, as well as partnerships to deliver the grass cutting service, including contractors, other Local Authorities, and other organisations (for example community groups or colleges). In exploring the options Council should look at its own policy for grass verges.

87 **COVID-19 Update**

- 87.1** Members considered report FC017/2021, COVID-19 Update that proposed a way forward for meeting remotely in early 2022 should it not be possible to do so through current legislation. The Town Clerk summarised the report, outlining the three sections in the report with examples.

Meetings of Council and Committees

- 87.2** The National Association of Local Councils (NALC) had issued basic guidance when following the Prime Ministers announcement to move to Plan B in England following the spread of the Omicron variant in the UK. NALC had suggested that Councils consider not meeting in December and recommended that officers should not attend in person, reminding Council's that there is no legislation in place to allow Council's to meet remotely and make decisions at those meetings.
- 87.3** NALC, The Local Government Association (LGA), Lawyers in Local Government, The Association of Democratic Service Officers and the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) had all been lobbying Government since May 2021 to resume virtual meetings to minimise infection spread and protect the vulnerable.
- 87.4** The above bodies had advised Councils to take steps to address the issue through measures such as delegation to clerks, deferring controversial decisions or holding meetings at a later date. Considering this advice, the Town Clerk had taken guidance from Sussex SLCC and the Chief Executive of East Sussex Association of Local Councils (ESALC).
- 87.5** Emergency provisions were proposed should Council be unable to meet in person, but a decision was required imminently. The report proposed Council and Committee meetings be replaced by Advisory Groups, operating in the same way but would only make recommendations not resolutions, and those recommendations are made to the Town Clerk to make the decision in consultation with the Mayor and Group Leads. Using the meeting agenda as an example, the Town Clerk explained, the Advisory Council would meet virtually to discuss the Grants report and recommend to the Clerk to make the payments because a decision is awaited by the applicants. The Clerk would make the decision based on the recommendation from Advisory Council.
- 87.6** Council could decide not to implement this delegated authority, but as advised by ESALC, if things were to clamp down and government doesn't implement legislation for virtual meetings the work of Council would have to halt. The Clerk confirmed Council cannot delegate the setting of the Precept, therefore options would have to be looked at in January if meeting in person was an issue.

Services

87.7 Use of face masks, opening windows where possible and the use of hand sanitiser had been implemented for staff and visitors to all Council premises and the current capacity of 75% was still in place to allow social distancing.

87.8 Daily temperature checks were being carried out in the office for staff and for members who were attending meetings. Staff were being encouraged to take a lateral flow test twice a week. Visitors to the office were being minimised.

Communications

87.9 The Town Clerk was liaising with the Communications Officer to set up a website page showing the Town Council's COVID secure measures, so the public were aware of safety measures when entering Town Council venues. Signposting on the website would be available directing users to sites such as the NHS, UK Government, Foodbank and energy checking websites.

87.10 Thanks were noted for the report which was then debated by Members with further explanation being given. Clarification was sought on the role of Group Leader and Group Convenor and why 'committee meetings' needed to become 'advisory groups' as it was understood that as Government guidance changed legislation would be put in place for virtual committee meetings.

87.11 The Town Clerk clarified that Group Leader is the Lead Member for the Liberal Democrat Party and Group Convener the Lead Member of the Green Party. It was confirmed the Independents had a Group Lead and therefore the proposal should refer to Group Lead as plural. It was confirmed the Mayor's role was not purely ceremonial, the Mayor's role was non-political and that the position is as Chair of the Council.

87.12 What was being proposed was that all Members of Full Council would sit as an Advisory Council Group and engage in making recommendations virtually rather than making resolutions in a face-to-face meeting in the Council Chamber. Virtual resolutions were not legal at present therefore recommendations made by Advisory Council would be put forward to the Town Clerk and the decision would be taken by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor and Group Leads. It was clarified that if the Advisory Group wished to make amendments to the recommendations or proposals it was considering in a meeting then that could be done in that meeting, resulting in an amended recommendation to the Town Clerk. It was clarified that the Town Clerk would not during that consultation change or deviate from the recommendation made by Advisory Council. There would be no voting process when the Town Clerk consulted with the Mayor and Group Leads. The only time the Town Clerk would not make the decision would be if it were illegal, in which case it would be referred back.

87.13 It was queried as to whether this restrained democracy. The Clerk explained it was potentially more democratic as those that couldn't attend a meeting in person due to COVID, as was the case for four Members this evening, could attend virtually. Everybody would engage in the meeting online, but instead of making a resolution the Advisory Group would make a recommendation. It was also noted that residents could participate more easily if meetings were online.

87.14 The Town Clerk could not make decisions solely unless matters had been delegated in a scheme of delegation. Lewes Town Council does not have a scheme of delegation at present, other than those outlined in Standing Orders, and it has no Urgent Action procedure as is being used by West Sussex County Council instead of holding a December meeting. The Clerk explained if there was an urgent action procedure it would be normal practice that the Clerk would make a decision in consultation with the Mayor, or if it was related to a decision

delegated to a specific Committee, it would be implemented in consultation with the Chair and possibly the Vice-Chair of that Committee. The Mayor requested a Scheme of Delegation be brought to Council as soon as practically possible.

87.15 Several Parish/Town Council's had been using the process outlined in the report since the legislation expired on 6th May 2021. Others had a Scheme of Delegation in place.

87.16 It was proposed that the Town Clerk, on behalf of Lewes Town Council, write to the Minister of Housing and Communities to add their voice in changing current legislation regarding virtual Committee Meetings.

87.17 A further suggestion if legislation was passed, was to film virtual meetings of the Council to encourage more public participation. The Town Clerk confirmed that virtual meetings could be published online.

87.18 It was resolved that:

1. Council and Committee meetings be delivered as Advisory Groups with the same Memberships, Terms of Reference and Standing Orders as now, other than they are only able to make recommendations to the Town Clerk and that
2. in these circumstances, give the Town Clerk authority in consultation with the Mayor and Group Lead(s), to implement the recommendations of the Advisory Groups.
3. Retain the current capacity restriction of 75% in Town Council facilities.
4. Note the contents of the report.
5. The Town Clerk, on behalf of Lewes Town Council, write to the Minister of Housing and Communities to add their voice in changing current legislation regarding virtual Committee Meetings.
6. Council records its thanks to the Town Clerk for her comprehensive report.

88. Items for press release

88.1 Grants Panel decisions

Lewes Football Club Impact Report launch event

The meeting closed at 8:45pm.

TOWN MAYOR