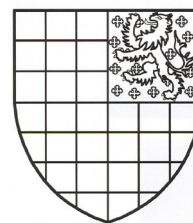


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**LEWES  
TOWN  
COUNCIL**

## **MINUTES**

of the meeting of the **Open Council Working Party**, held on **Monday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2021**, online via Zoom Meetings at 7:00pm.

**PRESENT** Cllrs Catlin; Henman; Dr Maples (*Chair*); Sains; Vernon and Waring

**In attendance:** S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*) Mrs F Garth (*Assistant Town Clerk & Civic Officer*) Laura Chrysostomou (*TC Designate*)

**OCWP2021/10** **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies had been received from Cllr O’Keeffe, who was attending a District Council Cabinet meeting, and Cllr Wood who was unwell. No message had been received from Cllrs Bird; Herbert, or Makepeace.

**OCWP2021/11** **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** Cllrs Dr Maples declared that she is a Council allotment tenant, with regard to the item scheduled at 6b) on the agenda.

**OCWP2021/12** **QUESTIONS:** There were no questions.

**OCWP2021/13** **MINUTES:**

**It was resolved that:**

**OCWP2021/13.1** The Minutes of the meeting held on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2021 are received and agreed as an accurate record.

**OCWP2021/14** **REMIT of the WORKING PARTY**

Members noted the remit of the Working Party, which is:

To identify methods for improved public engagement and greater provision of information to residents of Lewes, to include:-

- › A review of information sharing and the methods used to share key events and policy developments.
- › Consideration of good practice on methods of online deliberation and social media, such as on key town-wide issues
- › Identifying ways to provide more joined-up support for community engagement in and around Council-owned buildings.

**OCWP2021/15** **BUSINESS of the MEETING**

*1 Public Participatory Budget pilot:*

A sub-group consisting of Cllrs Vernon and Waring were to develop designs for ‘Top Trump’ cards but had unfortunately not been able to meet since the last meeting. There was some discussion on the concept and principles of Community Infrastructure Levy; the fund that was to be subject to the public participation.

Cllr Vernon and Waring would endeavour to meet in the next few days. A timetable was agreed as :

- › Cllr Vernon and Waring would bring draft designs to a focussed meeting of the Working Party to be scheduled for Week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> October.
- › ‘Friends and family’ of Members would be used as guinea-pigs to test the impact of the scheme during week commencing 11<sup>th</sup> October.
- › The Working Party would meet again during week commencing 25<sup>th</sup> October, or earlier if possible, to refine proposals for Council on 11<sup>th</sup> November (deadline for Council agenda items was 1<sup>st</sup> November)

There was a question as to the timescale, and TC advised that as the CIL fund was a ring-fenced sum held on account, and this project was not directly linked to the annual budget process. What the project aimed to do was seek input from the

public on priorities for expenditure of that existing fund, related to the list of identified items in s11 of the Neighbourhood Plan. He recounted the timing of the incoming annual tranches of CIL received, which each had to be disbursed within 5 years or risk being reclaimed by the Planning authority. He advised that it was not necessary to define the amount to be spent, as the principle was to prioritize importance. Some Members felt that it was important to declare the amount available. Members were asked to consider practical points for consideration at the next meeting, such as recommended printers.

2 *Allotment representatives:* The meeting had previously considered suggestions put forward by an allotment tenant for having more Tenant engagement across and between sites, through a system of representation at Council Allotment Group meetings – and a request for regular Allotment meetings. It was suggested that volunteers be representatives for each of the Council sites, initially by invitation and subsequently following an election process.

The Working Party had considered such questions as the democratic dilemma posed by individuals as representatives and contrasting models such as an Allotments Society (either pan-Lewes or site-for-site).

Members had been asked to crystallize their ideas on these issues, and these were discussed. In essence these were:

- a) To canvass all allotment tenants regarding formation of an allotment society.
- b) To appoint (by selection or election) representatives from each site on an arithmetical basis according to the size of the site.
- c) To postpone a decision on representatives pending a series of open meetings across the next year year (3 or 4) to which all tenants were invited.
- d) To hold a Symposium for all tenants, to be held once clocks had reverted to Greenwich Mean Time for practical reasons, at which the general question of representation could be openly debated.

A question arose regarding practice at other Councils, and the TC Designate offered to source a role description for a volunteer site representative. The discussion continued and ultimately an informal vote was taken on these options **it was agreed that** the option to hold a Symposium later in the Autumn (shown as *d*) above).

3 *Working Party status:* It had been suggested that the Working Party should have a continuing remit beyond the tasks set by Council originally, and some Members wished to promote the recommendation that the Working Party should become a standing Committee. TC had advised that it was open to Members to take that forward and present a case to Council, and the Chair had undertaken to prepare an argument in favour of this. The reasoning was given as:

- > There will continue to be regular changes in how the community is reached.
- > The Communications Officer might find it useful to have a standing committee as a 'sounding board'
- > Recent proposals at other levels of government such as 'Citizens' Assembly' offer opportunities which, although addressed by the Communications officer, might also require strategic decisions to which a standing committee could have helpful input.
- > A standing committee would act as a conduit for supporting communication.
- > A standing committee could usefully scrutinize communications strategies on behalf of Council – currently subject to informal comment by individual Members.

There followed a debate in which Members stated that these points were not new, and already adequately addressed by the *ad hoc* nature of the Working Party. Many of the things mentioned were part of the routine functioning of Council and the engagement of individual Councillors, adequately addressed by Council at its regular meetings. TC was asked to comment and recounted the legal distinctions and the reasoning behind the original formation of the current Council structure, with a

minimum number of standing bodies and using 'task & finish' working groups to address matters when it was impractical for an issue to be considered appropriately at a Council meeting due to complexity or scale. The list of suggested benefits appeared to be no more than the principles already underlying the roles of individual Members and officers and Council corporately. It was commented that there was little evidence of adequate scrutiny of communications, although other Members considered the matter was properly covered, and it was acknowledged that once Council set a principle it was executed by officers with professional discretion. A Member suggested that the working party should focus on its original remit, which was not yet fully addressed. It was proposed and **agreed**, in accord with this view, that once the Participatory Budget project issues were addressed, the next general Working Party meeting should focus upon the main remit originally set and it should then be clear if there was any merit in a change in status.

**OCWP2021/16**

**CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. The next meeting of the Working Party will take place during week commencing 4<sup>th</sup> October to agree designs for the Public Participatory Budget pilot scheme.
2. Council will be asked to agree a Symposium for all allotment tenants (to be held once clocks had reverted to Greenwich Mean Time for practical reasons) at which the general question of tenant representation can be openly debated.
3. Once the Participatory Budget project issues were addressed, the next general Working Party meeting will focus upon the main tasks within the original remit and it should then be clear if there was any merit in proposing a change to a standing Committee.

**OCWP2021/17**

There being no further business, the Chairman declared the meeting closed, and thanked everyone for their attendance. *The meeting closed at 8:25pm.*

Signed ..... date .....