

Local Government Act 1972



Local Government for Langton Green, Speldhurst, Ashurst and Old Groombridge

Minutes of the Full Council Meeting

Held on Monday 5th December 2022 at 7.00pm in the Committee Room, Speldhurst Village Hall

MEMBERS PRESENT

Councillors Curry (Chair), Barrington-Johnson, Ellery, Mrs Lyle (Vice-Chair), Norton, Rajah, Rowe, Scarbrough, Mrs Soyke and Mrs Woodliffe

OFFICERS PRESENT

Mrs K Neve, Clerk and Mrs C Barrett, Assistant Clerk (minutes).

IN ATTENDANCE

County Councillor McInroy, Borough Councillor Sankey and Borough Councillor Ms Willis (from 7.30pm) were in attendance.

MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were two members of the public present.

22/243 Covid Compliance

Those in attendance were free to decide whether to wear a mask according to their own wishes.

22/244 To enquire if anyone intends to record the meeting

The meeting was recorded by the Clerk for accuracy of the minutes. The recording would be deleted once the meeting minutes are signed off at the next Full Council meeting.

22/245 To accept and approve apologies and reasons for absence

Apologies had been received from Cllr Turner (Covid-related).

22/246 Disclosure of Interests

The Clerk and the Assistant Clerk declared an interest in item 16a, to consider approving the review of staff salary increases.

22/247 Declarations of Lobbying

There were none.

22/248 Minutes of the Full Council Meeting held on 7th November 2022

RESOLVED that the minutes, previously forwarded to Members were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

22/249 Co-option of new Councillors

The two members of public, Ms Kay Dooley and Mr Domenico Tarricone left the room while Cllr Mrs Lyle made a recommendation on behalf of the Co-option Working Group that they be co-opted as Councillors. It was then **RESOLVED** to co-opt Ms Dooley and Mr Tarricone on to the Council, and after signing the declaration of acceptance of office, they took their places at the meeting. The Chair welcomed Cllrs Ms Dooley and Tarricone to the Council and said he looked forward to working with them.

22/250 Public Open Session

There were no members of public present.

22/251 Borough and County Councillors' Reports

- Cllr McInroy said there would be a £20-25m shortfall in Kent County Council's (KCC) 2023-24 budget, and the reduction of a number of non-statutory services provided by the council was being considered as a way of making up the difference. He explained that the 2.99% increase in council tax which had been set for local authorities by the Government, together with 2% which was ringfenced for social care, and the Government's £30m contribution fell short because of a rise in inflation.
Cllr Barrington-Jonson asked why the Government had capped the council tax increase at 2.99%, and Cllr McInroy said there didn't seem to be a clear answer other than political direction.
Cllr Rajah asked if there was an update on the grants payable to Ukrainian students attending primary schools in the parish. Only a fraction of the grant for each child had been paid. Cllr McInroy said that he would find out why the full amount had still not been released by central government.
Cllr Sankey noted that Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) had elected not to raise the council tax until it became mandatory. This meant the borough's council tax rates remained lower than neighbouring boroughs, although this had led to a deficit.
- Cllr Sankey reported that 10,000 letters had been sent to a random selection of residents inviting them to respond to the boundary review public consultation. Of those who responded, 64% requested an 'all out' electoral system, and 36% requested the current system of 'thirds'. A further 65% of residents who accessed the consultation independently requested 'all out' elections, while 35% requested thirds. The Borough Council would take these figures into account when it met the following week.
- The 288/235 school bus routes between the parish and secondary schools in Tonbridge had been cancelled by Autocar, effective from January, due to staffing issues. This would affect many children in the parish travelling to and from school. KCC had invited a number of bus companies to tender for the route but none had come forward. Cllr Sankey had talked to Hams Travel and Arriva about incorporating part of these routes into their scheduled school bus services. Hams Travel had already said they were unable to send a double decker bus into Speldhurst village because of overhanging branches in the roads. Cllr McInroy said he would chase up his email asking about the possibility of funding for a parish-run bus service.

22/252 Chair's Report

The Chair said he would incorporate his report on the recent Kent Association of Local Councils (KALC) meeting into item 16f.

22/253 Clerk's Report

The Clerk had circulated a list of 2023/24 Full Council, Committee and Working Group meeting dates. The dates had now been set up to and including April 2024.

22/254 General Matters

New - Items arising since last Full Council meeting				
	Summary	Owner	Created	Status
56/22	Meeting with Cllr Barrington-Johnson and Mr Cornelius regarding LG carpark issues. <i>To be re-organised for November/December.</i>	Clerk	04/07/22	Complete
Ongoing				
39/22	Look for new Internal Auditor and write to David Buckett expressing thanks for his work. <i>Letter to David Buckett sent. Contacted neighbouring parishes.</i>	Clerk/RFO	09/05/22	Complete
68/22	Programme of meetings for committees and WGs for '23.	Clerk	05/09/22	Complete
71/22	Obtain professional advice on energy efficiency at the pavilion.	Chair/Cllrs Rowe and Mrs Lyle	05/09/22	In progress
73/22	Vacancy candidate interviews.	Chair/Cllrs Mrs Lyle/Rajah	05/09/22	Complete
82/22	Finalise and distribute e-newsletter.	Assist Clerk CB	03/10/22	In progress
86/22	Make donation to the Mayor's Toy Appeal.	RFO	04/11/22	In progress
87/22	Include item on Finance Committee agenda regarding where the Accounts for Payment item should sit.	Clerk/RFO	04/11/22	Complete
88/22	Extend Pavilion Café licence until 31/03/23.	Pav Man Cttee	04/11/22	In progress
89/22	Confirm appointment of Pavilion Building Manager.	Pav Man Cttee	04/11/22	In progress
90/22	Confirm SPC reps on Pavilion Review / set up initial mtng.	Clerk	04/11/22	
91/22	Discuss Energy Contract for 2024 with Broker.	Chair	04/11/22	Complete
92/22	Promote council vacancy.	All	04/11/22	Complete
93/22	Set up meeting of APM WG and invite Cllr Norton to join.	Clerk/Chair	04/11/22	TBA
94/22	Confirm appointment of Cllr Soyke as Ashurst VH Trustee.	Clerk	04/11/22	Complete
95/22	Send invitations for Christmas Reception.	Clerk	04/11/22	Complete
96/22	Confirm with KCC Highways to start TRO for double yellow lines at Cobhams/Ferbies.	Clerk	04/11/22	Complete
97/22	Purchase and installation of horse warning signs.	Highways WG	04/11/22	In progress
98/22	Adoption of Amenities ToFR and update website.	Asst Clerk (KH)	04/11/22	In progress
99/22	Update Highways ToFR to include Footpaths.	Highways WG	04/11/22	TBA
100/22	Confirm with Landscape Services to start work on the installation of the path behind the ball net on LGRG.	Asst Clerk (KH)	04/11/22	Complete
101/22	Instruct Quaife Woodlands to carry out action-only survey on trees in the parish.	Asst Clerk (KH)	04/11/22	Complete
102/22	Start process of re-wilding Groombridge Green.	Env WG	04/11/22	In progress
103/22	Follow up to find out when remaining grant money for Ukrainian students would be paid by central government	Cllr McInroy	05/12/22	TBA
104/22	Chase up possibility of funding for a parish-run school bus	Cllr McInroy	05/12/22	TBA
105/22	Respond to South East Water Consultation	Cllr Turner	05/12/22	TBA

22/255 Finance Committee – Report by Cllr Ellery:

- a) A meeting had been held on 23rd November and the minutes had been circulated. Cllr Ellery reported the following:
- The Committee had spent some time going over the budget for the 2023-24 financial year.
 - Speldhurst Recreation Ground Committee had given notice of their intention to apply for a grant to fund playground equipment.
 - The Terms of Reference (TOR) had been reviewed and no changes were made.
- b) **Report on budget virements** – There were none.
- c) **Interim payments made since the last meeting:** Unity Acct: £313.03 transfer to credit card; £537.00 Pavilion electricity; £102.00 Pavilion window repair; £1,345.00 two months mowing and strimming and the annual jobs; £50.63 Pavilion water and £25.92 mobile.
Mastercard: refer to the Finance minutes for a list of payments; in addition £54.79* Pavilion new lock and Van MOT and service £253.29
Decisions made under delegated authority are starred * above.
- d) **To consider confirming the precept amount for 2023-24** – Cllr Ellery gave a brief explanation of how the precept worked for the benefit of Cllrs Ms Dooley and Tarricone. This was paid to the parish council by TWBC in two instalments. At the last meeting a precept increase of 6.7% to had been discussed but a decision was deferred pending further information on the tax base. This had now been provided and equated to a rise of 6.1% because the tax base had grown. It was **RESOLVED** to defer a final decision until January Full Council.
- e) **Accounts for Payment** – **RESOLVED** that the invoices, as listed, be paid.

Payee Name	Reference	Amount Paid £	Detail
Viking Direct	MT2372	26.62	Stationery
Tunbridge Wells Borough Council	MT2373	100.00	Grant - Toy Appeal
Commercial Services Trading Lt	MT2374	796.60	LG & Groom maintenance
Mr L Cooper	MT2375	24.59	Reimbursement petrol
Sunstone	MT2376	2,165.86	Annual Maintenance
C May	MT2377	7.65	Expenses
Katie Neve	MT2378	68.40	Expenses
Zurich Municipal	MT2379	199.87	Adj to premium
Cloudy IT	MT2380	272.82	Monthly IT Services
m;power accounting	MT2381	48.00	Monthly payroll
HMRC	MT2382	1,076.58	NI & Tax
N.E.S.T. Pension Scheme	DD	415.89	Pensions
BT PLC	DD	174.42	Broadband and Telephone
Employees	MT2383	4,573.45	Salaries
EDF Energy	DD	537.00	Pavilion - electricity
Castle Water	DD	50.63	Pavilion – water
Total:		£10,538.38	

22/256 Planning Committee – report by Cllr Rajah:

A meeting had been held on 14th November and the minutes had been circulated. The Committee had remained neutral on all the applications considered. They had also voted not to accept a change to their Terms of Reference which had been proposed by the Environment Working Group.

22/257 Langton Green Recreation Ground (LGRG) – report by Cllr Mrs Lyle:

- a) To receive a report from the Pavilion Management Working Group – Cllr Mrs Lyle said that the Pavilion Café had been busy. They would be providing soup and a roll for £1.00 during December. This had been subsidised by Langton Green Village Society (LGVS) with the aim of providing affordable food and a warm space for customers.
Cllr Mrs Lyle had agreed, with the consent of Speldhurst Parish Council (SPC) and the awareness of the Langton Green Community Sports Association (LGCSA), a three-month renewal of the Occupational License with the Café Manager. This would be looked at again once the Pavilion Review had been carried out. It was **RESOLVED** to approve the renewal of the Occupational License.
A slight increase in rent had also been agreed, together with electricity and cleaning surcharges for hirers, which would come back to the Parish Council.
- b) Update on the investigation into the energy efficiency of the boiler and to consider engaging Prestige Plumbers to provide a design of the present heating system – Cllr Mrs Lyle reported that meter readings had been taken at the beginning and end of each day, and at the beginning and end of the weekend when the pavilion was not in use. It was noted that the pavilion did not use significantly less kilowatts/hour when not in use than when the café operated. The next test would be to turn the boiler off over the weekend to see how much usage decreased. Specialist monitoring equipment was being installed on 7th December to monitor usage more closely.
Cllr Mrs Lyle said that an ex-Parish Councillor had agreed to help with the project management of purchasing a new boiler. He had previously helped with the purchase of a new boiler at Trinity Arts and would use this experience to help find a cost-effective solution.
It was **RESOLVED** to approve the engagement of Prestige Plumbing to draw up a guide to plumbing in the pavilion.
- c) Update on the Pavilion Review – The Chair reported said that a pre-meeting had taken place and he was now scheduling a further meeting. It had been a positive process so far.

22/258 Working Group (WG) and other Reports: to include any meetings held since the last Full Council meeting, the draft minutes having previously been forwarded to all Members

- a) **Governance WG – Report by Cllr Mrs Lyle:**
A meeting had been held on 9th November and the minutes had been circulated.
- It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Governance Working Group's return to committee status.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve a further dispensation for Cllr Turner to attend council meetings in person subject to him being a councillor after the elections in May 2023, as he was required to continue shielding for covid-related reasons.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to authorise the appointment of April Skies as the council's new Internal Auditor.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to approve proposed salary increases for all staff.
 - It was agreed to defer the review of committee membership numbers until January Full Council.
 - It was **RESOLVED** to adopt the following standing orders, policies and terms of reference:
 - Standing Orders
 - Financial Regulations
 - Health and Safety Policy
 - Video Meeting Policy and Guidelines
 - Media Policy
 - Training and Development Policy
 - Co-option Policy

- Code of Conduct
- Employee Code of Conduct
- Air Traffic Committee Terms of Reference
- Governance Committee Terms of Reference
- **Highways WG** – Report by Cllr Norton:
There had been no meeting since the last Full Council. Cllr Norton said it was clear on reviewing the meeting minutes that the Highways Improvement Plan (HIP) should determine the Working Group's focus.
It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Mr Ed Langridge as a Member of Public on the Highways Working Group.
- b) **Amenities WG** – Report by Cllr Mrs Lyle: There was nothing to report.
- c) **Air Traffic WG** – Report by Cllr Barrington-Johnson: There was nothing to report.
- d) **Environment WG** – Report by Cllr Turner:
There had been no meeting since the last Full Council. The Assistant Clerk (CB) said it had been decided by Cllr Turner that a review of weed control on council owned land would be deferred until January Full Council.
- e) **KALC** – Report by the Chair:
Cllr Curry had attended a meeting of KALC, who had expressed their disappointment that the parish council had abstained from responding to the boundary review. Additional items of interest included concern from other Parish Councils over delays from the planning department at TWBC. Cllr Curry noted that this was due to staffing issues. The Parish Council had already raised its concerns about a lack of enforcement with the Head of Planning.

22/259 South East Water Consultation – It was **RESOLVED** to delegate a response to Cllr Turner.

22/260 Boundary Commission for England 2023 – This related to a review of constituency boundaries in order to rebalance the number of electors represented by each MP. The parish council had originally commented in support of keeping the present constituency boundary and it was **RESOLVED** to make no further change to this comment.

22/261 Diary Dates – The following dates were noted:

- 12th December – Planning Committee
- 9th January – Full Council
- 16th January – Planning Committee
- 24th January – Environment Working Group

22/262 Items for Information:

- The Chair had spoken to the Speldhurst Chapel Project group about their plans for moving the community shop to Speldhurst Chapel. The group planned to approach the Parish Council about a funding application in the New year.
- Cllr Ellery said that the recent emergency road closure on the Speldhurst/Langton Road, together with the ongoing closure at the junction of St John's and Speldhurst Road in Southborough, had caused significant disruption to school bus routes and drivers entering and exiting Speldhurst village. He asked why KCC had approved an additional road closure. The Assistant Clerk (CB) said it had been necessary for UK Power Networks to repair a high voltage cable on the Speldhurst/Langton Road which had left a number of houses without power. She said that staff in KCC's Streetworks department were struggling to keep up with the number of emergency road closures and had warned there were more to come. She was in contact with KCC and the relevant utility companies about establishing better communication between stakeholders when it was necessary to close roads at short notice.

There being no further items the meeting closed at 8.10pm.

Chair