

Sandy Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of Sandy Town Council held in the Council Chamber at 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire on Monday 11 August 2014 commencing at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs N Aldis, J Ali, C Butterfield, M Groom, C Osborne, M Pettitt, W Jackson (Town Mayor), M Runchman, M Scott, D Sharman, K Sharp, R Smith and S Sutton

Absent: Cllr T Cole

In attendance: Central Bedfordshire Council Cllrs Maudlin and Sheppard, twenty members of the public, one member of the press and the Town Clerk

Actions

1 Apologies for Absence (58-2014/15)

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Cole.

Admin

2 Declarations of interest and requests for dispensations (59-2014/15)

- i) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests - None
- ii) Non Disclosable Interests – Cllr Aldis drew attention to his place on the allotments waiting list in respect of item 12. Cllr Jackson and others drew attention to the fact that many had relatives buried in Sandy cemetery
- iii) Dispensations - none

3 Public Participation Session (60-2014/15)

A member of the public asked whether he was personally in any way concerned in agenda item 6.2 of the Human Resources Committee meeting of 16 June 2014 and agenda item 4 of the Human Resources committee meeting of 28 July referred to him. The Mayor advised that an answer to the question would be provided in writing within one week of the meeting. The same member of the public then asked whether the council would reconsider the appropriateness of its adopted unreasonable behaviour and vexatious complaints policy and procedure. The Mayor advised that an answer to the question would be provided in writing within one week of the meeting.

Town Clerk

A member of the public asked whether Sandy Town Council had been involved in the Bedfordshire and Milton Keynes Healthcare Review currently being undertaken by Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group as he had not seen this on a Town Council agenda. The Mayor advised that the Council was aware of the review which had been on a recent committee agenda and a response to the question would be provided in writing within one week of the meeting.

Town Clerk

4 Minutes of previous Town Council meeting (61-2014/15)

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of a meeting of Sandy Town Council held on Monday 30 June 2014 as a correct record of

Admin

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proceedings.

5 **Burial Regulations (62-2014/15)**

Several members of the public addressed the Town Council about their concerns following recent enforcement activity undertaken by council staff in Sandy Cemetery and these comments have been summarised below.

To follow

A public debate dedicated only to the subject of the cemetery was requested by a group described as The Sandy Town Council Watch Group the purpose of which was so that all those affected by the decision made by the Town Clerk could have their say since the three minutes per individual allowed at a Town Council meeting was not sufficient. It was stated that the Town Clerk had caused pain and anguish to the people of Sandy. Photographs were handed to the Clerk and it was asserted that they showed cemetery staff did not use guards on strimming equipment when maintaining the cemetery. The Town Clerk explained that there was a guard in the picture but guards were only for the protection of the staff not to protect objects or gravestones. It was stated that damage had been caused to gravestones by the groundstaff with strimmers and the council did not care about this. It was also alleged that at some time in the past the groundstaff had broken a slate stone placed over a grave and had denied that they knew it was there. They had subsequently broken items placed on graves including a painted flowerpot and these had later been found in bins and when relatives complained to the council no-one was interested. It was asserted that the Town Clerk's report to council showed that the Town Council had neither the will nor the resources to enforce the burial regulations. It was said that there had been no public debate about the regulations. It was said that members of the council did not understand people's pain and grief or the comfort which was derived from placing objects on graves. Members of the public asked why the regulations were there anyway and what happened if there was no headstone? The Mayor advised that the regulations applied whether there was a headstone or not and explained that the regulations were partly there to ensure effective maintenance could be done.

Members of the public stated they did not accept that placing items on graves interfered with maintenance or that they were a health and safety problem. It was stated that headstones were private property and anything put on them was put in a private place and so the council had no right to remove them and this had been confirmed by a police officer. It said that gravestones were not looked after by the council. The council was asked why it removed artificial flowers and the Mayor advised that artificial flowers were

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not removed. It was stated that the council groundstaff did not give any consideration to the people buried in the cemetery or their relatives. It was said that objects on graves brought back happy memories and were very important to mourners. Members of the public said how very distressed they were to find notices on graves which did not have any ornaments on them and asked why this had happened. It was asserted that Sandy Town Council has changed its regulations. The Mayor advised that the regulations were not new. A member of the public asked the council to share the decision making with the community. Another member of the public explained that for people with learning disabilities or special needs, such as her son, the placing of objects on graves was one of the most important ways of expressing themselves. The Mayor thanked members of the public for expressing their views and explained that now members of the council would debate the issues.

Council members noted that this was a sensitive topic and anyone present at the meeting would note the strength of feeling of relatives. It was stressed that the burial regulations had been in existence for many years and had not changed. The council was proud of the standard of maintenance work in the cemetery and regulations were necessary to permit this. The regulations had been reviewed by the council at a meeting in June 2014 and were reviewed regularly. The report attached with the agenda acknowledged many of the points made in the public debate and accepted that mistakes had been made with recent enforcement activities. Any specific complaints of damage to headstones were best dealt with outside the meeting. Some members of the community had contacted members to say that they were glad to see the regulations being enforced and there had been instances when it had been necessary to remove inappropriate items which would cause offence to mourners.

Members moved on to consider a proposal to hold a public meeting to allow people to express their views further before making any decision about whether to review the regulations at this time. Differing views were expressed about whether or not such a meeting would be beneficial.

It was **RESOLVED** to hold an open meeting chaired by an independent chairman so that members of the public could express their views about the cemetery regulations and to defer any further enforcement of the regulations until after the meeting.

Following further discussion it was agreed that the meeting would be held after the Policy Finance and Resources committee meeting due

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to be held on 1 September 2014. The arrangements and funding for the meeting would be approved on 1 September 2014. Cllr Butterfield agreed to work with the officers of the council to make the necessary arrangements.

6 **SG19 Road Safety Action Group (63-2014/15)**

The Chairman of the SG19 Road Safety Action Group had asked for a named representative to be elected by the Town Council to act as a named contact for the group. The Chairman addressed the meeting noting that the group particularly wished to have a named representative since the A1 Campaign Group was no longer active. The Chairman commented on the Clerk's report accompanying the agenda which stated that the constitution of the group had not been made available to Cllr Aldis. The Chairman noted that the constitution was only supplied to anyone who became a member of the group which Cllr Aldis was not. The Clerk apologised for any offence caused and members noted that the constitution was available to members of the group but was not in the public domain. A member asked the Chairman whether the SG19 group included Everton, Waresley, Gamlingay and other communities in the SG19 area since they were affected by problems at the A1/Black Cat. The Chairman confirmed that there was contact with some of these settlements and there were also members of the group from Moggerhanger since the residents of this village were affected by the roads in SG19 even though they lived in MK44.

RESOLVED to elect Cllr Scott to act as Town Council representative and named contact for all communications with SG19 Road Safety Action Group.

Cllr Scott
Admin

7 **Minutes of committees and recommendations therein (64-2014/15)**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the following committees

i) Minutes of a meeting of Development Scrutiny Committee held on 14 July 2014 (no recommendations)

ii) Minutes of a meeting of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee held on 14 July 2014

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the recommendation of the committee to adopt new financial regulations and implement these with immediate effect.

Admin

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the recommendation of the committee to adopt a new publication scheme with effect from 1 September 2014

Admin

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It was **RESOLVED** to consider the minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 28 July 2014 and the minutes of the Community Services and Environment Committee on 4 August 2014 at the end of the agenda as these were likely to involve discussion of confidential information.

8 Financial Matters (65-2014/15)

RESOLVED to note a summary statement of income and expenditure against budget for the year to date.

RESOLVED to note a list of payments made since the last Town Council meeting

9 Employers' Statement of Discretions (66-2014/15)

The Chairman of the HR Committee spoke on behalf of the working group which had prepared the draft statement of discretions, describing the advice which had been taken and the legal requirement to adopt a statement.

RESOLVED to adopt the draft statement prepared by the working group as Sandy Town Council's Employers' Statement of Discretions to be effective from 1 April 2014 and to publish the statement on the website.

Town Clerk

10 Co-option (67-2014/15)

Members noted the Clerk's report on arrangements for co-option to the current casual vacancy in Pinnacle Ward at the Town Council on 22 September 2014. No applications had been received as yet though some interest had been shown.

Admin

11 Consultation on Development Strategy (68-2014/15)

The Clerk's report was noted and it was

RESOLVED to make no further response to Central Bedfordshire Council's public consultation on the Local Development Strategy. Members noted that individuals could still make their own submissions up to 26 August 2014.

12 Allotment Report (69-2014/15)

An update report on progress with the acquisition of a new allotment site via a lease agreement had been circulated to members in advance of the meeting (copy in minute book). This was discussed and members noted that compensation for the existing tenant would be necessary. The Clerk reported that she had attended a meeting with the Chairman of Sandy & District Allotment Association to discuss the report. A firm quotation for soil testing was expected shortly.

Admin

Members **RESOLVED** to note the report.

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13 Community Orchard Report (70-2014/15)

An update report on progress with the development of a community orchard in Beeston, Sandy had been circulated in advance of the meeting (copy in minute book) and this was discussed and the report was noted.

Admin

14 Reports from Representatives (71-2014/15)

A report from CBC Ward members had been circulated before the meeting. It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

Members had been advised that the position of representative to Sandy Young People's Youth Group was no longer viable as the Youth Group did not exist at present and there were no meetings to attend. Cllr Cole had therefore stepped down from this role and she did not feel it was feasible to act as representative to all youth groups in Sandy. It was **RESOLVED** to note the position.

There were no other reports from STC representatives on external bodies.

15 News Release (72-2014/15)

RESOLVED to instruct the Town Clerk to issue a news release about the planned public meeting about the burial regulations.

Town
Clerk/Mayor

(A 5 minute comfort break was held. Cllr Smith left the meeting.)

16 Minutes of committee meetings (73-2014/15)

RESOLVED that under the Public Bodies (admission to Meetings) Act 1960 (as extended) members of the public and press would be excluded for the next item of business which involved the likely disclosure of confidential personal information as defined as exempt information in Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 (personal and confidential data).

Members discussed recommendations contained within the minutes which had been deferred earlier in the meeting. Both sets of minutes referred to potential restructure of the staff team and potential alterations to the premises.

- i) **RESOLVED** to note the draft minutes of the Human Resources Committee held on 28 July 2014 and to approve the recommendation that arrangements be put in place to progress the proposed new structure.

RESOLVED to approve the recommendation contained within the minutes that the costing processes for the revised plan recommended by the committee would be begun.

- ii) **RESOLVED** to note the draft minutes of the Community Services and Environment Committee on 4 August 2014.

Town Clerk
HR
Committee

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RESOLVED to approve the committee's recommendation to work towards securing an office base for the outdoor staff at 10 Cambridge Road and towards securing garaging space for the vehicles as described so that a replacement for the Skoda can be obtained as soon as possible. This recommendation was agreed in principle subject to satisfactory detailed costings.

Depot
Working
Group/Town
Clerk