

NORTHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Monday 15th March 2021

PRESENT: Councillor Birch (Chair); Councillor Marriott (Deputy Chair); Councillors Hibbert, Lane, B Markham and Russell
In attendance: Councillors Ashraf and Hallam with Mr R Walden (Acting Town Clerk), Ms E Hawkins (Civic and Mayoral Officer); Mr L Gould (Borough Council) and Mr D Moody and Dr L Sambrook-Smith (Northants CALC)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were none.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 February 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. MEMORIAL TO VICTIMS OF THE PANDEMIC

Councillor Brian Markham asked the Committee whether the Town Council wished to consider providing or facilitating a suitable memorial to local victims of the Coronavirus Pandemic.

The Chair further suggested that the Council might wish to facilitate or support local community events such as “community get togethers” which could vary in extent according to the wishes of that community. There was evidence that some of the major sports and arts providers and organisers within the town may also wish to play their part. The Committee very much favoured the sentiments behind the suggestions and discussed appropriate actions.

RESOLVED: That the proposals be supported in principle and the matter be referred to the Community Services and Environmental Services Committees for detailed discussions including inviting via the website suggestions from the community for sharing their covid experiences and commemorative ideas which might include:

- a) An arbour of trees with suitable seating to provide a lasting memorial and a place for quiet reflection,
- b) A possible enhancement of the Carnival event,
- c) An exhibition of images from the community of their covid experiences, and
- d) A commemorative inter faith church service for all local victims, especially for those whose families who were unable to say farewell in traditional ways.

5. COMMUNITY NEEDS ANALYSIS

The process for selecting the new Town Clerk had included asking all candidates to submit a report on how they felt the Council could conduct a community needs analysis of its area. One of those reports, which had particularly impressed the Appointments Panel and which could form the basis for future action was submitted. The Council's contingency budget for the coming year included a provision for implementing the results of such an analysis.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk be requested to report to the first meeting of the Community Service Committee on a suggested process for conducting a community needs analysis for the whole of the area served by the Town Council and the various communities within it.

6. BANK MANDATE

The Council has agreed to open an online bank account with Unity Bank and the necessary account has now been opened. The mandate for approving payments and withdrawals needed to be consistent with the arrangements agreed at the last Council meeting as part of the scheme for committee delegations. This would come into effect after the Annual Meeting on 17th May, in the meantime, as a temporary measure, the Acting Town Clerk recommended that the Chair and Vice Chair of this Committee be authorised to approve payments. It was intended that the meeting of the next Executive Committee on 12th April would approve a schedule of accounts and the Chair and Deputy Chair would only be asked to use this authority for approving any other payments which may need to be approved outside this meeting.

RESOLVED: (i) That from 17th May 2021, the Council's Bank Mandate be, payments uploaded by authority of either the Town Clerk or the Administration Officer and payments approved by any two members of the Accounts Sub Committee and

(ii) That, for the interim period from 1st April to 17th May 2021 a temporary mandate of payments uploaded by authority of the Town Clerk or Administration Officer and payments approved by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Executive Committee (who shall form a sub-committee when so acting) be approved.

7. MAYORAL ALLOWANCE

At the last Council meeting it had been agreed that the proposed Mayoral Allowance be divided equally between an allowance paid directly to the Town Mayor through payroll and half retained by officers as a mayoral and civic expenses contingency. The incoming Town Mayor, Councillor Ashraf, had indicated that she would prefer the whole of the allowance to be held by the council staff for the term of her office from 1st April to 17th May 2021 and, should she be re-elected, for the whole of the 2021/22 Municipal Year. To give full effect to the Mayor's request it will be expedient to create a petty cash fund of £100 from the Mayoral Allowance budget.

RESOLVED: (i) To note that for the remainder of 2020/21 and for 2021/22 the proposed Mayoral Allowance will be held as a general contingency by the Civic and Mayoralty Officer for reimbursing any expenditure incurred by the Town Mayor in the course of her duties and for other general civic duties.

(ii) That a petty cash account of up to £100 be held by the Civic and Mayoralty Officer for reimbursing minor mayoral expenses.

8. TREASURY MANAGEMENT POLICY

The Town Clerk advised that one of the early tasks for the new Policy and Finance Committee would be to determine the Council's policy for where it wished to hold its various reserve funds. In the meantime, as discussions on which services may transfer from the principal council to the Town Council and what funding will follow the service continued, it was likely that the Council would be holding a fairly significant total of reserve and contingency funds. The Council's accountancy advisor, Stuart Wilbur, had advised that, as interest rates are all very small at the current time, from a financial risk assessment point of view, the most important issue was to have a spread of investments amongst leading institutions. He had advised that Lloyds offered a 6 week instant access rolling investment to hold funds to top up the current account as required and Barclays or NatWest offered fixed terms of up to a year. Using the three banks would give the Council a spread for its funds as would be defined in any financial risk assessment.

RECOMMENDED: That the Town Clerk be authorised to place the Council's reserves and those contingency budgets unlikely to be expended initially in easy access investment accounts with Lloyds, Nat West and Barclays.

9. APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR

The Town Clerk recalled that the Council had appointed External Auditors, PKF Littlejohn, who will be examining the Council's use and management of public funds. To complement this it was also necessary to appoint an Internal Auditor who would provide an independent review of procedures including internal processes, book keeping, risk management, payroll, budgeting, asset management and year end procedures etc. Northants County Association of Local Councils (NCALC) provided a well-used relevant service appropriate to the needs of each council. The cost of the service for this Council would be £1,640 and the Council's appointed internal auditor would be Tina Charteress.

RESOLVED: That the NCALC Internal Audit Service be appointed as the Council's Internal Auditor for 2020/21 and 2021/22

10. UPDATE ON TRANSFER OF ASSETS AND SERVICES

Mr Gould of the Borough Council reported on positive discussions which were taking place between the West Northants Unitary, the Borough Council and the Town Council concerning the transfer of assets and services. A full report on the proposed transfer of the historic part of the Guildhall would be presented for discussion at the next Council meeting.

The Borough Council at its meeting on 22nd March would be finalising all matters relating to the transfer of the Mayoralty including the continuing recognition of holders of offices of civic dignity and authority to enter into an agreement to secure the continued preservation of all items of civic plate and regalia and muniments.

Following discussions between elected members and officers, West Northants Council was considering the possible funded transfer of some services to the Town Council. Further information on this would also be presented to the next Council meeting.

11. CALENDAR OF MEETINGS

The Committee considered a draft schedule of Council and Committee meetings for the coming municipal year. West Northants Council had yet to publish its calendar of meetings

so this presented a potential problem of clashes for dual hatted councillors. The Committee accordingly agreed the frequency of meetings which would allow the preparation of a detailed calendar based upon a broad two monthly cycle of Council and committee meetings but with Planning Committee meeting every three or four weeks to meet consultation deadlines.

RESOLVED: That the outline of a calendar of meetings for 2021/22 as set out at Appendix “A” be approved.

12. ARRANGEMENTS FOR COMING MEETINGS

The Acting Town Clerk recalled that the current legislation permitting virtual meetings expired on 6th May and it remained unclear if the date would be extended. NALC and SLCC were seeking urgent clarification on the position from the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government. Socially distanced meetings would be a challenge if possible at all so the Committee was asked to consider the format of key meetings and events which of necessity would have to be conducted through Zoom with the limits that entails:

RESOLVED: (i) That the above meetings be held virtually by Zoom and the proceedings be adjusted accordingly:

Thursday 1st April	Handover of Mayoral and Civic Regalia etc	Short ceremony with all former Borough Councillors invited
Tuesday 11th May	Informal Meeting of new Councillors	To agree committee memberships and appointments. Acting Town Clerk to facilitate
Monday 17th May	Annual Council Meeting (Mayor making)	Remote meeting - same procedure as last Borough Council mayor making
Monday 24th May	Town (Electors’) Meeting	Remote meeting to meet statutory requirements only

(ii) That, for the time being, the Town Mayor and Deputy wear red robes and all other town councillors the blue robes.

13. COUNCILLOR TRAINING

The Committee considered what training sessions should be provided for newly elected councillors after the coming elections. NCALC were specialists in training for town and parish councillors and had suggested the following sessions:

- “Off to a Flying Start” general councillors training. 2½ hours suitable for evening of **Thursday 27th May at 6 pm**
- Specific in depth NTC training involving NCALC team, NTC staff and a leading expert from the School of Local Government Studies at De Montfort University who would lead a “visioning” session. Four hours plus, suitable for a Saturday around a buffet lunch
- Planning training- for members of the Planning Committee looking at material considerations in commenting upon planning applications to maximise their influence –

hopefully with appropriate WNC Planning Officer(s) one -two hours and/or NCALC Planning Advisor as part of an early meeting of the Planning Committee

- Chairing Meetings: The rules and good practise for chairing Council and Committee meetings. Two hour evening session suitable for all Chairs and Deputy Chairs of committees and sub committees and those aspiring to be Town Mayor.
- Councillors as Employers – the very specific role and responsibilities of councillors as the employers of staff, up to two hours, suitable for an early meeting of the Staffing Sub-Committee
- Finance for Councillors – the rules and regulations for finance in a large Town Council, suitable for all Members of the Policy and Finance Committee, one and half hours

RESOLVED: That training sessions be arranged as indicated above.

14. REVIEW OF POLICIES

The Council at its first meeting had adopted a number of policy documents, which were now available on the website, subject to their review by this Committee. The Committee had subsequently asked nominated councillors to review those documents and all councillors had been invited to advise them of any changes they wanted to be considered to particular policies. No comments had been submitted and the nominated councillors did not wish to suggest any changes.

RESOLVED: That the position be noted and the various policy documents be reviewed at the 2022 Annual Council Meeting in the light of experience of the first full year's operation..

15. BRACKMILLS BRANCH RAILWAY LINE

The English Regional Transport Association (ERTA) had provided the detailed information attached about its campaign, which was supported by the Brackmills BID, to secure a re-opening of the branch railway line to serve the Brackmills Industrial Estate.

Some members felt that the proposal was worth exploring along with other major transport schemes such as a Rugby – Leicester rail link, the suggested Oxford – Cambridge Varsity Line and general improvements to the town's bus services.

RESOLVED: That the Planning Committee be asked to consider the matter in more detail together with considering what role the Town Council should be playing in .

Promoting an integrated transport solution for the town.

16. ROTARY CLUB OF NORTHAMPTON CENTENARY

The Civic and Mayoral Officer reported that, in a personal voluntary capacity, she had been assisting the Rotary Club of Northampton with its plans for a community exhibition event as part of its centenary celebrations which would be taking place between July 2021 and June 2022.

The Club had helped hundreds of charities during their hundred years and they wanted to have the opportunity for these charities and community groups to come together under one roof to network and hopefully gain mutual volunteers, and at the very least provide a platform for these community groups to share their work. It would also raise awareness of Rotary's century of service to the community.

The Club was aware that it was an objective of the Town Council to organise an exhibition for our local community groups and charities. It was also pursuing the possibility of incorporating the Lord Lieutenant and the High Sheriff's ceremony for their Rose of Northamptonshire awards. Such a ceremony could form an integral part of the event which was likely to be held on March 2022. The Club was exploring potential funding and financial support from the Council would enable it to consider a larger venue, possibly the County Cricket Ground

RESOLVED: That the Council agrees to support the proposed Rotary Club of Northampton Centenary Exhibition and Rose of Northamptonshire Awards Ceremony, including assistance from the Civic and Mayoral Officer, and the matter be referred to the Community Services Committee for further detailed consideration.

(During the discussion on this item the Committee was delighted to note that thanks to Lizzie Hawkins' efforts, the Northampton Civic Office had received two commendation certificates in the Civic Office of the Year Awards in the categories of How the Civic Office responded during the national crisis of 2020, and: How the Civic Office is moving forward after the national crisis of 2020. The Committee was pleased to congratulate Lizzie on this excellent and merited achievement.)

17. HERALDIC BADGE

At the last meeting of the Committee THE Acting Town Clerk had been asked whether, once the Coat of Arms had been transferred to the Town Council, it could consent in some way to use by other parishes within the area of the Borough Council. Windsor Herald at the College of Arms has responded that the coat of arms would exclusively be that of the Town Council. It should not be used by other parishes, councils or other organisations. They would have no right to do so. If they wanted to use arms themselves, they would need to petition for a new design which could be based on the existing arms, but would have to be sufficiently distinct. If the Council wanted a formal device that others could use with its permission it could petition for a grant of a heraldic badge. Its design could include the tower and lions on a grassy mount, but it would not be on a shield. It could be something entirely different of course.

The fee for a grant of a badge (an example of which was presented to the Committee) was presently £3,760.

Whilst Committee members supported the principal of a heraldic badge which could be shared with others, it was felt that a decision on this matter w]should be left to the newly elected councillors after the coming elections.

18. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBIC

RESOLVED: That, in view of the confidential nature of the business about to transacted, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

19. STAFFING MATTER

The Committee considered a report of the Acting Town Clerk on a staffing matter and agreed recommendations which would be presented to the next Council meeting.

Northampton Town Council
Suggested Calendar of Meetings

Meeting	Week commencing Monday 2021
Annual Meeting (Mayor Making)	17th May
Planning	24th May
Policy and Finance	7th June
Environmental Services	14th June
Community Services	21st June
Planning	28th June
Policy and Finance	5th July
Council	19th July
Planning	26th July
Planning	16th August
Environmental Services	6th September
Planning	13th September
Community Services	20th September
Policy and Finance	4th October
Planning	11th October
Council	18th October
Policy and Finance (budget principles)	8th November
Planning	15th November
Environmental Services (budget)	22nd November
Community Services (budget)	6th December
Planning	13th December
	2022
Policy and Finance (budget recommend)	10th January
Planning	17th January
Council (budget)	24th January
Environmental Services	7th February
Planning	14th February
Community Services	21st February
Policy and Finance	28th February
Planning	7th March
Council	21st March
Planning	28th March
Environmental Services	4th April
Planning	4th April
Community Services	11th April
Easter	18th April
Policy and Finance	25th April
Council	9th May
Town (Electors') Meeting	9th May
Annual Meeting (Mayor Making)	16th May