

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE COUNCIL
HELD ON 13 DECEMBER 2023 AT 6.00 pm**

Attendance:

The Mayor (Councillor Pepper) (in the Chair)

Councillors Ms Ballard, Beavis, Bradley, Burgess, Casey, Chegwyn, Earle, Hammond, Herridge, Mrs Huggins, Hutchison, Hylands, Jessop, Johnston, Miss Kelly, Mrs Morgan, Pepper, Philpott, Raffaelli, Scard, Westerby, Durrant, Gledhill, Marshall, Maynard, Bradley and Cox

TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FROM MEMBERS FOR THEIR INABILITY TO ATTEND THE MEETING

Apologies for non attendance were received from Councillor Cully and Honorary Alderman Dickson.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Johnston declared a personal interest agenda item 7 at the point at which taxis were discussed.

Councillor Marshall advised that he held a taxi License in Havant.

MAYOR'S COMMUNICATION

The Mayor advised that he had attended a large amount of events over the last week and one of the underlying constants in all of the events was the importance of volunteers.

The Mayor wished to pay tribute to all the volunteers involved and recognised the importance of them in society.

TO CONFIRM THE MINUTES OF THE COUNCIL HELD ON 18 OCTOBER 2023

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on the 18 October 2023 be signed as a true and correct record.

DEPUTATIONS AND PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

MEMBERS QUESTIONS

Six Members questions had been received.

Councillor Raffaelli to Councillor Chegwyn

We should all be delighted that the government has provisionally awarded up to £18,117,915 to Gosport Borough Council for the RECONNECTING HISTORIC GOSPORT WATERFRONT project which was submitted last year by the Conservatives for Round Two of the Levelling Up Fund. It is that Conservative project which has now been awarded the funding in Round Three. This money is to help pay for the restoration of the Rum Store and to connect the town centre to the waterfront. However, in the latest Liberal Democrat leaflet, Cllr Chegwyn claims the funding will help with the demolition of the old Bus Station and the creation of a new "People's Park". What part of the planned walking and cycling route improvements to reconnect the waterfront is he now not going to deliver in order to divert funding to his People's Park?

Answer: The Liberal Democrat Council are trusted by the Government to deliver the project, which previous administrations had not been.

Supplementary question: The answer provided includes spin, as there was no requirement to submit a bid for the third round of funding, 55 bids from round two had been carried over and supported. The bid for round two was made under the previous administration. The Policy and Organisation Board report advised that the £800,000 required for the People's Park had increased to £1.35 million and that in turning down residential development on the site for affordable housing and additional flats, which included plans for shops restaurants and a Tourist Information Centre. The removal of these proposals had cost the Council £5-£6 million. How will the cost of the People's Park be met, when this funding has been lost, and the proposals have evolved from a field with a burger van to multiple bistros, restaurants and wine bars? The costs of such proposals will bankrupt the Council.

Answer: The proposal was never for a burger van, the administration has been trusted by the government to deliver the levelling up bid. None of the money from the £18,117,915 awarded will be used for the People's park.

Councillor Burgess to Councillor Chegwyn

Gosport residents are already regularly experiencing missed refuse collections. We now understand that the refuse collection teams are going on strike on Boxing Day for 2 weeks. What contingency plans do you have in place for Gosport residents over the festive period when higher than usual levels of waste are expected?

Answer: Higher waste levels are always anticipated over the festive period and allowed for. Not all matters in the press should be believed, there is no strike so no contingency is required.

Supplementary question: The Managing Director of Urbaser has been to the depot today, can the Leader update with facts on the negotiations on the strikes.

Answer: The Managing Director of Urbaser was at the depot today and good progress had been made, the Liberal Democrats would make sure there was no bin strikes. The dispute

is not with Gosport Borough Council, but between the contractors Urbaser and their staff. They had been appointed by the previous administration who had visited their offices in Spain.

It was clarified that the visit was a day trip.

Councillor Hammond to Councillor Chegwyn

Is the Leader aware of a Police investigation into a senior Conservative Councillor?

Yes, they are serious allegations, it was understood that the Police investigations were now complete.

Supplementary: Is the same incident being investigated by the Council?

Answer: Yes, it is a serious allegation of harassment and an investigation is live. It would be inappropriate to say more so as not to prejudice the investigation, but it was important to note that anyone found guilty of harassment should stand down from the Council.

Councillor Hammond to Councillor Chegwyn

Is it correct that there has recently been an investigation with reference to staff and, if so, what has been the outcome of that investigation?

Answer: Yes, investigations do take place into staff on occasions, some are proven some are not. The incident related to a staff member in a lake and the Health and Safety surrounding the incident. The report and investigation was not yet concluded, so no further comment could be made.

Not linked to the question, the Council was advised that Rob Gamble and Fred Gibson were no longer under Council employment and it was requested that thanks to both be noted, particularly Fred's vast experience and expertise in the wild grounds.

Councillor Hammond to Councillor Chegwyn.

Can the Leader please update the Council on the success of the Community Skips scheme?

The skips, available in public locations every two weeks had been a huge success. Hundreds of residents had used them and they had so far allowed residents to dispose of 220 tonnes of waste for free. Residents had been praising the scheme and 94.5% of the waste was recycled, which was 10% more than the County Council Waste Recycling Centre. Fly tipping had been down 40% contrary to the opinion of the opposition.

A point of order under standing order 4.11 was raised that the statement quoted was an extract and therefore incorrect. The full statement called into question the validity of the figure as comparisons per month showed fly tipping was marginally less and therefore likely to be no less overall, figures from the Covid period had also been taken into account. And that there was no demonstrable evidence that the skips had reduced fly tipping.

Supplementary question.

Why do you think the Conservative Party continue to oppose the skips when they are so beneficial to the residents?

Answer: The comparisons had taken place between 2022 2023 and had shown a 40 % reduction in fly tipping. The opposition continue to be negative about everything.

Councillor Hammond to Councillor Chegwyn

Can the Leader please update the Council on progress with the proposed redevelopment of the Gosport Bus Station site?

Answer: Yes, very good progress is being made. The planned new designed was beginning to move forward but the old bus station could not be demolished until the new one was functioning. It was hoped this would be in May/June and then focus could shift to the construction of the People's Park. This would allow the area to benefit all residents, not just those in the flats. Things were getting done.

Supplementary question: Will the new People's Park and development have room for a Tourist Information Centre?

Answer: Yes, the existing one hadn't been scrapped but was being operated privately to save £59,000. There would be space for a centre to continue in some form allowing the Council to save money and to provide a service.

TO RECEIVE THE PART I MINUTES OF THE BOARDS OF THE COUNCIL

Consideration was given to the Part I recommendation of the Policy and Organisation Board.

At its meeting on 29 November 2023 the Policy and Organisation Board considered a report of the Borough Treasurer detailing the updated Fees and Charges. The recommendations are now presented to Full Council for approval.

An amendment was proposed to the report as follows:

It is recommended that the fees and charges referred to in the report and appendix are frozen at the rates introduced into effect on 1st January 2023 with the exception of those fees and charges which are statutory and require to be uplifted in accordance with regulations and the two new charges introducing a drugs test for taxi drivers and a range of concession rate charges for pest control.

This was proposed by Councillor Burgess and seconded by Councillor Philpott.

A Councillor advised that they felt the proposed fees and charges were another attack on residents, with 3 rises to car parking charges in 18 months and felt that residents were not aware of how much they had increased. A proposed amendment to freeze fees and charges at 1 January 2023 would not see a vast increase to most of the fees reducing the burden on the public.

A Member advised that an increase of 60% on some car parking charges was unacceptable as the CPI currently sat at 8.5% this year, following a rate of 10.1% last year. The increased charges would do nothing to encourage tourists to the Town, or encourage residents to stay, shop and utilise their local area over out of Town centres with free parking, or Town Centres like Winchester and Southampton. It was felt the increases could close businesses.

In addition they felt there was a stealth tax on fitness and exercise, not only through the car parking charges, but through the increase in charges on sports pitches.

A Members advised that they supported the amendment as there was no justification for the increase in charges. If CPI had been considered as justification for the increase, as it was in the previous year, then the month preceding the proposed increase, CPI had sat at 4.6% so offered even less justification of such large increases. Figures from the Bank of England supported this making the proposed increases to sports facilities and car parking of between 40-70% appalling and unjustifiable. In addition it was advised that from January 2024 Hampshire County Council would be removing charges for disposal of DIY waste and therefore the continuation of the skips scheme would be obsolete and be contrary to previous statements advising provision non statutory services. Waste disposal was a Hampshire County Council function, not Gosport Borough Council, removing the amenity skips would save money, reducing the need for such increases.

A Members advised that the Gosport Borough Council Local Plan highlighted that residents of Gosport had a lower life expectancy. 5 of the Borough's wards were in the top 20% in the country for poor health and faced great inequality with regard to health. It was felt the Council should be facilitating healthy opportunities not creating barriers to them by creating more access to fitness, not increasing charges.

This could be seen not only in sports facilities, Rowner Recreation football pitches had had hire costs increased by 67% in 2 years, the wildgrounds permit cost had increased 38% for a day and 120% for a monthly pass and Alver Valley Car Parks had increased by 22%.

This was mirrored across Gosport, with the cost of burials also increasing between 22-26%.

A Member advised that the concern they had regarding increases in cost was significant when the actual financial differences could be seen. Comparisons included, mini soccer pitches increasing from £17.50 to £27.50 from 2022-2023, cricket pitches increasing from £44 in 2022 to £66 in 2023. And parking increasing from £1 to £1.60 and annual permits increasing from £490 to £660 from 2022 to 2023.

A Member advised that they felt the increase in beach huts was unreasonable, with hire charges rising 50%. Previous efforts to improve them following vandalism had been undertaken, but repairs and renovations were no longer being undertaken, which would be disappointing to those that had waited a long time to hire them.

A Member advised that the Beach huts rentals were subject to NNDR rates, utility costs and up keep costs so those hiring should undertake basic measures such as painting themselves. In addition, they felt that residents should be encouraged to walk to Town or use the bus rather than using car parks if they felt charges were too steep. Walking would also help residents to improve their health.

A Member advised that the budget needed to be balanced and accepted that there was a cost of living crisis but that services still needed to be paid for. Not increasing fees and charges would lead to service cuts.

A Member advised that they felt the proposals were not calculated, but an abstract exercise putting more strain on constituents Councillors were elected to represent and were increasing fees above inflation for nearly all of the fees and charges listed. Burial charges were up 32%, sports pitches charges up between 28.2 and 70.9%, wildground visit charges up between 37.5 and 120%, beach hut charges up 50% car parking increases had risen as high as 83.3% and parking permits up as high as 64.7% in the last 3 years.

This would give an increase of £254,000 and a future increase of £111000 which totalled £400000 in car parking in just 18 months which was an exploitation of residents in the cost of living crisis.

A Member advised that as well as high levels of deprivation, the Borough hosted the largest parkrun on the South Coast, people visited the Town to take part and were being charged to do so. Obesity was a real issues and it was felt the money spent on skips should be used to reduce access to fitness.

The Council were advised that the current tax burden was the highest it had ever been with restrictions on Council Tax increases. This has been caused by a cut in Government funding, many Councils had or were close to declaring bankruptcy and this had to be addressed.

Sports facilities had been left to decay, and toilets removed, under the previous administration and even with the increase to fees and charges, running costs were not being met.

The Grants Sub-Board had been reinstated and was helping to support sports groups.

A Member advised that economics needed to add up, the restrictions on Council Tax increases meant that the Gosport Borough Council element increase could not match inflation, creating a shortfall in funding which had to be addressed.

A Member expressed concern that the change to the car park metres would also need to be paid for, as well as the increasing costs for the Criterion and subsidies for bus services.

A recorded vote was taken on the amendment as follows:

FOR the AMENDMENT: Councillors Beavis, Burgess, Casey, Gledhill, Huggins, Jessop, Morgan, Philpott, Raffelli, Scard (10)

AGAINST the AMENDMENT: Councillors Ballard, M Bradley, K Bradley Chegwyn, Cox, Durrant, Earle, Hammond, Herridge, Hutchison Hylands, Johnston, Kelly, Marshall, Maynard, Westerby. (16)

ABSTENTION: The Mayor (1)

This AMENDMENT was LOST

FOR the recommendations: Councillors Ballard, M Bradley, K Bradley, Chegwyn, Cox, Durrant, Earle, Hammond, Herridge, Hutchison, Hylands, Johnston, Kelly, Marshall, Maynard, Westerby, (16)

AGAINST the recommendation: Councillors Beavis, Burgess, Casey, Huggins, Gledhill, Jessop, Morgan, Philpott, Raffaelli, Scard. (10)

ABSTENTION: The Mayor (1)

RESOLVED:

The Council approves the fees and charges referred to in the report and appendix for implementation from 1 January 2024 or as soon as practically possible thereafter, unless stated otherwise.

TO RECEIVE THE PART II MINUTES OF THE BOARDS OF THE COUNCIL

The Part II Minutes of the Policy and Organisation Board on 29 November 2023 be presented and accepted by the Council.

Members expressed frustration that they had not seen the business case work undertaken to date and had been asked to approve additional expenditure on more business case work, without seeing the results of the initial £20000 spend. Concern was expressed that a second case was being sought as the first did not offer what was desired.

Members advised that they had submitted Freedom of Information requests but had not been given the opportunity to view the document.

A Members expressed concern that in addition to the increased purchase price, there were concerns that for the proposal to be commercially viable the cost would be between £7-£8million.

A Members advised that the minutes of the Policy and Organisation Board advised there was a desire to see the existing business case, but advised that feeling was stronger than that and that it was a demand to see it.

Some Members expressed concern that the whole project was a waste of money.

It was acknowledged that visits to other potentially similar venues had been undertaken, but when comparing the facilities in the proximity of the venues there were significant differences.

The Tivoli Theatre in Wimborne had 5 hotels and restaurants within 270 yards, it also had ample parking within close proximity and seated 483. The Regent Theatre in Christchurch sat 505, had 5 hotels within 150 yards, a number of local restaurants, significant parking spaces, and a railway station within 0.6 of a mile.

A Member expressed concern that these facts alone meant there was no way to compare the venues, as the infrastructure to support them simply wasn't there.

Some Members felt that the second resolution of the Board with regard to the Criterion wasn't acceptable and placed on record their disagreement to it.

A Member advised that the report had not been required to be presented to the Board and doing so had increased transparency in decision making and that it was disappointing to hear such negativity.

A survey had been undertaken which had found to have overwhelming support for the project from the public.

ANIMAL WELFARE CHARTER

Consideration was given to a report of the Animal Welfare Working Group detailing a proposed Animal Welfare Charter.

The Council were advised that there was an historical document that detailed the previous charter but that it could not be located and it was felt that it was long overdue an update.

The Group had considered a number of issues with regard to animal welfare and discussed at length the limitations of action that be taken by the Council and had invited guest speakers and wanted to encourage responsible pet ownership.

Members felt that a review date should be set on the document.

A Members suggested that a link be included into the PSPO for Dog Controls and the Countryside Code and the Marine and Coastal Welfare code.

A Members also questioned whether there was any regulation regarding animal welfare at events such as reindeers at Christmas Fayres.

Members welcomed the inclusion of the Countryside Code and the PSPO as appendices and suggested a review after two years.

RESOLVED: That the Animal Welfare Charter be approved.

GOSPORT AND TOWN CENTRE PUBLIC SPACES PROTECTION ORDER (PSPO) 2023

Consideration was given to a report of the Head of Corporate Policy and Community Safety detailing the PSPO for the Town Centre.

It was confirmed that there had been no additional cost as a result of the previous PSPO lapsing. Members felt that the value in the PSPO was in its enforcement and welcomed that it would improve the Town Centre.

The Council expressed their thanks to the Head of Corporate Policy and Community Safety for her work on the project.

RESOLVED:

That the Council:

- Considers the results of the consultation exercise in relation to this matter carried out between 01/11/2023-29/11/2023,
- Approves the proposed Gosport and Town Centre PSPO 2023 (to be effective from 14 December 2023 to 13 December 2027) to control Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in the area shown edged black in the accompanying plans as set out in Appendix 1,
- Delegates Authority to the Head of Corporate Policy and Community Safety to take the necessary required steps to implement the proposed Gosport and Town Centre PSPO 2023 in the form of Appendix 1.

ADDENDUM: The PSPO can only be made for a period of 3 years. Therefore the expiration date must be the 13 December 2026, not 2027 as per the agreed decision.

OUTSIDE BODY APPOINTMENT

The Council were asked to consider a request to appoint a Member to Bridgemary Bowls Club as an outside body representative.

RESOLVED: That Councillor Hammond be appointed.

ANY OTHER ITEMS

There were none.

The Meeting concluded at 7.39 pm

The Mayor.