

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE
HELD ON MONDAY 1 JUNE 2020 AT 5.30PM**

- PRESENT:** Councillors Apel, Carter, C Hughes, Gershater, Lishman and Sharp
- EX-OFFICIO:** The Mayor (Councillor Plowman)
Deputy Mayor (Councillor J Hughes)
Councillor Scicluna
- APOLOGIES:** Pam Bushby (Communities and Wellbeing, Chichester District Council), Graham Pound (Chairman - Friends of Valletta), Julia Sander (Chairman – Friends of Chartres), Liz Turner (Chairman – Friends of Ravenna)
- ALSO PRESENT:** Councillor Gaskin
Councillor Simon Oakley – West Sussex County Council (Chichester East), Councillor Jamie Fitzjohn – West Sussex County Council (Chichester South), Councillor Louise Goldsmith (West Sussex County Council – Chichester West)
Paula Chatfield, Acting Chair, Chichester Tree Wardens
- ABSENT:** Councillor Joy
- IN ATTENDANCE:** Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Member Services Support Officer

The Mayor in the Chair for the first item.

The Mayor reminded participants that this was only the second meeting to be held under the new virtual meeting arrangements. Members were reminded that this was a meeting in public, just as if the Committee's meeting would have been had it been held in the Council Chamber. He outlined meeting protocols, including the need for clear voting practice to be adopted by Councillors.

1. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN FOR 2020-2021

It was proposed, seconded, put to the vote and **RESOLVED** that Councillor Clare Apel be elected Chairman of the Community Affairs Committee for the remainder of the Council year. There were no other nominations.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

It was proposed, seconded, put to the vote and **RESOLVED** that Councillor Cherry Hughes be appointed Vice-Chairman of the Community Affairs Committee for the remainder of the Council year. There were no other nominations.

3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received

4. MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS COMMITTEE HELD ON 3 FEBRUARY 2020

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the Meeting held on 3 February 2020, having been circulated, were approved and be signed as a correct record at a later date.

5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE IN MATTERS ON THE AGENDA FOR THIS MEETING

The Chairman and The Mayor and Councillors Lishman and Sharp declared a personal interest as Members of Chichester District Council.

6. UPDATE FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

Post meeting note: the Agenda is numbered incorrectly – Agenda items 7 to 12 should be marked (a) to (f) as sub-sections of item 6.

(a) **Minute 51** – Floral Displays

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the City Council's contractor, Ferring Nurseries had furloughed its entire staff in the wake of the Coronavirus pandemic and therefore had been unable to undertake maintenance or new planting. This had meant the cancellation of the hanging baskets scheme for the City centre for summer 2020.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed the Committee that work was currently under way to find a contractor to refresh the flowers in the fixed City centre planters.

Councillor Gershater asked about the Chi in Bloom budget. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the annual budget currently stood at approximately £30,000, including subsidising the hanging basket scheme. The Deputy Town Clerk further advised that there would be a large underspend on this budget in the current year but that alternative uses for this money were being considered.

The Mayor expressed sadness that the schemes were not going ahead but also supported the actions taken to safeguard the staff.

The Committee was informed that discussions were taking place internally about the maintenance aspect of the Chi in Bloom contract and that the Property Team had indicated willingness to water and maintain any planting solutions as required.

Councillor Sharp suggested that consideration be given to moving some of the planters to vegetables and herbs to help support groups or individuals struggling with food supplies.

The Deputy Town Clerk responded and advised that all considerations were on the table.

Councillor Carter indicated a willingness to help maintain any vegetable planting and to bring in some volunteers.

Councillor Gaskin asked that consideration be given to only using locally grown and sourced plants while the Mayor suggested that allotment holders could be a source of food through the disposal of their surplus crops.

Post meeting note: In preparation for the start of non-essential shops reopening from Monday 15 June, City Council Officers had undertaken to strip the dead flowers from the planters and fill them with fresh flowers. These

flowers had been sourced from a nursery in Birdham. This work had been completed by Tuesday 9 June. Sadly, the planters were vandalised over night. The plants have been replaced and the situation will be monitored.

(b) **Minute 56** – Chichester Tree Summit

The Member Services Support Officer advised the Committee that the Chichester Tree Summit itself had been postponed due to the current pandemic but it was still very much the intention to rearrange the event as and when the circumstances allowed. Members were notified that a piece of work had been undertaken in the Assembly Room which had indicated that only 34 socially distanced people could be permitted in the room at any one time.

It was noted that the “My Favourite Tree” competition was still running with details available on the website and ward board posters.

Councillor Oakley asked about the Agenda for the Tree Summit and whether it included reference to ongoing maintenance of newly planted trees on the highway.

The Chairman deferred this discussion to the Tree Wardens report under Agenda item 15.

(c) **Minute 60** – VJ Day celebrations

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the intention for VJ Day had been a small gathering at the War Memorial in Litten Gardens with the Mayor’s Chaplain providing appropriate text for the occasion.

In light of the ongoing situation, the Town Clerk advised that it was not currently possible to put concrete plans in place and it would very much be dictated by the guidelines in place at the time.

The Deputy Mayor voiced his support for keeping the current plans and only revising if the Government guidelines necessitated it.

The Chairman noted that, as there would be no Community Affairs meeting before VJ Day, a virtual Special Meeting may be required to finalise plans for the day.

The Mayor voiced his support for the Committee’s discussion and emphasised his view that VJ Day itself should not be forgotten. He also expressed hope that, based on how successful the VE Day celebrations had been; this would not be the case.

(d) **Minute 60** – Chichester City Council Business Plan (2019-2023)

The Town Clerk thanked Councillor Gershater for offering to undertake work on the formatting and content of the City Council’s Business Plan.

The Members were then advised by the Town Clerk that, in his opinion, the recent Coronavirus pandemic could signal the need to completely redraw the Business Plan and that the aims expressed within it could be made much more ambitious given that the principal authorities may be reviewing their operations, who delivers them and how.

Councillor Gershater thanked the Town Clerk and supported the concept that the scope of the Business Plan would probably now need to change significantly.

The Mayor was supportive of a full revisit of the Business Plan with the possibility of starting from scratch. He suggested to Members that this could start from an away day activity to give all Councillors the chance to feed in to the Business Plan process. The Chairman supported this idea but cautioned that social distancing considerations would need to be in place for any event of this nature to go ahead.

(e) **Minute 60** – Proposal for a friendship link with Speyer, Germany

The Town Clerk advised Members that, while it appeared that there was a good working connection with Speyer through email; the current pandemic meant that no progress towards physically meeting and cementing the link would be possible for the foreseeable future. Members were informed that all indications were promising that the link would go ahead at an appropriate time.

Councillor Gershater expressed his strong support for the friendship link and his willingness to help bring it about once the circumstances allowed.

(f) **Minute 60** – The future of Rumboldswyke School

Councillor Sharp updated Members regarding the ongoing discussion and actions being taken with regards to Rumboldswyke School. The Committee was advised that the Regional Schools Commissioner had been due to consider the academisation offer for Rumboldswyke from Bishop Luffa school the previous week.

Members were further advised that, due to the controversial nature of the discussion, it had been passed to Baroness Berridge, a Member of the House of Lords with a decision due during the week beginning 1 June. The Chairman agreed that Councillor Sharp could also circulate details of the ongoing West Sussex consultation which was due to close on Thursday 4 June.

Councillor Sharp informed Members that she considered the Bishop Luffa proposals to be very sound and positive and she urged Councillors to support the proposals.

The Mayor commented that, notwithstanding the ongoing process, there could be significant merit in keeping the school open to provide the extra space needed due to social distancing restrictions.

Councillor Fitzjohn advised Members that the current intention was to try to keep the school buildings open to provide the extra room needed as well as investigating other spaces that could be utilised.

Post meeting note: further to the note under (6) the Agenda is numbered incorrectly – Agenda items 13 to 18 should have read as item numbers 7 to 12.

7. POLICING AND SECURITY IN THE CITY

The Chairman expressed concerns that, given the difficult circumstance currently faced by everyone; it would be very useful to have someone from the Communities or Wardens team at the Community Affairs Committee meeting.

The Member Services Support Officer advised the Committee that, due to the fact that the District Council Offices closed earlier than the start of the meeting so the Divisional Manager had been unable to attend.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that City Council Officers were in regular contact with the Divisional Manager through Zoom meetings and that this point would be raised with her at the next opportunity.

The Chairman suggested that while meetings continued to be held virtually, it may be advisable to hold future meetings in the afternoon to allow the Divisional Manager to attend. The Town Clerk advised Members that this would be a decision for the Committee.

After a short discussion, it was RESOLVED that, for the foreseeable future, Community Affairs Committee meetings would start at 3pm on the scheduled Mondays.

(a) Report from Pam Bushby – Divisional Manager (Communities and Wellbeing), Chichester District Council

The Committee noted the summary report which had been circulated to all Members prior to the Meeting.

(b) Community Warden Reports

The Committee noted the reports which had been circulated to all Members prior to the Meeting.

The Mayor commented on the large increase in cycling activity that had taken place since the lockdown had started. He expressed concerns about the road safety implications of this and suggested to Members that the City Council may have a role in providing advice and support to cyclists to enable them to enjoy the activity safely and minimise any issues that may be related to the increase in popularity.

Councillor Goldsmith informed Members that West Sussex County Council still had a Cycling Safety team so the possibility existed for cycling surgeries or similar events whereby cyclists could have their bikes checked and discuss safety and other cycling related issues with members of the team. Councillor Goldsmith agreed to take the Mayor's points and concerns back to the County Council.

Councillor Carter suggested that the City Council could investigate supplying bells in support of cycling safety. Councillors then discussed the legalities around bells on bikes and it was clarified that, while it is compulsory for all new bikes to be supplied with bells; it was not compulsory for the bells to be kept on the bikes or used at all.

Councillor Sharp advised Members that, as lockdown started to ease, volunteers were returning to work but she was still receiving requests for help from vulnerable residents. Councillor Sharp asked whether the West Sussex County Council Community Hub was still active for vulnerable people to be referred to. The Chairman agreed to contact the Divisional Manager at Chichester District Council to clarify what support was currently available. Councillor Oakley advised that the Community Hub was still active and Councillor Fitzjohn informed Members that community based volunteer groups could apply to a Crisis Fund for support.

The Mayor briefly updated Members regarding the Mayor's Hardship Fund and the support it has been able to give to individuals in need.

8. REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES OF FRIENDS OF CHARTRES, RAVENNA AND VALLETTA

(a) Friends of Chartres

The Friends of Chartres report had been circulated to all Members and noted.

(b) Friends of Ravenna

The Friends of Ravenna report had been circulated to all Members and noted.

(c) Friends of Valletta

The Friends of Valletta report had been circulated to all Members and noted.

Councillor Scicluna advised Members that, as she was a member of all the Friends committees she would be able to answer any questions from Members in the absence of the Friends representatives themselves.

9. CHICHESTER TREE WARDENS

The report from the Chichester Tree Wardens had been circulated to all Members and noted.

Mrs Chatfield (Chichester Tree Wardens) highlighted the issue of ongoing watering of new trees and that it was very important that tree survival rates were considered as well as tree planting rates.

Members were informed that, despite the postponement of the Tree Summit, it was the intention of the Tree Wardens to try to start a project called "Mind the tree gap" which would give residents the opportunity to identify where gaps in tree planting had developed. Mrs Chatfield emphasised that, as well as identifying the gaps and ensuring they were filled, it was important that volunteers were found to water the trees as they settled in.

The Committee was advised that the decline in highway trees would need intervention before it could be reversed. The Chairman asked what form this intervention would take. Mrs Chatfield informed the Committee that once the areas of concern were identified then there would need to be fundraising or grant applications undertaken to pay for the additional tree planting.

Mrs Chatfield updated Members on the issue of the current state of affairs regarding looking after existing trees and watering. Tree Wardens in Summersdale and Parklands had taken responsibility for trees in their areas while the City Council ensured that trees in the City Centre were watered as required. In other areas, trees requiring watering were identified from a West Sussex County Council list with, ideally, two nearby households being asked to look after them.

10. DISCRETIONARY GRANTS

The Mayor added further to his comments about the Mayor's Hardship Fund, the types of applications the Fund was receiving and how heart breaking the stories behind the applications had been. He informed Members that applications were being received at a rate of one or two a day and processed within approximately 48 hours. The Mayor thanked the Committee for the funding provided by the City Council and advised them that other funding streams such as the GoFundMe page and direct private contributions were working well.

The Chairman advised Members that there was currently £5,599.12 remaining from the original £40,285 budget. The next scheduled meeting of the Committee to deal with Grants is not until October. Further Grant applications have been received since the most recent allocation and at least two are time sensitive, ideally requiring resolution well before October.

The Chairman noted the report from Councillor Scicluna on the subject of the Discretionary Grants and its conclusion that a Working Party be formed to look at the Grants system as a whole. Councillor Scicluna briefly outlined her concerns about the Grants system as it stands, including that more groups are asking for increasing amounts of money which means the scope for wider distribution of funds could be limited.

Councillor Gershater suggested that the City Council Business Plan could also feed in to the Discretionary Grants process.

The Mayor voiced his support for the formation of a Working Group to review the Discretionary Grants parameters, rules and fund allocations especially in view of the current pandemic.

After a further, short, discussion it was RESOLVED to form a Discretionary Grants Working Group.

The membership of this group would be Councillors Apel, Lishman, Plowman and Scicluna.

11. APPOINTMENT TO OUTSIDE BODIES

The Chairman referred the Committee to the list of representatives on outside bodies for comment.

Councillor Sharp noted that the Sussex Rural Community Council (Transport) was no longer in existence so that would be removed from the list.

The Chairman reviewed the current representatives with the Councillors present. Members responded that they had experienced a wide range of interaction from none to very active.

The Member Services Support Officer agreed to update the list based on the Committee's responses.

12. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION ON THE NEXT AGENDA

- City planting
- Covid-19 review and preparedness for a second wave
- Discretionary Grants Working Party
- Future of Rumboldswyke School

DATE OF NEXT ORDINARY MEETING: MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2020

The meeting closed at 6.44pm