

LEEK TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the General Purposes Committee held on 20th June 2023

Chairman: Cllr. L Swindlehurst

Present: Cllrs: M. Swindlehurst, P. Powner, K Hoptroff, K Nicholls, D. Young, S. Webster and M. Worthington
2 members of the public were in attendance and one member of the press. Minutes - D. Wheat, Town Clerk

11. The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the agenda ahead.

12. **Apologies:** Cllr. Wales.

Cllr. Worthington also apologised as had to leave mid-meeting for another engagement.

13. **Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Other Interests and consideration for the granting of Dispensations:**

None were disclosed.

14. **Minutes of the General Purposes Meeting** held on 23rd April 2023 were received as a correct record, approved and signed by the Chairman.

Proposed - Cllr. L. Swindlehurst - Seconded - Cllr. M. Swindlehurst - Motion Carried

15. There were no matters arising.

The Chairman moved item 17c forward before Monthly Reports to discuss the finance and Annual Governance Review earlier on the Agenda, and also moved item 17b Insurance to Confidential to discuss the quotations received.

16. **Item moved to follow AGAR**

17. (17c) **The Annual Governance and Accountability Return:**

17.c) i. **The Internal Audit prepared by JDH Business Services Ltd. was received.**

The report had several issues which had been raised during the audit for the council to consider to improve financial procedures. It was noted that the report is a very positive report which will help the Clerk and the Council overcome any issues which need to be addressed.

Issues were raised as follows:

1. **Books of account were not maintained throughout the year and as a result the council have not received balanced reconciliations during the year for approval.**

The Clerk explained that as the Council have invested in a new Accounting Software Scribe, it had taken time to enter all the data and to bring it up to date to be able to present accurate reports. This is now complete and can be managed moving forward on a monthly/ quarterly basis.

2. **The Balance at the year end was out by 50p which the Clerk had to write off and an Events Account Bank Statement was not presented to the Auditor.**

The Clerk advised that she had tried to find the imbalance but had not managed to do this before the audit was due. Monthly reconciliation moving forward will make it easier to find errors. The events bank statement had not arrived from the bank as this account had not been used recently which explained why this statement was not presented for Audit. Missing bank statements will be requested from the bank in 2024 if a similar situation arises.

3. **Income and Expenditure Accounting had not been applied correctly to the Year End Accounts.**

The Clerk explained that her previous experience as a Parish Clerk had been managing Accounts on a Receipts and Payments structure. It was noted by the council that the Clerk needs training in Income and Expenditure Accounting.

Approved Signature of Chairman:.....

Date: 18th July 2023

4. **No VAT was reclaimed in 2022/23 and the final claim for 2021/2022 had also not yet been claimed.**
The Clerk explained that now the data is all entered into the new accounting software this report can be filed to HMRC and the VAT 126 return can be completed for £24,660.00.
5. **The Risk Assessment needs to be reviewed in each the Financial Year.**
The Council has now approved the Risk Assessment at the May Annual meeting. The Clerk will make sure this is reviewed earlier in the next financial year.
6. **Accurate Budget Controls should be in place, so the council receives regular quarterly reports to comply with financial Regulations.**
Due to data being incomplete, the information was not presented to the council throughout the year. The Council have resolved to form a finance committee to help the Clerk set out what they expect to see from Budget reports so that they can monitor the performance of the decisions made when setting the Councils budget.
7. **Petty Cash transactions have not complied with Financial Regulations.**
The Clerk explained that some cash received from Mayoral fundraising events had been logged to Petty Cash as it was in coin form. The Auditor has clarified that all receipts should be paid to the Bank. The Clerk also explained that where possible cash should not be received for Allotment rent, but occasionally cash is received, and in future this will be banked the same day.
8. **Salaries were applied at incorrect rates.**
NALC issued a backdated pay increase for Council employees backdated to April 2022. Both the Clerk and the Admin assistants' salaries were adjusted to include the pay increase and backdated accordingly. This issue is now resolved.
9. **The fixed asset total was not carried forward correctly and was £60 less than the previous year.**
The Clerk explained that she had deducted £60 for the two past Mayor Badges which had been given out as she thought these were classed as assets.

Previous Financial Year 2021/2022 issues were also noted:

1. **The Locum Clerk and the HMRC indicator tool:** The previous Clerk had helped the council during a period of uncertainty while a new Clerk was recruited. As the Locum was a past employee the council had not realised they should have commented on the item raised in the previous financial year concerning the HMRC employment indicator tool. It was minuted that the council is very grateful to the previous Clerk, Mrs Julie Taylor for coming in to help during the difficult recruitment period and they are now aware should a locum be required in the future, to use the HMRC tool.
2. **Fidelity Insurance cover was recommended to be increased to £200,000.00.**
The Clerk had had a discussion with the councils' insurance provider and had been advised to increase cover from renewal 1st July 2023.
3. **Out of date cheques need to be noted and written off if applicable in each financial year.** Noted
17. **c) ii. The Annual Governance Statement (Section 1)** was then reviewed with improvements to be implemented and omissions declared, were then approved.
17. **c) iii. The Accounting Statements (Section 2)** were approved.
17. **c) iv.** The Annual Governance Statement was then signed by the Town Council Chairman, Mayor Cllr. Swindlehurst and the Clerk.
17. **c) v. The Accounting Statement** was then also signed by the Chairman.

The Council resolved that the Audit report will enable the Clerk to move forward to have positive outcomes. It has highlighted some weaknesses which the council can now work together with the Clerk to overcome by creating a roadmap to tackle the shortcomings. A report needs to be included with the Audit submission, to state what the council will do to correct any issues. Cllr. Nicholls commented that it is difficult for the new Councillors to approve the work of the previous council. Transparency and quality of

work needs to be the way forward.

19.28 – Cllr Worthington left the meeting

16. Monthly reports/ updates:

a) Allotment Committee Report:

- Cllr. Birch reported that the Committee have met, and all previous Committee members are still involved. Site visits to all locations by Cllr Birch and Cllr Young have been undertaken to familiarize them with the Allotments and to meet some tenants.
- A few outstanding fees have been identified where Direct debits have been received at the previous rent rate. Reminder invoices have been sent.
- Warning letters are going to be sent out to untidy Plots to give them a month's opportunity to resolve the problems before a Notice to Quit is issued. There is still a steady increase to the waiting list.
- Some minor issues have been resolved on Beggars Lane Allotment regarding boundary fencing between plots.
- A meeting has been arranged for Cllr. Birch to meet Leek's Youngest Allotment Gardener a press release will follow.
- **Floral Displays at the entrances to the Town:** Cllr Birch has some ideas to enhance the Town entrances, but working with the Allotment Association Members to create floral displays at all the entrance points. Residents have complained about the Sainsbury's and the Co-op headquarters roundabouts in particular. The Clerk has advised that permissions need to be sought from County Highways. Cllr Birch will plan towards 2024 to develop this project further.
- **Sparrow Park Planter:** Cllr. Birch and Cllr. Young have worked with the Lengthsman who has secured sponsorship from local businesses for the Sparrow Park Planter. Ash Lovatt was commended for his work to solve the problems with the Sparrow Park central planter and getting the work done swiftly. Thanks were minuted to the business sponsors who have offered to support the project. Plaques for the sponsors will be displayed on the Planter when completed.

b) Events Committee Report:

- **Family Fun day:** (originally planned for July) is to be re-scheduled. The events application and risk assessment went in on time but missed the deadline for road closure notice, which is a legal procedure.
- **Lego Day:** Sunday 1st October to co-inside with the Sunday Supplement Market. To be held in the Trestle Market.
- **The Outside Project** are proposing a live advent calendar art project in December and are asking for the Town Councils support.
- **Brough Park Concerts:** Summer Sunday afternoon entertainment sessions at the Bandstand are being very well attended in Brough Park.
- **Remembrance Sunday 12th November:** The Town Council will again support the Royal British Legion to host this event. Road closure procedures and any help the RBL need with invitations and parade organisation will be discussed at designated meetings dates to be arranged.
- **Christmas Lights: Friday 17th November**– Cllr. Cawley asked for the lights switch on to be reintroduced. This item to be on the next Events Agenda.
- **Twilight Market** – Provisionally booked for 8th December

Cllr. Cawley stated that Leek is coming into a period of centenary. A celebration anniversary is needed to commemorate 100 years of Brough Park being established. The Abbots Ville and Glebe Ville early social housing developments in Leek North were also established in the 1920s. The history of Leek should be celebrated. The Centenary of the Nicholson Memorial will also be celebrated in 2025. It was resolved to add these ideas to the next Events Agenda.

Cllr. M. Swindlehurst reminded the Council that March 2025 is also the deadline for the LOUGH funding for the Nicholson Institute restoration.

c) War Memorial Committee Report:

- Cllr. Hilyer reported that the Committee have not yet held a meeting. Terms of Reference will be agreed at the first meeting of the Committee. Research has commenced using the Town Council archive, for information to build a picture of what has pre-ceded in War Memorial activity.
- Cllr. Hilyer will do a written report before each meeting moving forward.
The council resolved that if a written report is not circulated prior to the meeting then the information cannot be discussed at the GP. meeting.
Proposed Cllr L. Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. Hilyer – Motion Carried
- Ball Haye Memorial had its Centenary in November 2023 but the Memorial needs to now be restored. A plan to address these repairs will be discussed at the first meeting.
- Ideas are emerging for a Celebration to mark the Centenary of the Nicholson Memorial in 2025:

d) Climate Change working group report: Scheduled to meet on 27th June at The Foxlowe, with a full agenda.

e) Bank House working group report: The Clerk reported that Scaffolding is going up at the end of June and work is set to commence throughout July. Moorlands Partnership Board officers are coming to inspect the work as it progresses.

f) Twinning Committee Report:

Cllr. Cawley has met with a German representative when he was in Este and he is looking into the possibility of Twinning also with a town in Germany.

The Phoenix Singers are interested in visiting Este as part of a European Tour and Westwood College are still involved with the Committee and will be involved with future trips where possible to involve Young People with cultural exchange.

17.a) In accordance with Local Government Act 1972 section 5 (150), payments were approved for the following:

The Clerk explained that she has relisted April payments to include items clipped off the list on the previous Minutes due to a formatting issue. May payments were approved as follows:

Proposed Cllr. M. Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. B Birch – Payments approved

Date	Net	VAT	Total	Description	Chq No.
APRIL					
02.04.2023	£36.05	£7.21	£43.26	General Duties	8137
03.04.2023	£918.45	£0.00	£918.45	General Duties	8137
03.04.2023	£12.00	£0.00	£12.00	Window Cleaner	8139
03.04.2023	£300.00	£0.00	£300.00	Storage	8140
03.04.2023	£52.38	£2.62	£55.00	Nicholson Clock Electricity	DD
04.04.2023	£39.35	£1.97	£41.32	Bank House Gas Supply	DD
11.04.2023	£570.00	£0.00	£570.00	General Duties	8138
11.04.2023	£7.50	£1.50	£9.00	General Duties	8138
12.04.2023	£60.35	£0.00	£60.35	Allotment Water	DD
17.04.2023	£730.00	£146.00	£876.00	Plumbing	8141
17.04.2023	£1,410.33	£282.07	£1,692.40	Highway Lighting	8142
17.04.2023	£150.00	£30.00	£180.00	Nicholson Clock repair	8143
17.04.2023	£120.00	£24.00	£144.00	Slate for Memorial	8144
17.04.2023	£1,860.00	£0.00	£1,860.00	Tree Surgery	8145
17.04.2023	£280.00	£0.00	£280.00	Bench Repair	8146
17.04.2023	£500.00	£0.00	£500.00	Equipment Storage	8147
17.04.2023	£330.00	£0.00	£330.00	General Duties	8148
17.04.2023	£210.00	£0.00	£210.00	Plumbing	8149
17.04.2023	£96.20	£0.00	£96.20	Bank House Water	8150
17.04.2023	£214.82	£42.96	£257.78	Weed Treatment	8150
17.04.2023	£233.62	£0.00	£233.62	PAYE, NI, Student Loan	8152
17.04.2023	£4.16	£0.83	£4.99	General Duties	8148
21.04.2023	£400.00	£0.00	£400.00	Mayors Fundraising	8152
24.04.2023	£800.00	£160.00	£960.00	Stockwell St. Premises Lease	8154
24.04.2023	£200.00	£0.00	£200.00	Community Grant	8157
24.04.2023	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	Cheque Cancelled	8158
25.04.2023	£2,792.65	£558.53	£3,351.18	Flags & Bunting	8155
25.04.2023	£1,000.00	£0.00	£1,000.00	Grant	8156
25.04.2023	£174.00	£0.00	£174.00	Website & IT	8159
26.04.2023	£240.00	£0.00	£240.00	General Duties	8160
26.04.2023	£2,472.40	£0.00	£2,472.40	Salaries	8161/62
26.04.2023	£743.21	£0.00	£743.21	PAYE, NI, Student Loan	8163
26.04.2023	£37.04	£7.41	£44.45	Advertising	8164
26.04.2023	£149.67	£29.94	£179.61	Microsoft and stationary	8165
26.04.2023	£44.05	£8.81	£52.86	Printer Fee	8166
28.04.2023	£23.24	£0.00	£23.24	Bank Charges	DD
<u>PAYMENTS</u>	<u>APRIL</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>£18,515.32</u>		

Approved Signature of Chairman:.....

Date: 18th July 2023

Date	Net	VAT	Total	Description	Chq No.
MAY					
02.05.2023	£728.95	£0.00	£728.95	General Duties	8167
02.05.2023	£675.00	£135.00	£810.00	Bank House Maintenance	8168
02.05.2023	£12.00	£0.00	£12.00	Window Cleaner	8169
02.05.2023	£26.20	£0.00	£26.20	Allotment Water	8170
02.05.2023	£223.79	£0.00	£223.79	Pension Contribution (employer)	DD
09.05.2023	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	Cheque Cancelled	8172
09.05.2023	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	Cheque Cancelled	8173
09.05.2023	£1,032.00	£0.00	£1,032.00	Flags & Bunting	8174
09.05.2023	£555.00	£0.00	£555.00	General Duties	8175
09.05.2023	£41.67	£8.33	£50.00	Maintenance Supplies	8175
09.05.2023	£12.49	£2.50	£14.99	Maintenance Supplies	8175
09.05.2023	£132.11	£0.00	£132.11	Bank House Water	8176
09.05.2023	£350.00	£70.00	£420.00	Hanging baskets	8177
09.05.2023	£80.00	£16.00	£96.00	Hard Core	8178
09.05.2023	£120.00	£0.00	£120.00	PA & Disco	8179
09.05.2023	£21.90	£1.58	£23.48	Balloons & Accessories	8180
11.05.2023	£65.00	£13.00	£78.00	Leaflets	8181
15.05.2023	£450.00	£0.00	£450.00	General Duties	8182
15.05.2023	£565.00	£0.00	£565.00	General Duties	8183
23.05.2023	£35.00	£0.00	£35.00	Allotment Refund	8184
24.05.2023	£1,115.00	£223.00	£1,338.00	Bank House Maintenance	8185
24.05.2023	£315.00	£0.00	£315.00	General Duties	8186
24.05.2023	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00	Cheque Cancelled	8187
24.05.2023	£2,908.81	£0.00	£2,908.81	Salaries	8188/89
24.05.2023	£838.88	£0.00	£838.88	PAYE, NI, Student Loan	8190
30.05.2023	£111.93	£0.00	£111.93	Bank House Water	8191
30.05.2023	£100.00	£0.00	£100.00	Entertainer	8192
30.05.2023	£44.85	£0.00	£44.85	Stockwell Street Water	8193
30.05.2023	£345.00	£0.00	£345.00	General Duties	8194
30.05.2023	£375.00	£0.00	£375.00	General Duties	8195
PAYMENTS	MAY	TOTAL	£11,749.99		

18. Items on Notice:

a. Committee Structures, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations Review:

Cllr. M. Swindlehurst proposed that a new Finance Committee is formed to monitor financial matters, but also to look for Grant opportunities, and to initially scrutinise the structure of the Committees, Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. In the coming year Levelling up funding bids will open up Grant opportunities to apply for which will need researching, planning and officer time to implement the administration Cllr. Hilyer referenced bringing Standing Orders in line with Terms of Reference. Officers should not be on Committees. Cllr. Hilyer clarified the situation. An officer can disagree with Council decisions and this needs to be in writing as an officer's recommendation. It was proposed that the Mayor each year should be on the Finance Committee and also the Chair of the GP. It was also recommended that members of different political parties should be on the committee. Cllr. Swindlehurst circulated a document draft Terms of Reference.

Cllr. Powner was nominated to be on the Finance Committee as it is in his field of expertise, along with the Mayor and Chair of General Purposes but to emphasise that all Councillors can attend the Committee meetings and will have voting rights on financial decisions through full council.

Proposed Cllr. M Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. Cawley – All in favour

H. R Committee.

Cllr. M. Swindlehurst thanked former Mayor Cllr. Cawley for completing a staff appraisal with the Clerk and identifying appropriate training needs.

Cllr. L Swindlehurst will work with the Clerk to consider a HR committee.

b. Appointment of a Safeguarding Officer:

The Safeguarding Policy was approved at a previous meeting. Cllr Nicholls recommended the Clerk needs to be the Safeguarding Officer to be consistent. Cllr. Nicholls will advise on training courses.

c. Haregate Summer Fayre:

The Haregate Centre have asked for the Town Council support to help them have a Bouncy Castle at their summer event.

The Town Council resolved that this could not be approved due to insurance issues and the event being held on SMDC land. It is a matter for the District Council.

d. Sparrow Park Planters and other Town Floral areas:

Discussions have been recommended between officers and the Council to formalize the responsibilities of the Town Council to maintain some floral areas within the Town Centre.

Item to be on the next Agenda.

e. Prince Street Green Space: The Clerk reported that the Town Council are responsible for a green space on the corner of Prince Street. This area needs attention.

The council discussed ideas to renovate this area. Quotations have already been gathered for the replacement of the path. Possible grants could be sourced for green space improvement or a new garden design. It could be developed into a really pleasant place.

Item for the Climate Committee agenda.

f. Lengthsman request to purchase a steam cleaner. The council resolved to continue to hire one when required. ***Not Approved***

g. Flag /Mini Christmas Tree Brackets: A quotation has been received for £19.50 for Flagpole brackets from a local supplier. The brackets are stress tested each year.

It was resolved to purchase 10 new brackets to prepare for Christmas.

Proposed Cllr. M Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. Webster

h. Leek as a Dementia Friendly Town: Cllr Young reported on progress in Leek to support people with Dementia and carers. There are three main activities so far; one at the football ground, a singing group at the Haregate Centre and a care and support group at the Salvation Army. I was discussed that pre-covid there was a dementia group at SMDC and there was a Dementia Champion.

The work Cllr. Young proposed it to raise awareness about being sensitive to things that mean a lot to someone with dementia. Cllr. Webster offered to be involved with the project. Cllr. Cawley commented on the relationship between memory and Sport. Memories live on in sporting endeavour. Music was also mentioned - connecting music with memories. Cllr Cawley's Moorlands Radio Show is played to residents of Beech Dene Care Home.

The Sensory Garden behind the Nicholson would make an ideal Dementia Friendly space if the anti-social behavior can be tackled. The council all agreed it could be an exciting working group.

Walking rounders activity was mentioned by Cllr. Birch who has requested more information.

It was proposed that the Town Council start a Dementia Friendly Community Initiative with the ambition that Staffs Moorlands becomes a Dementia friendly Community.

Proposed Cllr Young – Seconded Cllr. Hoptroff – Motion Carried

- i. **Chatty Benches:** Cllr. Nichols and Cllr Young have set the text and ordered plaques for four benches at the Butter Cross, the Nicholson Memorial, Market St and Derby Street.
- j. **Leek & District Show Society grant application for £200:** Carried from the May meeting. A letter clarifying the purpose of the application for a grant has been received. The funding will help in purchasing some marketing equipment and materials to encourage new growers to have a go at entering Show competitions. The grant was approved.
Proposed Cllr. L Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. Birch – Motion Carried

19. Items were received for information:

- a. **20 is Plenty:** Request from the Chairman of the organization to come to give a presentation to Leek Town Council. A discussion was had about the timing of a presentation. The Chairman and the Clerk will look at other options. The Mayor will also have a meeting with the local representative to listen to their ideas.
- b. **Moorlands Partnership Board:** SMDC have asked for a representative who attends the Parish Assembly to be nominated as a Council representative on the Moorlands Partnership Board. Parish Assembly representatives are Cllr. Birch and Cllr. Webster. The Clerk reminded the Council that Cllr. Wales had previously been a member on this board.
A vote was cast for the nomination of Cllr. Birch as the representative to be put forward.
Proposed – Cllr. L. Swindlehurst - Seconded – Cllr. Cawley – all in favour
- c. **Leek & District Show:** Further correspondence clarifying the Grant application has been received. The council approved the £200 for marketing material to recruit new growers to try showing produce and some training resources to help them achieve this. Grant approved.
Proposed -Cllr. L Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. Birch – all in favour
- d. **Club Day – 8th July:** A discussion was had about a power supply in the Market Place – it was clarified that this belongs to the District Council.

- 20. Exclusion of the public:** The Chairman moved that in accordance with section 19(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960 by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the public and press were then excluded from the meeting.
Proposed Cllr. L. Swindlehurst – Seconded Cllr. Nicholls - Motion Carried

Members of the Public and the Press left the meeting at 20.50

- a. **Bank House:**
Two organisation's are pursuing their interest in potential lease of the property. The property is currently under repair and the contractors are working for at least 4 weeks. It was suggested to hold an open day when the repairs are complete for people to come in to view the facility.
No decisions were made.
- b. **Insurance:** Quotations were discussed for the forthcoming Insurance Cover due on 1st July.
The Council resolved to appoint Arthur J. Gallagher Insurance Brokers Ltd.
Proposed Cllr. Cawley – Seconded Cllr. M. Swindlehurst – Motion Carried

Cllr. Nicholls mentioned the Household Support Fund. If anyone know any families who qualify they will receive £65 and £20 per child.

21.05 Meeting ended.