

**Minutes of a meeting of Council
held on 27 March 2024
from 7.00 pm**

Present: R Jackson (Chairman)
J Henwood (Vice-Chair)

M Avery	M Cornish	M Kennedy
A Bashar	J Dabell	P Kenny
R Bates	J Edwards	J Knight
J Belsey	D Eggleton	P Lucraft
M Belsey	R Eggleston	G Marsh
A Bennett	S Ellis	M Miah
K Berggreen	A Eves	J Mockford
P Brown	L Farren	D Pascoe
G Casella	I Gibson	E Prescott
L Carvalho	S Hatton	C Phillips
P Chapman	S Hicks	A Rees
C Cherry	J Hitchcock	R Whittaker
R Clarke	T Hussain	C Wood
AM Cooke	C Hobbs	G Zeidler

Absent: Councillors A Peacock, A Platts, J Russell and D Sweatman

A Minute's Silence was held for ex-Councillor and Chairman Margaret Hersey who recently passed away. Members acknowledged her distinguished service to the Council over many years.

1. OPENING PRAYER.

The opening prayer was read by the Vice-Chairman.

2. TO RECEIVE QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 9.

Question received from Mr Kenward (read by the Chairman in his absence.)

The license granted on the 1st of March 2022 to the Alliance for Better Care for the use of Clair Hall expired in February this year. However, ABC continue to occupy the venue. Could you please explain the conditions of the extension to this license or any new license that has been granted and how it may impact on the current processes in place regarding the future of the venue. A future which may soon see another third party granted permission to return the building back to its previous use as theatre and multi-use community venue.

The following response was provided by the Cabinet Member for Finance, Revenues and Benefits

Thank you for your question.

NHS partners continue to use Clair Hall on the same lease terms on a rolling monthly basis. We are pleased to be able to support the NHS Spring Vaccination Programme.

Question received from Mr Reed

How can MSDC justify charging more for parking in East Grinstead than the rest of the District? Is this legal, certainly unethical?

Surely the job of the Council is to support local business? Several shops have recently closed, e.g. M & Co, Clarks and Greggs plus two restaurants and a café/bar.

The Hospitality sector has been devastated by the pandemic, increasing parking charges to 8pm will only inflict more pain on this struggling sector. This punitive charge will also have a negative effect on Chequer Mead and the cinema. How will this be policed? Street parking and WSCC finish 5-6pm.

The following response was provided by the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Customer Services:

I would like to address each of your points related to the introduction of variable parking tariffs across our communities plus evening, Sunday and Bank Holiday charging that is budgeted for introduction later in the year. I am acutely aware of public feeling on these matters and now the budget has passed I would like to clearly articulate plans for implementation.

The Budget was agreed by the majority of Councillors in this Chamber on 28 February. It is a legal requirement of this Council to produce a balanced budget by early March and this was achieved. Costs to the Council have increased massively, not least through inflation and we are facing a £12m funding gap over the next four years. Budget preparation work followed months of work by Officers and a cross party working group and then Scrutiny considered the proposals.

The background to parking elements of the budget originates from the parking strategy adopted by the previous administration of the Council in late 2020. A 10-year strategy whose data was refreshed post-Covid and recently updated in November last year.

The evidence in the strategy tells us we should not treat each town and village car park the same, each should be dealt with uniquely with regards to their own challenges. In this context, while we wish to invest to our car parks with the introduction of new payment technologies for example, in East Grinstead we have a unique parking capacity issue that needs to be resolved. Not enough parking in our main car park for residents and retailers turns people off visiting the town and does not help our retailers. We therefore need to ensure that our tariff structure encourages the right amount of turnover, or churn and to use the revenue generated to prepare a business case for investment in our estate including at the Queens Way Car Park. In treating each town differently, the fact-based analysis tells us quite simply that the Haywards Heath tariff increase should be pitched below East Grinstead due to lower demand, and in Burgess Hill the same again. So for three reasons we are increasing parking charges. 1) to reinvest in our parking estate, 2) as part of our overall strategy to meet the financial challenges of the Council and 3) to ensure charges set at the appropriate level to encourage a healthy turnover of spaces that better support the economy. The first hour charge in East Grinstead will therefore increase by 30p, in Haywards Heath by 20p and in Burgess Hill by 10p. The full table of charges, by carpark will be detailed on the Council's website from

tomorrow and will be published in local newspapers as we commence the statutory process of implementing these charges in April.

I now turn to the challenge of the evening, Sunday and Bank Holiday charges. Firstly, I would like to correct a misconception about the Sunday and bank holiday charges. These are planned to be fixed, all-day tariffs of just £1.50 in East Grinstead and Haywards Heath and £1 in Burgess Hill, to encourage shopping in our town centres and not deter it. Yes, we are planning to extend parking charges into the evening. However both these new charging periods will be subject to statutory consultation which will launch in the coming weeks. With regards to your point about the cost of parking being detrimental to the theatre and evening economy, many towns and cities already have evening charging regimes in place at much higher rates than are budgeted here and their economies have suffered no worse than East Grinstead. To take a family of four to the Big Easter Panto at Chequer Mead this Friday will cost £72 and if our Bank Holiday charging was in place, at £1.50 that's just 2% of the cost of the visit. In fact if you looked at ticket availability today, more people are choosing Saturday afternoon performance and there are parking costs on Saturday and not on the Friday. For people going to see Paul Young on 7 April it will cost £128. No future parking charge for this show as it is on a Sunday evening.

Finally, your observation on how we will police this will be addressed as follows: We will continue to work with our excellent enforcement staff. In the longer term they will be reinforced with our investment in new technologies. This will free up some of the enforcement teams time to concentrate for example on on-street parking infringement. So in summary, we increase charges by pence per hour and we both improve our carparking estate and the experience of our shoppers and we raise vital revenue this Council needs to continue to operate its services.

Mr Reed asked a supplementary question. His comment and question are as follows:

Did you say there weren't enough parking spaces in East Grinstead that was turning off shoppers as it's illogical to think that increasing charges will encourage more. Also regarding the parking regime, we are inundated at the Kings Centre with people parking and walking into town. They should be putting registration numbers into the keypad but we've not seen civil enforcement officers for some time, that's why I ask the question. West Sussex County Council on-street parking in East Grinstead (which is unique to the three towns) finishes at 5pm. This doesn't occur Burgess Hill or Haywards Heath. The yellow line parking finishes at 6pm so can I suggest that if you do go ahead with 8pm then the streets will be clogged with yet more complaints about illegal parking or parking outside my house. Finally, are you aware that 5215 signatures have been collected from East Grinstead Business Association today?

The Cabinet Member acknowledged that there are a number of petitions that have been run across the three towns and he is aware of the feelings around the charges that are being applied and proposed to be applied. The Monitoring Officer has received at least one petition, and it is going through the process of being verified.

The Monitoring Officer agreed to provide a written response to a point of order querying the length of time constitutionally allowed for a Cabinet Member's response.

3. TO BE AGREED BY GENERAL AFFIRMATION THE MINUTES AND EXEMPT MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 28 FEBRUARY 2024.

The minutes and exempt minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. TO RECEIVE DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FROM MEMBERS IN RESPECT OF ANY MATTER ON THE AGENDA.

None.

5. TO CONSIDER ANY ITEMS THAT THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COUNCIL AGREES TO TAKE AS URGENT BUSINESS.

None.

6. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS.

The Chairman highlighted recent engagements. He confirmed that he had recently hosted the Mid Sussex Applauds Awards, alongside the High Sheriff of West Sussex and noted that it was a pleasure to award residents who work so hard for the District.

7. CHANGES TO EXECUTIVE ARRANGEMENTS MADE BY THE LEADER.

Councillor Eggleston moved the item noting that it is a simple change to bring leasehold arrangements in line with values on asset disposal. This was seconded by Councillor Cooke.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations as set out in the report which were agreed unanimously with 44 in favour.

RESOLVED

Council noted the changes to executive arrangements set out in the report.

8. MSDC PAY POLICY STATEMENT 2024/2025.

Councillor Cooke proposed the item noting that the statement informs current practice and does not introduce anything new. This was seconded by Councillor Hicks who noted the Council's commitment to paying staff the living wage.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendations as set out in the report which were agreed with 43 in favour, 1 against, and no abstentions.

RESOLVED

Council agreed the Pay Policy at Appendix A, to comply with the requirements of the Localism Act.

9. DRAFT PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2024/25.

Councillor Bennett proposed the item. This was seconded by Councillor Lucraft.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation as set out in the report which was agreed unanimously with 44 in favour.

RESOLVED

Council approved the provisional Programme of Meetings at Appendix 1.

10. APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS TO STANDARDS COMMITTEE.

Councillor Cornish proposed the item. This was seconded by Councillor Wood.

The Chairman took Members to a vote on the recommendation as set out in the report which was agreed with 44 in favour.

RESOLVED

Council agreed to appoint three Independent Persons to the Standards Committee (Amanda Rogers, Wendy Swinton Eagle and Paul Cummins) for a four year term from 1 May 2024 to 30 April 2028.

11. TO RECEIVE THE LEADER'S REPORT.

The Council received the Leaders report. In response to questions from members, he agreed to maintain engagement and continue to make representation to Lewes District Council regarding their Regulation 18 Draft District Plan.

With regards to Mid Sussex District Council's Regulation 19 consultation which has recently closed, he agreed to provide a written response to Members to clarify the process for the next stages and when Members may be able to view the responses.

12. REPORT OF CABINET MEMBERS, INCLUDING QUESTIONS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.1.

The Council received the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Communities and Communications' update. She agreed to provide a written response on the Council's plans to commemorate the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings. She also provided clarification on the mixed media approach for online and offline communications regarding Mid Sussex Matters (MSM) and Council updates in community magazines and agreed to provide a written response on the number of digital subscribers for the MSM digital copy.

The Council received the Cabinet Member for Finance, Revenues and Benefits' update.

The Council received the Cabinet Member for Leisure and Customer Services' update. He agreed to provide a written response to a query regarding a potential safety issue with the wooden path in Ashenground Woods and any remedial action that may be being considered. In response to a Member's question, he also agreed to follow up with officer to ensure road clearance work is carried out.

Regarding questions related to sport provision, he agreed to provide a written response to what amount of S106 monies for formal sports may be available to be spent inside Burgess Hill in coming years to support the aspirations of the Rugby, Football and Cricket clubs in growing and improving their grounds and pavilions. Specifically relating to a question on Burgess Hill Cricket Pavilion he noted that the first stage is for the tenant to achieve planning permission. After this they will revisit

all the costs involved and the Council will discuss what funds are available to help them achieve their goal. He also agreed to engage with the larger villages in the north of the District who have aspirations for their sports provision.

The Council received the Cabinet Member for Sustainable Economy and Housing's update. With regards to questions on unused accommodation, he noted that it was an ongoing topic of discussion with housing providers, to bring properties back into use. He also agreed to provide a written response on the current position with Swan Mead. In response to a question on funds provided in place of affordable housing provision (during the planning application stages) he agreed to provide a written response on where and what such funds can be used for.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS PURSUANT TO COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULE 10.2.

None.

The meeting finished at 8.08 pm

Chairman