

CARTERTON TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE TOWN HALL
ON TUESDAY 12 DECEMBER 2017
COMMENCING AT 7.45 PM

Present: Cllr Mrs L Little - Town Mayor
Cllr N Leverton - Deputy Mayor

Cllr Ms J Bull Cllr Mrs M Mead
Cllr Mrs D Bulley Cllr D Melvin
Cllr Miss S Coul Cllr M McBride
Cllr R Crapper Cllr P Scott
Cllr Mrs C Delaney Cllr Mrs S Scott-Stovold (from Item 119)
Cllr J Hayes Cllr Mrs C Wilson

Officers: Ron Spurs – Town Clerk
Tan Marchant, Assistant Clerk

In attendance: Cllr M Crossland – District Councillor
Mrs Doreen Clarke, Mrs Elaine Hatton, Mrs Kerry Jones & Mr D Wesson

116 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

117 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 21 November 2017, copies of which had been previously circulated to Members, were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Mayor.

118 RESIGNATION OF TOWN COUNCILLORS

The Clerk reported that Cllr M Brennan and Cllr R Brooks had resigned from the Town Council. If an election is not called for by the electorate, then two Councillors will be co-opted.

119 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor expressed her thanks to Cllr Brennan, who had resigned from both Town and District Councils and also from the Conservative Party. His contribution as Chairman of the Planning and Amenities & Regeneration Committees was invaluable, as was his help and support on the Local Plan. She thanked Cllr Brooks, who had also resigned from the Town Council and Conservative Party. He would be missed for the valued support he had given to the town.

She thanked everyone who had helped with the switch on of the town's Christmas Lights. The Lanterns, once again, were magnificent. She particularly thanked Rev Bill Blakey, Marie Hazell from the ICE Centre, Keasi Gonewai (Head Girl at Carterton Community College), Lucy Southgate (Deputy Head Girl) and Keiron Eldridge (Mayor's Cadet) for their help in switching on the lights.

The Mayor was invited to the After School Club at Carterton Primary School to talk to about the fundraising that Ted Little had done over the last few years to raise money for a much needed Community Drop In Centre and Veteran's Hub. The children were interested to hear

of his travels around the world and his invitation to Buckingham Palace with the RAF Falcons. He had also received a Blue Peter Badge.

She thanked the children from Edith Moorhouse Primary School for singing carols on the Market Square on Saturday 9 December. Thanks also to Cllr Mrs Bulley for playing the piano, Cllr Mrs Wilson for arranging a visit from Santa, Cllr Ms Bull for her help serving hot chocolate and to our Town Warden, Alex Fleming, who helped behind the scenes.

On Thursday 14 December there would be a Christmas Lunch Club at the Town Hall for senior citizens, which would consist of turkey and cranberry baps, mince pies and sherry. On Friday 15 December there would be a Christmas Concert by the Wessex Male Voice Choir and RAF Brize Norton Military Wives Choir at St John's Church at 7.00pm with tickets available from the Town Hall at £10 each. Any profits made would be shared between SSAFA and the Children's Society.

The RAF had helped her to provide Christmas hampers for the most vulnerable residents and the Mayor expressed her thanks to all the residents who had donated towards this.

120 CLERK'S REPORT

The Clerk's Report, copies of which had previously been circulated, was received. The Report is attached at Annex 'A'. See below.

121 ADJOURNMENT FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO RAISE MATTERS

Elaine Hatton of 45 Swinbrook Road stood up to speak. She expressed her concern that the Mayor had been booed when making announcements at the switching on of the Christmas Lights. She felt this was a sad situation and wondered whether the Mayor perhaps felt this was the time to walk away. The Mayor said she would speak to Mrs Hatton outside of the meeting.

Doreen Clarke of Rose Villa, 32 Milestone Road, stood up to speak about the Vote of No Confidence in the Town Mayor. She said she spoke for many residents who felt they had no confidence in the Town Council. The impression was that the Council was divided and arguing amongst themselves instead of working together for the good of Carterton. She said that Cllr Mrs Little had been a fantastic Mayor who deserved praise for what she had done. Mrs Clarke said that she had received over 200 cards when her husband had died ten years ago, some from people in this room, and the one she had treasured the most had been from Carterton Town Council – that was the Council she had respected. She said residents just wanted to see this situation resolved for the good of the people of Carterton.

122 ADJOURNMENT FOR COUNTY COUNCILLORS TO RAISE MATTERS

Cllr Field-Johnson had given his apologies.

123 PLANNING COMMITTEE

Council received the Minutes of the Meetings of the Planning Committee held on 21 November and 5 December 2017. These were noted.

124 AMENITIES & ECONOMIC REGENERATION EXTRAORDINARY MEETING

Council received the Minutes of the Extraordinary Meeting of the Amenities & Economic Regeneration Committee held on 12 October 2017, which had been convened to approve the 'A' works within the Quinquennial Report and to obtain the necessary quotes.

Council APPROVED proceeding with the 'A' works identified and the Minutes were duly signed by the Mayor.

125 ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

The Minutes of the Meeting of the Administration Committee held on 5 December 2017 had been previously circulated to Members. The following matters were considered:

- (a) Draft Budget for 2018/2019

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the Budget for 2018/2019 as presented.

- (b) Draft Precept for 2018/2019

The Administration Committee had recommended that Council approve a 0% increase in the Precept, which would amount to a Precept of £517,399 as in the current year. For information, the Clerk advised that there are more than one year's operating funds currently with WODC and in addition to that there is around £150,000 also with WODC but we are only three-quarters of the way through the year. The Council is therefore in a very healthy position financially. He also advised that there may be a small adjustment to the Precept depending on the number of homes on Band D. Cllr Miss Coul queried how much the Council should hold in Reserves and the Clerk responded that it was good practice to have no more than one year's operating costs.

Council RESOLVED TO APPROVE that the Precept be maintained at £517,399 for 2018/2019.

126 REPORT OF THE TOWN CLERK

Council received a report from the Town Clerk concerning tree work in Bracken Close. The Tree Surgeon had identified works required to eleven trees in close proximity to footpaths in Bracken Close and had submitted a quote of £1,200 to carry out the works.

Council APPROVED the expenditure of £1,200 + VAT for the tree works.

127 MOTION OF NO CONFIDENCE IN THE TOWN MAYOR

Cllr McBride stood up to speak on behalf of himself and Cllr Crapper. He said that he had looked at the Code of Conduct, in particular Item 19 concerning financial matters, and he sought clarification as to whether he could proceed. The Mayor said there could be no discussion of financial matters in this meeting. Cllr McBride said there were a significant number of Town Councillors who had no confidence in Cllr Mrs Little continuing as Chair of Carterton Town Council. Her behaviour since the original allegation was made had not been befitting of the office of Mayor. This Motion of No Confidence arose from several areas where the Mayor had brought the Town Council into disrepute and had failed to comply with the Council's own policies.

A number of complaints concerning Cllr Mrs Little had been reported to the West Oxfordshire District Council Monitoring Officer and, following an examination of the Mayor's Account by the Internal Auditor, the investigation had been passed to the Police fraud squad. The Mayor had chosen to speak to the press to attack the actions of the Town Clerk in having these matters investigated, which was in breach of Standing Orders. Quoting from the newspaper article, 'Mrs Little, who is now in her fifth year as Mayor, said that she had refrained from commenting until this point because she had been adhering to the Code of Conduct as a Councillor', but then went on 'and I also quote that this has not occurred, and I believe that this is as a result of the actions of four Town Councillors who have split the Town Council'. The article did not name

the Councillors and they had no right to reply, otherwise they would be in breach of Standing Orders.

The Mayor also called an Urgency Committee, which was convened for the purpose of suspending the Town Clerk on a non-urgent issue, with no minutes or agenda and no presentation to the next Council meeting, which was required in the Code of Conduct. Cllr Scott also then tried to subsequently convene a meeting of the Urgency Committee to try to suspend the Clerk.

Cllr McBride said he believed there were other areas that may require investigation following the blitz of emails from three Councillors supporting the Mayor's actions, which again were in breach of Standing Orders and Councillor Protocol. One example from the email of Cllr Mrs Scott-Stovold stated that the Clerk had been suspended, which was not true. He asked that if anyone had any doubt in their minds or wondered whether or not this Motion was valid, then they should take the opportunity to abstain, otherwise he asked that Councillors support this vote of no confidence.

Cllr Scott asked whether the Clerk had ever asked for evidence of the missing financial documents. The Mayor said that as Chairman she was going to stop any debate on this as there had never been an internal inquiry with the corporate body and she did not believe this was the platform for discussing finance, but would say that she had a signed copy of the Ted Little Constitution. She said she welcomed an internal inquiry where she would be able to answer any questions. The questions that went to the District Monitoring Officer had been answered and she had a letter stating that there was not enough evidence to warrant further inquiry. The Monitoring Officer had made some recommendations and she would be happy to show Councillors the report. She had tried to convene a meeting with Councillors so that views could be aired, but people were unable to attend. She had now called an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council on Monday 18 December.

Cllr Miss Coul asked whether the reply from the Monitoring Officer included the second complaint about the Mayor, Cllr Scott and Cllr Brennan (who had since resigned). The Mayor said this was a grievance and would be discussed at the Extraordinary Meeting, the agenda for which would follow in due course. Cllr Miss Coul asked the Mayor what the Mayor's Allowance was for and the Mayor replied that she had an email from the previous Town Clerk saying that the Allowance was for whatever she wanted to use it for. It was mostly used for dresses and tickets to Mayor's functions. Cllr Miss Coul said that the Allowance was paid directly to her, yet tickets were paid for out of the Mayor's Charity Account (for example, for WODC, Cherwell DC, Abingdon TC and Witney TC events) and these should have come from the Allowance and not the Mayor's Charity Account. The Mayor did not comment.

Cllr Mrs Scott-Stovold said she was outraged at this Motion and she felt it had gone on for far too long. She was appalled at the attitude of some of the Members who seemed set on destroying the harmony that the Council strived for to represent residents and who only seemed to have malicious intentions. She said the Mayor had worked very hard for the last five years and she was proud to have her as Mayor.

Cllr Ms Bull said that as a new Councillor she had spent a lot of time reading Standing Orders. She agreed with Cllr McBride because the Urgency Committee that had been called was outside of Standing Orders, which state that any decisions made at an Urgency meeting need to be brought to the full Council for approval. The Urgency Committee convened to suspend the Clerk, according to Standing Orders, should never have taken place. Cllr Ms Bull said that when she was called to attend the meeting she did not know what it was about until she got there and what transpired at the meeting was appalling and clearly outside of employment law. The allegation made did not constitute gross misconduct and trying to suspend the Clerk would not have been possible. She had raised her point quite clearly with Cllr Hayes and Cllr Scott that

she thought it wise not to continue that line of inquiry and these actions could open up the Council to a possible negligence claim due to constructive dismissal. If that happened, then the whole of Carterton would suffer because financially the Council could be in a lot of trouble. Cllr Ms Bull's concern was that the Council did not seem to understand employment law.

Cllr Leverton said that in the newspaper article the Mayor stated that she had never been given the opportunity to respond to any of the queries regarding the Mayor's Account. He had a copy of an email from the Clerk to Cllr Mrs Little dated 6 November 2017 attaching the report of the Internal Auditor and asking for her availability to be interviewed regarding these matters during week commencing 20 November. The Mayor had replied the next day thanking the Clerk for his email, therefore acknowledging receipt of it, but she did not come in for the meeting. Therefore, what was stated in the newspaper article on more than one occasion misled the Council and misled the population, and he was in favour of supporting this Motion because the article was riddled with holes. The Mayor replied that she had emailed the Clerk and the Monitoring Officer to say that she did not intend to wait for another three weeks and wanted the meeting that day. Cllr Leverton reminded the Mayor of what she had said in the newspaper article, that if she had any doubt that her actions had not been in line with current procedures, she would resign her position as a Councillor. The Mayor replied that this was correct and that she did not believe she had done anything wrong. She said that the meeting that should have happened of the corporate body at the very outset in October should have been an internal meeting, as stated by a council solicitor yesterday, who was amazed that this had gone like it had. She restated that these matters would be discussed at the Extraordinary meeting on Monday.

The Clerk asked for clarification that the solicitor referred to was not the Council's Solicitor and Cllr Mrs Little replied that it was not.

Cllr Mrs Bulley said that never in all the years that she had been on the Town Council, since 1985, had she experienced the spiteful attitude of some of the Councillors. Instead of working together for the good of the town and the people who live in it, they were attacking one of the Councillors with the sole intent of destroying all the good things that she had achieved for everyone's benefit. It seemed this witch-hunt had been hellbent on tearing the Mayor's life apart for no other reason than jealousy and spite. If someone joins the Council with the only intention of causing trouble within the Town Hall, then this was not the place for you and you should think seriously about your position. Councillors are needed who are keen to look to the good of the town. She said she had every faith in the Mayor and always would have, and could not recall anyone who had worked so hard to bring so many good things for the residents.

Cllr Melvin said that he was a fairly new Councillor as well and would be supporting the Motion, principally because of the way the Mayor had reacted and handled the initial complaints made and the subsequent investigation. He felt that it had been a shoot the messenger approach, attempting to deflect the blame back to the Clerk. Some of the allegations and emails had been unnecessary and could be viewed as an attempt to discredit the Clerk and could affect the ongoing investigation. He believed she was in part the architect of a lot of the difficulties because of the way it had been handled.

Cllr Mrs Wilson said she was disgusted with the behaviour of the Town Council and appalled at the accusation made, which should not have been leaked to the press as this had put the Council in a bad light, resulting in a lot of residents having no confidence in the Council. She said she had every confidence in the Mayor, who had given the town a much-used Food Bank, Drop-in Lunch Club that was free and paid for out of her own pocket, and was working on getting the Swindon bus back, to name a few things. She did not recall anyone else that had done this much for the town.

Cllr Mrs Mead said that she could see tensions were really high around the table and the Council was divided, which was a shame. However, there were elements that had gone awry. The Council's Terms of Reference stated that the Urgency Committee was made up of Chairmen of Council Committees or his/her deputy in their absence to deal with matters on behalf of the Council of such urgency that they cannot be delayed until the next Council meeting. She said Cllr Scott had chaired the meeting, whereas the Terms of Reference clearly stated that the Chairman of the Council must chair it. The Terms of Reference stated that the meeting must have an Agenda, but Councillors were telephoned ten minutes beforehand and not told what the meeting was about. The Terms of Reference state that Minutes should be recorded but this did not happen, and that the Minutes should be signed by the Chairman, which also did not happen. Decisions made by the Committee should then be an agenda item at the next full Council meeting and this had not been the case. For all those reasons, her confidence had been knocked. The Mayor had continuously circulated emails talking about Standing Orders, protocol etc, yet none of this was adhered to, so Cllr Mrs Mead would be supporting the Motion.

Cllr Crapper said it was very sad that things had come to this, but he had no option but to support the Motion. He had known Cllr Mrs Little since just before she applied to become a Councillor and was impressed by her enthusiasm and personality. She became Mayor in due course and in her retirement was able to work hard for the good of the town. He had a good relationship with her and she should be proud of her many achievements and support for good causes. A little over a year ago, however, he noticed that her behaviour was changing and her judgement was becoming less reliable. Her unduly harsh appraisal of the Town Clerk was a case in point. Here was a man with a military and police background who knew that his duty was to keep the Council on the right side of the law and to be line manager for the Town Hall staff. This completely correct behaviour did not suit Cllr Mrs Little, who tried to undermine him by giving instructions to the staff by virtue of her status as Mayor without reference to the Clerk and riding roughshod over the proper procedures.

As a result, in April this year, he told Cllr Mrs Little that he would not vote for her if she put herself forward for another term as Mayor. He did not mention his observations, but merely said that she had had a good innings and could step down with her head held high. He followed this with a confidential and friendly letter, which Councillors had now all seen because the Mayor had used extracts from it to claim that he had been harassing her, and he could not let this betrayal of confidence pass without comment.

When the Mayor re-elected herself with her casting vote, which was another example of poor judgement, several Councillors who had not voted for her told her immediately after the meeting that they would support her nevertheless for the sake of Carterton. By this time he realised that the title of Mayor had gone to her head and her behaviour was becoming increasingly erratic. She regarded several Councillors and the Town Clerk as sworn enemies and had divided the once united Council and also the town, much to the amusement of most of West Oxfordshire it seemed. She then instigated the so-called Urgency Committees, with the objective of suspending the Town Clerk, knowing that if the Clerk was suspended the inquiry into her Charity Account would not continue. These Committees had no meaningful agendas or minutes and there was nothing urgent about them, only a state of panic in the mind of the Mayor. In fact, they were more like kangaroo courts, which had no place in a civilised society. This is why, sadly, he believed this once respected lady is no longer fit for the office of Mayor and he seconded the Motion of No Confidence.

Cllr Mrs Little said that some of what Cllr Crapper said was untrue and she had the evidence to prove it.

A vote was taken by a show of hands. Those in favour of the Motion were Cllrs Melvin, McBride, Crapper, Leverton, Ms Coul, Miss Bull and Mrs Mead. Those against were Cllrs Hayes, Scott, Mrs Scott-Stovold, Mrs Delaney, Mrs Bulley, Mrs Wilson and Mrs Little. The

Mayor used her casting vote to vote against the Motion. She said she did not intend to stand down until she had the apology that she deserved because the allegations made against herself, her family and RAF personnel were untrue. She would consider her position after that. Those that had voted against the Motion then gave a round of applause.

Council voted AGAINST the Motion of No Confidence in the Mayor.

128 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Financial Statement to 30 November 2017, set out at Annex B, was noted.

111 INCOME RECEIVED

Income Received during November 2017, previously circulated, was noted.

112 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

The Accounts for Payment for December 2017 had previously been circulated. The Assistant Clerk had circulated an updated list prior to the meeting.

Cllr Mrs Mead asked about the Mayor's Christmas Cards as she considered that £100 for 100 cards was expensive. The Assistant Clerk said that this was much cheaper than in previous years when it had cost £200-£300. The cards had been hand-painted and printed by former town councillor, Mike Steward.

Cllr McBride said that he had spoken to previous Mayors, who seemed to recall that the Mayor's Christmas Cards were paid for out of the Mayor's Allowance. The Assistant Clerk said that she did not think this was the case but would check back in the accounts.

Council RESOLVED that the Accounts, set out at Annex C, be APPROVED for payment.

113 DEBIT CARD TRANSACTIONS

Debit Card Transactions for November 2017, previously circulated, were noted.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm

16 January 2018

Town Mayor

1. **Christmas Lights Switch on.** The Clerk thanked the Councillors who had helped with the Lantern Parade. There had been a last-minute change of plan as the RAF were unable to assist with marshals, which meant the planned closure of Burford Road did not go ahead and the Parade walked on the pavement as in previous years. There were no other problems and the event went well. **Noted.**
2. **OXPIP** –asked for their thanks to be passed on to Town Councillors for the grant of £2,000 approved at the last meeting. **Noted**
3. **Printer.** The Clerk had used his authority to purchase a small printer for the Assistant Clerk's office and he had emailed Councillors with the details. There was a difficulty in printing cheques on the current printer due to it being incompatible with Omega Accounts. **Noted.**
4. **RBL Silent Soldier.** An example of a life size cut-out soldier was on display for Councillors to see. The cut-outs would be placed around towns and villages to mark the anniversary of the end of the First World War in 2018. The cut-outs cost around £200. The Clerk will bring a report to Council in the New Year to consider whether to purchase any and where they should be placed. The Mayor said the Events Working Group would also consider how to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the RAF.
5. **Pampas Close Playground.** Cllr McBride asked for an update on the proposed new equipment for the Playground. The Clerk said that he had had a meeting with Sutcliffe Play about a further piece of equipment suitable for youngsters with disabilities. This would be presented for approval at the next Council meeting in January 2018.
6. **Diary Dates**
25 December to 1 January 2018 - Town Hall Closed for Christmas & New Year
16 January 2018 - Planning & Town Council

**Ron Spurs
Town Clerk**