

CARTERTON TOWN COUNCIL  
MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD IN THE TOWN HALL  
ON TUESDAY 20 FEBRUARY 2018  
COMMENCING AT 7.45 PM

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

Cllr Ms J Bull Cllr M McBride  
Cllr Mrs D Bulley Cllr D Melvin  
Cllr Miss S Coul Cllr P Scott  
Cllr R Crapper Cllr Mrs S Scott-Stovold  
Cllr Mrs E Hatton Cllr D Wesson  
Cllr J Hayes Cllr Mrs C Wilson  
Cllr Mrs M Mead

Apologies Cllr Mrs C Delaney

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

In attendance: Cllr Mrs M Crossland (District Councillor)  
Cllr H Howard (District Councillor)  
Cllr P Handley (County Councillor)  
Joanne Staddon (Carterton Squash Club)  
Stuart Rust (Oxford Mail/Witney Gazette)  
7 or 8 members of the public

149 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Clerk asked the Mayor whether she had a declaration of interest in relation to the Mayor's Allowance Account. She replied that she did not and the Clerk advised her that in his view she needed to declare an interest or she could be liable for criminal investigation. The Mayor accepted this and a declaration of interest was made.

150 MINUTES

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 January 2018, previously circulated to Members, were approved as a true record and the Mayor said she would sign them later.

151 TOWN MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Mayor read a prepared announcement as follows:

“Dear Members of the corporate body, residents of Carterton, the press, and those of you who have come here to attend today's Council meeting.

First and foremost, coming to the end of my fifth year as Mayor for this town in May 2018, I must say that it has been an honour to serve the residents of Carterton to the best of my ability and integrity (*some members of the public and Councillors gave a round of applause at this point*). Indeed, Cllr Crapper said the following about me in September 2016:

“I can think of no-one more deserving of recognition for giving exceptional services to Carterton than Cllr Lynn Little and I am delighted that Cllr Dee Bulley has seen fit to give Lynn one of her Exceptional Citizen Awards as a token of her tireless efforts over the last four years of hard work in and around Carterton to the benefit of us all. During her time as Mayor and as a Councillor before that, she has worked tirelessly for the good of the town and its people. From the Food Bank to fundraising charities like SSAFA, and support and encouragement of young people of the town, to relations with our largest employer, the Royal Air Force, and raising of Carterton’s profile within the District and County, and also with MP and former Prime Minister, David Cameron. No-one else could have kept the Town Hall Staff and Councillors focussed and productive during the difficulties suffered during her time as Mayor and we should be grateful that she was in post and so generous with her time and commitment. Lynn has always had time for people and her energy and enthusiasm for everything she undertakes is truly remarkable”.

For the avoidance of doubt, I intend to continue to serve the residents of Carterton in my full capacity as the Mayor up to the full end of my term 2018. The last few months have seen the growth of suspicion and questions, which were borne out of an email sent from a senior paid member of staff in October 2017. I hasten to add before stating anything else that this announcement is to be taken as a statement of facts, coupled with various documents which are before you as evidence to substantiate my position as Mayor and to dispel any doubt which may have arisen as a consequence of these recent allegations.

It could be said that the underlying issues for what has been simmering under the surface date back to April 2017 when I received a letter, in confidence, from Cllr Crapper. It reads:

“You will recall that when we met recently in the Mayor’s Parlour I explained why I could not vote to support you for another year as Mayor. I expressed my admiration for your commitment and enthusiasm ever since you took on the role and I also said how glad I was that you had the time and energy to steer the Town Hall Staff and the Council through a difficult period in our history. I stated at last year’s elections that you had deserved an extra normal year to compensate for this and the idea was welcomed and agreed. This you have accomplished with your usual zeal and you should be very proud of everything you have achieved. However, I am acutely aware that several Councillors are keen to take on the office of Mayor despite knowing that it would be a very hard act to follow. My sense of fairness in this respect is why I can no longer vote for you. In the hypothetical case that all 16 Councillors wished to take a turn for even one year, many would be past their sell-by dates or worse by the time their turn came round. Multiply this by even a two-year term and realistically assume that 30% wanted to serve as Mayor, we are still talking about more than 10 years. No doubt you have done the maths and realise that you would probably be able to gather enough support to serve another year, but I can foresee unpleasant repercussions which would not enhance the Council’s standing in the town. I know it would be seen as a very gracious gesture on your part if you were to consider stepping aside to allow other aspiring Councillors to take on the role. Your standing would be greatly enhanced within the Council and more importantly within the wider community where the effect would be greater and longer lasting. As a friend of many years I urge you to consider this possibility. You have served Carterton admirably, it would be a great shame if your term of office ended unhappily”.

It would appear, ladies and gentlemen, that these past few months have seen the materialisation of the unpleasant repercussions referred to in the letter by Cllr Crapper. I take my role as the Mayor very seriously. I have kept my peace these last few months in the hope that whatever grievances may have been vocalised internally, were dealt with and handled effectively internally. It has been difficult to do so, but it has become evident following the previous few meetings that it is imperative that my voice is heard. It is imperative that the other side of the coin’s story is told. It is imperative that this internal strife is resolved once and for all (*another round of applause from some members of the public*).

It is therefore in the interests of my fellow Councillors and residents of Carterton that you are aware of what has transpired at the Town Council and how I as the Mayor intend to use my last few months to steer this committee for the good of Carterton.

The Council will note that I met weekly with a senior paid member of staff in the capacity as line manager. I had been given the impression that we had a respectable and transparent working relationship and indeed sought to work in the same spirit. Throughout most of 2017 and up to 3 October 2017 this was my understanding. However, what transpired on 4 October 2017 was the untimely, unexpected and unsolicited set of accusations against Cllr Scott and I by the senior paid member of staff. Neither Cllr Scott nor I had previously heard of this list, nor had we been advised of it, discussed or had it brought to our attention in an orderly and internally correct manner. Thereafter this list of issues, which for the avoidance of doubt, I have denied and still deny, without any opportunity for response at the time or review, was published in an email to the whole of the Town Council members, Staff and our Warden, with the conclusion that the very same issues were to be sent to the Monitoring Officer at West Oxfordshire District Council. This is a clear breach of our internal Code of Conduct and policy. Indeed, there should have been an internal review and investigation to ascertain whether any of the accusations had any substance and, furthermore, with confidentiality at the forefront, to protect each of our characters' integrity and standing within the public domain. You will all be aware that, unfortunately, this did not happen. To further aggravate matters, the press received this email from a member of the recipient cohort, which began a trail of misconceived and misconstrued allegations and stories in our newspapers.

Let me now provide clarity on the conclusion of the list of grievances that were sent to the Monitoring Officer. The grievances brought can be broken down into two things, my line management with the senior paid member of staff and the management of the Mayor's Allowance Account. This was incorrectly termed as a charity account. In the email of 4 October, both grievances were found to be unsubstantiated and the Monitoring Officer found no reason to proceed with an investigation."

At this point, the Clerk interrupted the Mayor and said what she had said was not correct. The Mayor responded that this was her meeting and she wanted him to leave. The Clerk remained in the meeting. The Mayor went on to say:

"These conclusions were written in a letter dated 30 October 2017 and I am happy to share a copy of this letter with any Councillor who desires to see it. I turn briefly to the Mayor's Allowance Account. I do this because, regardless of the swift conclusion and vindication provided by the Monitoring Officer at WODC, the senior paid member of staff escalated allegations of mishandling the account to the Police as well as inviting an External Auditor to forensically analyse the accounts. Again, this was done without any recourse to me and certainly not to the Council, a full Council. For the benefit of all present here this evening and anyone else who may read these Minutes in the future, I will explain the history and the use of the Mayor's Account. I start with an email from Heath Jobes, former Deputy Mayor of Carterton Town Council, Chairman of Finance and a Chartered Accountant, who advised in an email dated 30 October 2017 that:

"It is not a charity. All you are simply doing is receiving donations or proceeds from events and redistributing them to your nominated charities for the year. You should be recording all proceeds and outgoings which would then agree back. The Mayor's Account has been in operation for, I suspect, over 15 years. It is a single signatory account and its sole purpose has been to be a holding account for any money raised in the Mayoral year for charity. In the absence of codified policy, regulation or advice from any third party to the contrary, I have always been of the understanding that the money raised does not belong to the Council but the

Mayor, who decides which charities, organisations or individuals he/she wishes to help. It is not restricted to charities alone”.

It is this precedent practice which led to my decision, amongst many, that I stand by, to donate £3,000 in July 2015 and I have a photo here of David Cameron handing over a cheque (Cheque No.100695) to SSAFA. The cheque was never cashed – I have that here – because SSAFA gave that cheque back to me to start the Ted Little Veterans Home that SSAFA supports and still does. I am pleased to note that Mr Ron Spurs supported me throughout this. He audited SSAFA’s books for two years running for me, he also sat and talked to the Treasurer of the Ted Little Veterans Account and gave us advice. He also offered to be a Trustee of the Ted Little Veterans Account and he also took me to some friends of his in Witney whose son was ex-military and the mother and father wanted to come on as Trustees of the Ted Little account. I have more information here with regard to Tim Stevenson of the Lord Lieutenant’s Office, who gave me a charity mentor. Myself and Jill Rayner of Fyne Associates, who was going to come on as a Trustee, came with me for a meeting and I was given a charity mentor and on all that advice Ted Little has a constitution, he has a Bank Account, he is perfectly legal.

A further £1,000 is what the Mayor gave Ted Little’s charity account and the funds were donated to Ted Little Veterans Home in November 2016. The Oxford branch of SSAFA kindly offered us a further £1,100 in March 2017 and a further £185.56 from an anonymous well-wisher, as the Clerk will know as he opened that letter and left the cheque in my in-tray.

I therefore call into question why Cllr Coul and Cllr Crapper consider it appropriate to bring a Motion for funds paid out of the Mayor’s Allowance since 2015 to be repaid by me. First of all, my points in relation to the historical running of the account absolve me from any criticism from opposing members of the corporate body. Secondly, if Cllr Coul and Cllr Crapper genuinely propose that the money is returned, then the corporate body should, not that this would be appropriate or correct, vote to request the return of that money from the organisations, bodies and individuals who have received donations. Thirdly, why are Cllrs Coul and Crapper proposing that only money donated from 2015 be subject to such scrutiny? In the spirit of apparent justice, surely the previous Mayors who have used the Mayor’s Allowance in the same way, which for the avoidance of doubt, is every Mayor prior to me, should also be asked to return money. This point is therefore null, void, unreasonable and without standing.

Their second point was that their Motion was brought as a result of an External Auditor’s findings. The same Auditor did not conclude that there was anything inherently or lawfully wrong with the way the accounts had been used, but merely offered recommendations as to the future handling of the accounts. The Councillors stated that the account cannot be used for any purpose other than as a donation or to offset expenses arising from fundraising. This was the Town Council’s policy for civic protocols. This is incorrect. There is no standing policy or codified instrument that relates to the use of the Mayor’s Account. Any assertion that I have pecuniary interest in Ted Little Veterans House because it bears my name is ludicrous. Ted Little is a teddy bear adopted by RAF Brize Norton and was desired by SSAFA named as such in order to attract and offer charitable assistance to our armed forces in need. Irrespective of the fact that all donations and funds used from the Mayor’s Account that have benefitted so many of our residents, charities and organisations alike since its inception, have not been subject to suspicion or scrutiny. The money donated to Ted Little Veterans seems to be a bone of contention, which I will touch on shortly.

Turning back to the advice from Mr Jobs a week prior to this email, the External Accountant who had begun a preliminary analysis of the account, stated in an email to Mr Ron Spurs that: “The practice in local councils is for the incumbent Mayor to decide what charitable bodies are to benefit from the activity of the fund, so that all funds raised by a Mayor are dispersed during that term. Councils tend not to enforce financial regulations on the day to day operations of a Mayor’s fund other than having an overall governance role”. Indeed, a later draft report from

the Accountant dated 6 November 2017 did not conclude that there had been anything incorrect, suspicious or ingenuine activity concerning the use of this account. He did, however, provide very helpful advice regarding the future of the account, the main recommendations being that it should be registered as a charitable account, which it should have done from the start, and there should be an annual expenditure review by an independent person. These are very much welcomed as they can only be for the benefit of Carterton and a better running of this Council and the Mayor's monetary accounts.

As for Ted Little Veterans, it is my understanding that a Motion was passed at the previous extraordinary meeting, at which I was not in attendance, asking me to pay the sum of £4,832 to Carterton Town Council. I was not present at this meeting due to illness - I am not surprised by the way I have been treated by many of you. Admittedly it has come as surprising news considering that, not only was the senior paid member of staff aware and very much supported the Ted Little Veterans organisation from its inception, but also because such a Motion was passed without my response. I trust that my fellow Councillors, in better understanding of the Ted Little Veterans account as well as the professional opinion of the Accountant in relation to all previous transactions from the Mayor's Account, including this one, will agree that a Motion passed on 23 January 2018 was passed in haste and should be withdrawn.

I am also aware that there seems to be some confusion arising out of four cheques for an unquantified sum – I do have the sum actually. In fact this confusion has been aggravated by the senior paid member of staff into public and ill-founded grievance, without reference to the response I provided in an email dated 23 January 2018, where I also give the Thames Valley Police letter that the public could have. I understand they were taken off the public. "Councillors, unfortunately I give my apologies for tonight's meeting and will be off sick for several weeks on the advice of my GP. However, I would like to give my reply to the Motion regarding the Mayor's Account and in answer to the question that was posed by Cllr Coul. At the time of the request for payment for the following – Witney Town Council, Cherwell District Council, Abingdon Town Council, WODC. Between March and May 2017, I was without a chequebook. The account I had with Barclays did not issue a chequebook any more and I had to chase them for one because of how I paid this. For the sake of expediency and the fact that most councils do not facilitate you to pay by debit card, I took the decision to pay by the Mayor's Account and then once my chequebook was received I wrote the following cheques to the Mayor's Account. I have been denied access to the chequebooks and paying in books, but from memory and from the cheque stubs in my personal account, which I have here, I believe the following to be true: a cheque for £80, which was Abingdon, was paid on cheque number 104026; a cheque for £160 on my personal Barclays account, cheque number 104027. They were paid into the Mayor's Account with other raised funds. The date on both cheque stubs confirm the date of 04.05.2017. The Cherwell and WODC events I could not attend, but to conclude this, at the Abingdon event that I went to my husband had been ill and Mr MacRae came up and asked my husband if he was better because he knew that he could not go to that previous event. I, however, paid the ticket price because it is something that is perfectly acceptable, the donation goes into their charity and from memory, as I have been denied access to this account, the cheque stubs will support this as the wording will say Mayor's Charity. The Mayor's Account is exactly what it says. The Mayor will raise funds and give to charity. The money does not belong to the Council and is not part of the Precept. I do not believe that I owe any money to the Council and would like to know why that question has been raised. The Mayor's Account has been through the proverbial wringer by the Auditor and TVP, who have not found any discrepancies.

The letter from DC Conroy is dated 8 January 2018. I had a call at 9.30am and the Clerk had one at 9.10am. It was the result of the investigation which the senior paid member of staff referred to the Police. In the letter DC Conroy states the following:

“Further to our conversation today, I can confirm that Thames Valley Police received a report from Carterton Town Council (see above reference). As a result of this report I have carried out an investigation into the matter to establish whether any offences have been committed based on the information that I received. As a result of the investigation I can now confirm that the matter has now been closed and I do not need to speak to you about this report”.

I will add to that, when the email came where the paid member of staff sent it to TVP without a full Council agenda, I went to Witney Police Station that Friday night and took what I thought was evidence to support this. It is reported and recorded. I therefore am pleased to state that the result of all the inquiries and investigations have been that I have not committed any offence and that I am not liable for any wrongdoing. I have been advised that, in light of the above, there is no legal basis upon which the Councillors are able to seek recovery of the funds. I have correctly and lawfully distributed the money, which it says on Agenda point 11, the Town Clerk is seeking to recover, is not a debt. For the Council to approve such a proposal would not only be acting ultra vires, a legal term which means acting beyond the scope of its powers, but also a show to the public here today of poor judgement by the corporate body.

I begin to conclude my statement with the penultimate point. The political sphere here is subject to much scrutiny and it can be said that to be in such a position you need to have a thick skin, and I certainly have had to have one, to be able to deal with whatever may come your way. There are, however, times when even the strongest of us may feel like we have been placed in a position that makes us feel under attack, dare I say, bullied and harassed. There is a lot in the media about women in the workplace or in leadership roles who are being, or have been, mistreated or treated less favourably. It is right that the public are aware that two serious complaints were brought to several Councillors’ attention in 2017 by the Amenities Officer and the Assistant to the senior paid member of staff. I have added to and escalated these complaints today. The public must also be aware that the accusations against me of late and their foundations have been baseless and I am afraid to say, worryingly, vindictive. Cllr McBride went as far as, in the absence of any response from me as the Mayor, to the Motion proposed by Cllrs Coul and Crapper, to say that the information that Cllr Miss Coul had shared appeared to be a fair representation of what happened and that the Council had not had any explanation so far. The public will, of course, be unaware of internal correspondence, but I assure you the public statement I am reading today is a true and factual representation of my responses to these accusations.

I am legally advised that Cllr Crapper should take serious caution in suggesting that my actions have been, as he termed it, devious and serious. It may be said that the fact that nothing has materialised from these grievances, it is a Dickensian reflection on our society. It could also be said that the fact that a senior paid member of staff’s line manager is not investigating what could potentially be gross misconduct is undermining access to justice. This is not right. I am legally advised that my fellow Councillors should be minded to agree that this is not how we wish to be seen by the people of Carterton and those outside its borders. I say that I am pleased to tell everyone here today that the Council is equipped with an external HR function which can assist in such times of need. A Motion such as in Agenda point 10 dedicated to not providing for redress for grievances raised by third parties against the Town Clerk is not legally or morally right. If there is a protected disclosure that has been made, let an independent body such as HR or even a Tribunal, determine this as such. This corporate body is not the judge and jury. The Council, in voting to approve such a Motion, will be showing the public at large that the corporate body is a law unto itself. The public will be watching.

If it is the case that the corporate body do not wish to come together, to work together for the good of our town from this moment on, we should be inviting an external HR body to come in and investigate each of our concerns, as well as mediate with us. There is no Standing Order or policy that restricts the Mayor from liaising or receiving advice from HR. I am legally advised that it is indeed correct for me as Mayor to correspond with HR. Indeed, in light of

many of the serious allegations that have been made to date, an objective, unbiased third party is welcome. I do know that one of the Agenda points is to remove this particular function and, whilst this is a separate discussion point on the Agenda, I truly believe and I am legally advised that my fellow Councillors, in light of my publicly expressed declaration on this particular issue, will join me in voting not only for HR function to remain but also for a public show of hands to highlight to all of us here tonight how seriously you take the need for an external HR advisor to assist this Council in such a situation. I for one agree we should do it and I raise my hand to that (*the Mayor raised her hand, followed by some of the members of the public present*). Quite frankly, there are too many points that have arisen within the past months which I beg to differ. I trust that the public will use their common sense, moral compass and understanding to consider my position and those of my fellow Councillors who simply wish to serve the town of Carterton to the best of their ability. The time to come together and finish this Mayoral term of office is now. I, as your Mayor and Chairman of this committee, thank you for your time and attention and consideration”.

#### 152 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.

#### 153 ADJOURNMENT FOR MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC TO RAISE MATTERS

A gentleman who did not give his name stood up to speak. He said he had been following recent events at the Town Council and was concerned and surprised at the reactions of the Councillors today. He said there were clearly issues happening within the Council and the Council is split and unable to come together to find an objective conclusion that would work best for taxpayers and the public. It was concerning that the Council were willing to consider removing an external HR function that was there to assist in a time of need. He said, to use the Mayor’s words, the public would be watching and urged Councillors to be open and honest in their decision making.

Rod Little stood up to speak. He said he spoke as an elector, taxpayer, Royal Air Force veteran of 32 years, nuclear armourer on the ground crew and loadmaster as aircrew in the Royal Air Force. He had lived in Carterton since 1970. He said he listened in total shock and despair at the way that several Conservative Councillors and the Town Hall have fanned the flames of this outrageous fiasco, yet we were here again tonight so that these Councillors could continue their vendetta and witch hunt against the Mayor, whose only crime was to work hard for the town she lived in. The Mayor had been subject to flimsy accusations that had been dismissed by the Monitoring Officer. The TVP were asked to investigate the Mayor’s Account without full Council approval, yet on 8 January they reported the matter was closed and there was no case to answer. He said he did not see any report to make the public aware of this. An employee who he was led to believe worked very hard at the Town Hall suppressed the true facts of what had transpired since October 2017. Tonight we witnessed the death of democracy in Carterton Town Hall with a Motion to prevent two serious complaints associated with the conduct of a senior paid member of staff, which was now public knowledge on the internet. One of the complaints was highlighted initially by the Amenities Officer and the Assistant Clerk to several Councillors in regard to the procurement process associated with the Skate Park and other issues. He said that as a taxpayer and voter, he and members of the public had every right to hear what concerns these Officers had regarding this member of staff. He said he had no faith and trust in the Councillors and demanded that there should be an independent inquiry into this very sorry mess.

A young lady stood up to speak. She said that the Mayor had time for absolutely everyone, whether it was those in the Food Bank who were in dire need, comforting families at repatriations or mentoring the young people of the town. She organised the local Lunch Club

for senior citizens and consistently sought to make everyone's lives better. Recently she had campaigned to reinstate a bus service to Swindon. She said she is compassionate, proactive and always ready to fight for a good cause. She has done this to make the town better. One example was her tireless efforts to redevelop the town and town centre, with the help of many of the public. She does this because she wants the best for this town and for the town to be the enjoyable place it could be. This comes at a personal cost of not being able to spend the amount of time she otherwise could with her family. She said that personally, as a proud granddaughter, she had missed out because the Mayor had given her time to everyone else. Members of the Council who had condoned this persecution should feel really ashamed and incredibly guilty and Councillors should reflect on this.

Ian Wright stood up to speak. He said he was concerned about the leadership that was being displayed in that the Mayor or leader of any organisation should be able to bring people together. At the last election the Mayor voted for herself, using her casting vote, to continue to be the Mayor and subsequently did the same again, highlighting a fundamental split within the Council, which shows a lack of leadership and inability to bring the Council together. He felt this was a failure to the residents of the town in that we had not had the clear and defined leadership required to take the town forward. He had lived in the town for nine years and it seemed to him there was a lot of work that needed to be done, but the internal bickering and poor leadership meant this was being held up. The Mayor replied to Mr Wright that she had tried to organise two meetings at the Town Hall for Councillors to air their views and to bring them together, but the split Council side decided not to come.

Cllr Maxine Crossland stood up to speak. She said that two of the earlier speakers did not identify themselves and asked who they were. The lady said she was the Mayor's granddaughter and the gentleman gave his name but declined to confirm whether he was the Mayor's solicitor. Cllr Mrs Crossland said that herself and the rest of the town were fed up with the quarrels taking place within the Town Council.

Cllr Mrs Crossland wished to comment on several items on the Agenda. Firstly, she had not seen a copy of the Shilton Local Plan, but was aware of the Carterton Masterplan, which was a well-intentioned initiative, but was based on bad advice and would not take us forward. She suggested the Council start again, getting together with the neighbouring villages and having a co-operative discussion. The Carterton Masterplan was seen by the villages as a selfish wish-list. The Council needed to learn from its mistakes and go forward in a spirit of co-operation. She said Carterton had three District Councillors with vast planning experience who would be pleased to be involved in workshops.

Secondly, regarding David Richings' request for reimbursement of electricity costs for Christmas Lights, she found this disappointing and not public-spirited at Christmastime, and hoped the Council would ask him to reconsider.

Regarding the Minutes of the Amenities and Economic Regeneration committee, she reminded Councillors that it was the Town Council that had requested four toilets in the new block at the Country Park, whereas the District Council were originally only putting in two. The Council should bear this in mind in discussions over who would manage them.

She asked whether there were plans to hold a St George's Day Dinner this year and suggested holding something different, perhaps a Reception for the 'great and good' in the town. It could be held at St John's Church, with a buffet paid for from the Mayor's Allowance.

Finally, she believed that having two different venues with Squash Courts might be too much in a small town and the Council should consider whether there were better uses for the Squash Club building, particularly whether being able to hold competitions there is a big enough benefit to keep the courts for this small number of people.

Cllr Mrs Crossland added that she had noticed children playing on the road with their scooters and suggested asking the local Police team to have a word with them.

Doreen Clarke stood up to speak. She said that over the last few months there had been numerous allegations in the local newspapers concerning the Mayor, often with big headlines about how she was under investigation by Thames Valley Police. A few weeks ago there had been a Council meeting calling for a Vote of No Confidence, at which everyone was handed a copy of a letter from the Police stating that the Mayor had been found innocent of all allegations. The letters were then collected in again as they were not for the public to see. She wondered why the Council seemed unconcerned about the bad publicity yet were concerned about the public knowing about the Mayor's innocence and, despite this, seven Councillors still stood up and repeated the same allegations. Some people had left the meeting feeling angry and wanting answers. This had resulted in a lack of trust in the Town Council. Councillors were not there to do what they wanted to do, but what the residents want, and it is their job to look after the town, not to drag its name into the gutter. A Town Council must run with 100% honesty and transparency. Residents have a right to know what is going on in the Council and at the moment they do not have the faintest idea. The public want a full investigation into who made the allegations and had them published and why they did this. The public also want a full investigation into the Town Council. Some people are saying that as they no longer trust the Council, how can they trust them to choose the next Mayor? They wanted the ability to select their own Councillors to put forward for Mayor and for it to be decided by a public vote. The residents of Carterton had had enough and wanted the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. The public present gave a round of applause.

Cllr Henry Howard, District Councillor for North East Carterton, stood up to speak. He wanted to comment on the Neighbourhood Plan developed by Shilton Parish. He said that he believed it would be a bad idea for the Council to support this. Cllr Howard said he had been a member of the Financial Management Review and Scrutiny Committee at WODC and also the Lowlands Planning Committee for eight years. The item on the agenda for both the Cabinet and Full Council at the District last week was the government plan for a growth deal for Oxfordshire. He suggested that the Town Council meet with himself and the other District Councillors, so that they can share their in-depth knowledge of the Shilton Plan before they make any decisions and respond to Shilton.

#### 154 ADJOURNMENT FOR COUNTY COUNCILLORS TO RAISE MATTERS

Cllr Peter Handley said that Carterton needed to grow to maintain its schools, services and infrastructure and in the future would need to expand into the boundary of neighbouring parishes. The land was not necessarily owned by the parishes and it was normal practice to expand in this way, for example, the new development in West Witney had expanded into the parish of Curbridge. He suggested the Carterton Town Council collaborate with Brize Norton and Shilton parishes to use S106 money generated from any new developments for improvements to infrastructure to the mutual benefit of Carterton and the villages.

The S106 agreement for the new Fire Station had now been signed for the new housing development to the east of Carterton. Firemen were being trained and they would be based on Carterton South Industrial Estate, under a five-year lease, until the new Station was built. The new Station would provide firefighter training for the whole of Oxfordshire and it would also be a safety hub for the Police and Ambulance services. Cllr Handley had worked very hard to bring this new Fire Station to Carterton and would continue to do so.

He reported that all the schools in Carterton were struggling at the moment. The Community College was 310 children short and were not getting Pupil Premium for those children, which had meant the College had gone into debt.

Of the 8,000 people working at RAF Brize Norton, 1,400 live locally and this had led to an extra 3,000 traffic movements per day through Carterton, Kencot and Alvescot. This in turn had led to increased wear of the road surfaces. A new Working Committee had been formed that included members of RAF Brize Norton, AirTanker and Airbus. A new airspace agreement would be coming into force, the same as any other civil airport in the whole of the country. A new hanger had been built to service and maintain the C17 aircraft.

He said he had secured funding for Carterton Day Centre for three years. They had needed to spend £10,000 to repair the roof last year and a new roof was now needed for their shed. Cllr Handley was trying to find this for them and would appreciate some money from the Town Council for this cause. The Day Centre work very hard for the community, particularly with those suffering from dementia that required extra staff.

Cllr Wesson said that he had been at a Housing Association meeting recently and could report that they were in the process of signing for the affordable houses on the new housing development to the east of Carterton and later this year the services would be put on the site. Cllr Handley said that the RAF would be building 200 houses, with the other 700 houses being discussed for 2022. There was a lack of housing locally and AirTanker and Airbus staff were travelling down from Leeds and Manchester to work here and were staying in B&B accommodation.

Cllr Handley said that he often found himself alone in fighting for the town and would value their support. Both sides of the Council had now had their say and he hoped Councillors could put their differences aside and work together for the good of the town.

The Mayor thanked Cllr Handley for his support for Carterton and he received a round of applause.

#### 155 PLANNING COMMITTEE

Council received the Minutes of the Meetings of the Planning Committee held on 16 January and 6 February 2018. These were noted.

#### 156 EXTRAORDINARY TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

Council received the Minutes of the Extraordinary Town Council meeting held on 23 January 2018. The meeting had been called by Cllr Miss Coul and Cllr Crapper to bring a Motion to request that the Mayor repay monies paid out of the Mayor's Allowance account during 2015, 2016 and 2017.

The Mayor said she had some comments to make on the Minutes and the Clerk said that the Minutes were for approval for their content and accuracy as a record of what was said at the meeting. The Mayor asked for those who agreed they were a true record to raise their hands, and the majority of Councillors did so. When she asked for those who did not agree to raise their hands, Cllr Scott and Cllr Mrs Scott-Stovold raised their hands, but it was pointed out that they had not actually been at the meeting. The Minutes were approved as a correct record.

#### 157 AMENITIES AND ECONOMIC REGENERATION COMMITTEE

Council received the Minutes of the Meeting of the Amenities and Economic Regeneration Committee held on 6 February 2018 and these were approved.

#### 158 MOTION – PUBLIC INTEREST DISCLOSURE ACT

Cllr Miss Coul and Cllr Melvin brought a Motion that any complaints put to Carterton Town Council regarding the Clerk between 4 October 2017 and 9 February 2018 by any Carterton Town Councillor should be rejected and no further action taken to protect the Council from the accusation of detrimental behaviour towards an employee who had made a protected disclosure.

Cllr Miss Coul said that the timing of complaints received could be perceived as being in retaliation to the original disclosure made by the Clerk. As this was a protected disclosure, should the Clerk feel that he had been treated unfairly, the damages would be unlimited. As such, and to protect public funds and the reputation of Carterton, she asked for Councillors to support this Motion.

The Mayor said that she totally disagreed. She said that the complaint was not related to the protected disclosure. Cllr Miss Coul reiterated that the timing could be perceived as in retaliation and she asked that any complaints received during that time period could be put to one side with no further action so that the Council could move on.

Cllr Scott said this Motion was probably illegal as it went against our policies and procedures. He said the Town Clerk was in breach of his contract of employment and was trying to brush the complaints under the table.

Cllr Melvin said that he was in support of the Motion as it was in the best interests of the Council that this matter be put to one side. The Clerk had raised the awareness of concerns that he had last year, brought them to the full Council and asked for an investigation, particularly as to a possible mismanagement of the Mayor's Allowance account and was subject to an orchestrated campaign of criticism and complaints. He said this was the perception that people could have and that this could be in retaliation of him raising these concerns. This amounts to harassment and it must stop. There was potential for serious financial and reputational consequences for the Council if it proceeds and it would be in the best interests of the Council to put this to one side, try to move on, to learn from the experience, making changes where necessary and get on with the business the Council is here for.

A vote was taken and the Motion was APPROVED by a majority.

#### 159 MAYOR'S ALLOWANCE ACCOUNT

Council received a report from the Town Clerk concerning the future management of the Mayor's Allowance account by officers and the Mayor and to seek Council approval for the Council's solicitor to pursue through legal process the sum of £4,835 which Council had resolved at an Extraordinary Meeting held on 23 January 2018 should be returned to Carterton Town Council by the Mayor, Cllr Mrs Little.

The Clerk asked the Mayor to leave the room while the matter was discussed and reminded her that if she remained she would not only be in breach of the Code of Conduct but would be breaking the law. The Mayor said she had evidence that the Ted Little Veterans Home was legal and held up documents showing details of the bank account and a picture of David Cameron giving £3,000 together with the cheque. The Clerk informed her that she had a pecuniary interest in this item and she should leave the room whilst the matter is discussed and if she failed to do so she would be committing a criminal offence.

The Mayor left the room and Cllr Leverton took the Chair. The Clerk presented his report and Council was asked to resolve with immediate effect the following controls and procedures be put in place to manage the Mayor's Allowance account:

- The account books, chequebooks and records should be held and maintained by officers, with the day to day expenditure managed through a cash book and a spreadsheet.
- Cheques written from the account should be signed by two Councillors, one of whom would be the Mayor.
- All payments from the account conform to Council policy relating to the Mayor's Allowance account.
- At the beginning of the Mayoral year, the Mayor should identify principal charities that he/she would support (this would not prevent payments to other bodies being made during the year).
- All records held by the Mayor, Cllr Mrs Little, should be handed over to officers with immediate effect.
- The account should be presented to Council for Noting in April of each year.

At an Extraordinary Meeting of the Town Council on 23 January 2018 a Motion was passed requesting that the Mayor, Cllr Mrs Little, repay £4,835 to the Council which that been paid out of the Mayor's Allowance account in contravention of Council policy and that if the funds were not returned, the matter would be pursued through civil litigation. The Clerk had written to the Mayor informing her of the decision immediately after the meeting, but no reply had been received. Should the matter be pursued through the Small Claims Court the Council would have to pay some legal costs, the amount of which would depend on the length and complexity of any proceedings. Should the Council decide not to pursue the matter in this way there could be a serious reputational risk.

Cllr Scott said that the Mayor had just produced evidence to prove there was nothing wrong with the Mayor's Account and to pursue it would be a waste of taxpayers' money.

Cllr Miss Coul quoted from the Mayor's words: "Between March and until May 2017 I was without a chequebook for my Barclays personal account. For the sake of expediency and the fact that most Councils do not have the facility to pay by debit card, I took the decision to pay by the Mayor's Account" and continued to say that she then repaid the money with cheques for £80 and £160. This did not equate with the money that was taken. The decision had been made at the Extraordinary Meeting where everyone was able to come and discuss it. She proposed that the Mayor's Account should be run as set out above and that Council authorise the legal proceedings to be initiated should Cllr Mrs Little not agree to a repayment plan.

A vote was taken and Council APPROVED that the Mayor's Allowance account should be managed as set out above and that legal proceedings should be initiated if the Mayor does not agree to repay the money. There were some jeers and derogatory comments from some members of the public present and a round of applause as the Mayor returned to Chair the rest of the meeting.

## 160 TERMINATION OF CONTRACT WITH SAGE HR

Council received a report from the Town Clerk asking Council to approve the cancellation of the contract with SAGE HR as the company had failed to comply with instructions from officers and authorised Councillors and, secondly, had failed to investigate a complaint made against a member of SAGE's staff in a timely and appropriate manner. Approval was sought for officers to seek the services of another HR provider.

The Clerk explained the background to this proposal. On 17 October 2017 Council approved the appointment of SAGE HR as the Human Resources provider to the Council. Two members of staff were authorised to access the system, Tan Marchant (Assistant Clerk) and the Town Clerk. Only the Clerk had line management responsibility for the staff. The Deputy Mayor,

Cllr Leverton, was also allowed access to HR services as he had line management responsibility for the Clerk.

It became apparent that two Councillors, Cllr Mrs Little and Cllr Scott, had accessed the Sage HR services on a number of occasions. Neither Councillor had HR responsibilities, with Cllr Mrs Little's HR responsibility for the Clerk having been removed on 21 November 2017. The Clerk advised Sage HR of the issue and assurance was given that access for the two Councillors would be withdrawn. However, communications with Sage HR revealed that the two Councillors were still using the service. A formal complaint was made to Sage HR by the Clerk, but no response had been forthcoming.

In view of this, Council was asked to consider cancelling the contract and to seek an alternative HR provider. Details of HR providers considered at the October 2017 meeting were presented from CitrusHR and MoorePay, together with a new proposal from Peninsula.

Cllr Scott said he had contacted Sage HR because he believed the Clerk was in breach of his contract and wanted legal advice on what the Council should do. The legal advice received was to suspend the Clerk from his duties, which the Clerk had refused to accept. He said that he needed access to HR advice as the Chair of the Administration Committee that dealt with staffing matters.

Cllr Mrs Little said that, as Chairman of the Council, she had always had access to HR to ask for advice. There was no Standing Order or policy that says she should not ask for this advice. The Clerk responded that it was standard practice that the only people who had HR access were the Councillor with line management responsibility for the Clerk and the Clerk who had management responsibility for staff. Cllr Mrs Little and Cllr Scott's line management responsibility for the Clerk was removed in November 2017 due to unsavoury accusations and comments they had made during the Clerk's appraisal.

Cllr Leverton said he had recently received a letter from Sage HR, addressed to himself, which went on to say that they understood that he had tried to dismiss the Clerk on three occasions, which clearly should have been addressed to Cllr Scott. This further emphasises the fact that they were not fit for purpose.

Cllr Miss Coul said that Sage HR were told that they could give HR services to three people – the Clerk, Assistant Clerk and Deputy Mayor – and they gave advice to people who they were not authorised to give advice to. As such, they had not followed the terms of the contract and the agreement that the Council had with them and there had been a loss of trust with them. Cllr Miss Coul agreed that the Council should seek the services of a different company and proposed that CitrusHR would be the best choice, at a cost of £600 + VAT per annum.

A vote was taken and Council APPROVED that the Council's contract with Sage HR should be cancelled and the new provider should be CitrusHR.

## 162 ST GEORGE'S DAY DINNER 2018

Council received a report from the Town Clerk to consider setting up a sub-committee of two Councillors to organise the St George's Day Dinner in April 2018.

Cllr Miss Coul said that the St George's Day Dinner was a civic event organised by the Mayor and if the Mayor wanted to organise an event for this year then the Council should support it. If she did not want to do so, perhaps the event could be organised in the next Mayoral year in May. She said that civic events like this were there to raise funds for the Mayor's charities and as such they should be self-funding and should not be subsidised by the Council. If charitable

bodies would like to request funds from the Council they should apply through the Council's grants process.

The Mayor said she liked the idea that Cllr Mrs Crossland suggested earlier in the meeting for a Reception at St John's Church with a buffet. This was widely supported by Councillors. A vote was taken and Council APPROVED that this should be organised.

#### 163 REQUESTS FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT

(a) Save the Children – May Day Fair. A request had been received from Save the Children seeking sponsorship towards this year's May Day Fair to be held on Monday 7 May on Alvescot Road Recreation Ground. A list of items needed to organise the event had been circulated with the Agenda.

Cllr Miss Coul suggested the Council offer the sum of £1,000 to hire the Batmobile, which would entitle the Council to a free double pitch next to the Batmobile that could be manned by Councillors giving advice to the public on the day.

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the sum of £1,000 to sponsor the Batmobile as above.

#### 164 SQUASH CLUB

Council received a report from the Town Clerk seeking approval to enter into a new lease with Carterton Squash Club to provide the Club with long term security and that work outlined in the Quinquennial Report should be commenced.

Carterton Town Council owned the building occupied by the Squash Club on an annual rolling lease of £3,120. The Club had approached the Council requesting a long-term lease of fifteen years to provide them with security to enable them to refurbish the interior and provide better facilities for their members and visitors. Discussions with the Club had been delayed pending the announcement regarding Phase 2 of Carterton Leisure Centre. It now appeared that the facilities on offer at the new complex did not meet the requirements of the Club in that the new facilities were not to competition standard. The implementation of the Quinquennial Report works at the Squash Club was discussed at the Council meeting on 19 September 2017, when it was decided to wait until details of the Phase 2 facilities were known.

Cllr Mrs Little and Cllr Scott had met with the Squash Club last Monday. Cllr Mrs Little said that the Squash Club offered a lot more facilities than the squash courts at the Leisure Centre and supported keeping the Squash Club as it is.

Cllr Scott said that it had been assumed when the Leisure Centre was built that there would be squash facilities, but in reality the squash courts would be movable so that other classes could be held in the same room. The Squash Club had concerns that there would be no viewing gallery at the Leisure Centre and the courts were not be designed for competitive squash. The Squash Club attracted team from the RAF and from outside of Carterton. The RAF had three teams that played at the Squash Club and they funded the matches to be played there as their own courts did not come up to standard. There would also be a problem with the Leisure Centre closing at 9pm because squash matches tended to go on much later into the evening. The Club also provided a bar and refreshments, which would not be available at the Leisure Centre. The Club was increasing its membership, with over 100 members currently. He believed that the Squash Club provided a valuable and unique facility and the Council should support it.

Cllr McBride said he would support extending the Lease and commencing the works outlined in the Quinquennial Report. He wondered whether there was any possibility of bringing the

Leisure Centre facilities up to the required standard, but Cllr Mrs Little said that this would not be possible.

Cllr Hayes asked whether the RAF could help with funding, and Cllr Mrs Little said she believed the Club had a business plan that they could present to Council.

Cllr Ms Bull said it was difficult for the Council to make a decision without the full facts and suggested that the Squash Club make a presentation to Council. Cllr Mrs Little suggested that Councillors look around the Squash Club to see exactly what it offered.

Council RESOLVED to defer a decision until Councillors had visited the Squash Club to see the facilities for themselves and Council would discuss this again at the March meeting. Council also RESOLVED to approve the repair works in the Quinquennial Report.

#### 165 WORKS REQUIRING AUTHORISATION

Council RESOLVED to APPROVE the following works:

- (a) Tree maintenance at Whittington Place at a cost of £750 plus VAT.
- (b) Tree maintenance at Jackson Close at a cost of £480 plus VAT.
- (c) Willow Meadows – repair to green sign and fence at Perimeter Path entrance gate., at a cost of £155 plus VAT.

#### 166 FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The Financial Statement to 31 January 2018, set out at Annex B, was noted.

#### 167 INCOME RECEIVED

Income Received during January 2018, previously circulated, was noted.

#### 168 DEBIT CARD TRANSACTIONS

The list of Debit Card transactions for January 2018, previously circulated, was noted.

#### 169 ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

The Accounts for Payment for February 2018 had previously been circulated. The Assistant Clerk had circulated details of additional payments by email prior to the meeting.

Cllr Scott queried why some payments seemed to come up twice in the same month and the Assistant Clerk explained that it was in order to balance the accounts for the approaching year end.

Cllr Mrs Little queried the request by David Richings to claim back the cost of electricity for Christmas Lights. Cllr Mrs Mead said she had spoken to the Council's contractor who installed the Christmas lights and he informed her that the electricity used for the Christmas lights was on a separate meter and related to the whole of Streatfield House. David Richings had agreed to have the new meter installed at short notice and had the meter not been installed there would not have been any lights on that side of the street. This was a longstanding agreement and the Council had always refunded the costs in the past. This invoice was the first he had submitted since 2012.

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

170 PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

Confidential items follow.

171 ALLANDALE CENTRE – LEASE

172 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT – APPOINTMENT OF COMPANIES  
AND CONTRACTS

Item deferred to next meeting.

173 STAFF MATTERS – APPOINTMENT OF RECEPTIONIST/ADMIN ASSISTANT

Item deferred to next meeting.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm.

20 March 2018

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Town Mayor

## Clerk's Report – 20 February 2018

## Annex A

1. **Internal Audit 2018** - The first stage of the internal audit 2018 will take place on 16 February 2018 by IAC Audit & Consultancy Ltd. **Noted.**
2. **Shilton Parish Local Plan** - I circulated to Councillors the first stage of Shilton's Local Plan for comment. The Council may wish to respond as a consultant. **Noted.**
3. **Diary Dates:**

Tuesday 6 March -

Planning & Administration

Tuesday 20 March -

Planning & Town Council