

Minutes of a meeting of the **CROWBOROUGH TOWN COUNCIL** held at the Council Offices, Pine Grove, Crowborough on Tuesday 14th January 2025 at 7.30pm

Present	Councillors	Alison Arthur	(also WDC)
		Peter Bucklitsch	
		Jane Clark	(also WDC)
		Suzanne Dixon*	
		Martyn Everitt	(also WDC)
		Martyn Garrett	
		Paul Goddard	
		Christopher Grose	
		David Hedges	
		Richard Jury	
		Kay Moss	
		Matthew Street	Mayor
		Neil Waller	
Natalie Whittle	Deputy Mayor		
Also present		Caroline Miles	Town Clerk
		Karen Whiley	Responsible Finance Officer
		Charlotte Penny	Meetings Administrator
		Clr Andrew Wilson	WDC Councillor
		Clr Phillip Lunn	ESCC Councillor
		Clr Johanna Howell	ESCC Councillor

*Denotes non attendance

PRAYER

The Mayor opened the meeting with a prayer.

APOLOGIES

Clr Suzanne Dixon

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

MINUTES

Minutes of the Council meeting held on 19th November 2024

10748 RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th November 2024 as confirmed be ratified by the Chairperson.

TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM DISTRICT AND COUNTY COUNCILLORS

The following questions were asked of the Wealden District Councillors present regarding the recent issue of WDC council tax being taken out of residents' banks erroneously causing hardship to many people.

1. How many residents were badly affected and how many of those were Crowborough residents?
2. When was the leader of WDC informed?
3. When were WDC councillors informed?
4. When were members of the public informed?

Standing orders were suspended at 7.35pm

Cllr Wilson informed members that the error was identified on 24th December as a result of a concerned resident contacting the council. The banks were contacted on the same day, but d/d payments could not be stopped. Cllrs Millward, Partridge and Manville were then informed of the error. Members of WDC were informed on the 27th December as a result of a letter sent to the council by ESCC Cllr Michael Lunn. The public were informed via press release however the Wealden weekly email was not used.

Cllr Wilson will email the clerk with the number of residents in Crowborough affected by the error.

WDC Councillors were asked how WDC was preparing for the local government devolution plan and how this would affect the Local Plan. It was noted that the speed at which WDC would be disbanded is not known but that the majority of WDC staff would be transferred to the Mayoral authority. The Local Plan reaches its next step in March and is expected to be concluded by the end of the year.

The Town meeting will be taking place on 20th March and members asked that the leader of ESCC be approached to ask if a presentation on the new ESCC, WSC, and Brighton and Hove merger could be given. Cllr Johanna Howell to approach the leader and will confirm attendance or otherwise with the clerk.

Members asked for an update on the situation regarding Hookstead. Cllr Johanna Howell will report back.

Standing orders were reinstated at 8.00pm

Cllr Andrew Wilson left the meeting at 8.05pm

TO RECEIVE REPORTS FROM CTC COUNCILLORS ON OUTSIDE BODIES

Noted.

TO ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM COUNCILLORS

Members noted that the Sussex Police area has the second highest shoplifting figures in the country behind the Metropolitan Police and expressed regret that the CSAG meetings were ended as these were important and useful meetings.

- 10749 RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk write to the Sussex Police and Crime Commissioner requesting that the CSAG meetings be reinstated and of the Town Councils concerns regarding the shoplifting figures in Sussex.

COMMITTEE MINUTES

Noted

TO RECEIVE SUCH COMMUNICATIONS AS THE TOWN MAYOR MAY WISH TO LAY BEFORE THE COUNCIL

To note the Town Mayor's engagements

The engagements were noted.

Cllr Kay Moss declared a personal interest as a Trustee of the Friends of Crowborough Hospital.

The Mayor thanked all those who had collected for the Mayor's charities at a local supermarket in the week leading up to Christmas. He advised that the collections raised just over £1000.

The overall total collected for the Mayor's charities for 2024/25 stands at £6181. The charities will be presented with cheques at the Town Conference in March.

TO AUTHORISE THE SEALING OF DOCUMENTS

- 10750 RESOLVED** to authorise the following Grants of Exclusive Rights of Burial:

CERTIFICATE	NAME	GRAVE SPACE
Q1208	Caroline Hobbs, Jonathan Hobbs & Rosanna Davis	GRH182

BUDGET REPORT

To approve the budget and setting a precept for 2025/26

- 10751 RESOLVED** to increase the precept by 1.31% for the year 2025/26 confirming a required precept of £1,748,865 and an increase of £2.47 on a band D property.

10752 RESOLVED to approve the budgets for 2025/26

Note the projected budgets to 2030

The report was noted.

To note the current Earmarked Reserves

The report was noted.

To note significant variances from 2024/2025 budget

The report was noted.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

To note the payments made in November and December 2024

The payments made in November and December 2024 were noted.

To approve the current list of suppliers paid by direct debit or standing order

10753 RESOLVED to approve the current list of suppliers paid by direct debit or standing order

To note the current income and expenditure position and Earmarked Reserves

The Income and Expenditure reports against budget and the Earmarked Reserves were noted.

To note the internal auditors' report

The auditor's report was noted.

To review the Annual Investment Strategy

10754 RESOLVED to approve the Annual Investment Strategy

CODE OF CONDUCT

To review and adopt the code of conduct

10755 RESOLVED to accept the code of conduct

PINE GROVETo note the stairlift report and agree further action

Members discussed the report. It was noted that Quote 3 was the only quote to include making good. It was noted however that breakdown support is only available during working hours. Council meetings take place in the evenings and support should be available during those times. It was agreed that a contingency plan should be put in place in order that support is available outside of normal working hours.

10756 RESOLVED to accept Quote 3 at a cost of £18,500 to be taken from budget code 4250/113

YOUTH AMBASSADOR BOARDTo note the report and agree further action

The report was noted.

The Mayor thanked the Deputy Clerk, Cllrs Everitt, Moss, and Whittle for their work in respect of the Youth Ambassador Board. It was requested that all members get involved in the programme the Youth Ambassador Board have proposed. The events take place between 29th March and 5th April 2025.

10757 RESOLVED to accept the 'I Care for Crowborough' event proposal and for the Youth Ambassador Board to proceed.

WDC CLIMATE GREEN PAPER SURVEYTo note the report and agree further action

Members discussed the survey, and it was noted that the Town Clerk is unable to provide a collective response on behalf of the council as the survey asks for responses on a personal level.

It was agreed that that councillors would respond to the survey individually.

ASHDOWN RADIOTo note the Ashdown Radio report and agree any action

The next interview slot is arranged for Wednesday 5th February at 10.35am. It was agreed that the Deputy Mayor and a representative from the Youth Ambassador Board use the slot as an opportunity to raise awareness of the 'I Care for Crowborough' programme although the timing of the interview will need to be flexible as it is during school hours.

It was agreed that this will be raised at the next Youth Ambassador Board meeting.

MEMBERS ALLOWANCES

To note the report of the Wealden Parish Independent Remuneration Panel and agree members allowance rates for 2025/26

It was noted that members had agreed to take lower than the recommended rate for three years and that freezing the basic allowance for 2025/26 would even out the amount by 2026/27.

- 10758 RESOLVED** to freeze the basic allowance at £1600 per annum and to increase the Mayor's allowance by 3% to £2122 per annum for 2025/26

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

Members discussed the report. It was noted that from the council's past experience the preparation of a neighbourhood plan required huge commitment from councillors and members of the public. Additionally, a neighbourhood plan would entail the council suggesting areas of land in Crowborough for development. The plan would then need to go to a referendum for approval. Residents who were near these areas of land would be very vocal in their rejection of the plan and the plan would likely not be agreed. It was further noted that a neighbourhood plan would cost in the region of £100k and that a consultant would need to be appointed.

The AONB is currently protected from housing, however the rules surrounding the AONB may change and if the council had a neighbourhood plan any planning in these areas would be harder to attain.

The clerk asked members to note that the Local Plan is due to be completed this year and that a neighbourhood plan can take a minimum of two years to be approved. This would mean that a neighbourhood plan for Crowborough would not carry much weight as a local Plan supersedes any neighbourhood plan.

It was agreed that a working group be set up to investigate the full costs of a neighbourhood plan and whether it would benefit Crowborough.

It was suggested that it may be beneficial for a working group to speak to a representative of Hellingly Parish Council as it has recently undergone the process of setting up a Neighbourhood Plan and would be able to advise of any benefits or drawbacks.

- 10759 RESOLVED** that Cllrs Whittle, Everitt and Clark set up a working group to investigate if a Neighbourhood Plan would be beneficial to Crowborough, the costs involved, and to present the findings to Full Council.

NALC SECTOR STANDARDS SURVEY

To note the survey and agree further action

The survey is open to all members of the public, councillors and officers to complete.

It was agreed that members will respond to the survey individually.

URGENT MATTERS AT THE DISCRETION OF THE CHAIRMAN FOR NOTING AND/OR INCLUSION ON A FUTURE AGENDA

It was noted that the Mayor had been approached by the CEO of Wealden Volunteering with regards having a space in the council offices to encourage members of the public to volunteer. The clerk met with the CEO and a trial presence of the organisation will take place in the Pine Grove atrium for a period of one month. Wealden Volunteering will therefore be in the atrium every Tuesday from 10am to 12pm. As there are a shortage of volunteers across most charitable organisations it is hoped that this will encourage Crowborough residents to get involved in volunteering.

The Mayor reminded members to contact the community engagement officer to give a sound bite which will be used in the latest co-option campaign.

The detrimental state of the path at Walshes Park was raised, members were encouraged to visit the area to see for themselves the condition of the walkways.

10760 RESOLVED that pursuant to Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 that the public and press be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reasons of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

To note the confidential bi-annual report from Clued-Up

The report was noted.

The meeting closed at 9.40pm