

**KIDDERMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL
TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the meeting held at 6pm on Wednesday 26 June 2024
In the Council Chamber, Wyre Forest House**

Present:

Councillors G. Connolly (Town Mayor), J. Aston J. Beckingham, B. Brookes, L. Carroll, D. Chambers, B. Connor, H. Dyke, N. Gale, D. Hine, S. Hollands, F. Oborski (MBE), M. Rayner and D. Round.

Hugh Peacocke, Chief Executive

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Cllrs. Mike Smith, Vicky Caulfield, Mary McDonnell and Shazu Miah.

19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None

20. PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

Nil

21. MINUTES

Re draft minute No. 6, it was noted that Councillor Bernadette Connor did not declare an interest as a member of the St. George's Park "Save the Paddling Pool" group.

RESOLVED: To approve the minutes of the meeting of Kidderminster Town Council held on 23rd May 2024, as amended.

Members noted the minutes of the following Committee meetings:

- The Planning Committee held on 28th May 2024
- The Town Hall Committee held on 30th May 2024
- The Staffing Committee held on 3rd June 2024
- The Operational Services Committee held on 5th June 2024
- The Finance & Overview Committee held on 13th June 2024

22. TOWN MAYOR'S REPORT

The meeting received a report from the Town Mayor, Councillor George Connolly, on his first month in office, since elected Mayor.

23. NOTICE OF MOTION

Submitted by Councillor Doug Hine:

1. *Council notes that the costs of the waterfall in 2023/24 were £3,060 and the budget estimate for 2024/25 has a figure of £3,750 for "water feature - servicing maintenance & utilities". This is excluding officer time.*
2. *Given this cost and the fact that it is only operational approximately 6 times a year, Council resolves to decommission the flow of water on it.*
3. *Council asks the Operational Services Committee and officers to assess whether we could have permanent coloured evening lighting at a more moderate expense.*
4. *Funds saved can be redirected towards St Georges Park Paddling Pool.*

Councillor Hine presented his motion, as published.

The Mayor invited Mr. Michal Loftus of the Kidderminster Civic Society to address the meeting on the history and local significance of the water feature.

An amendment to the motion was proposed by Cllr. B. Connor, seconded by Cllr. S. Hollands, and resolved, as follows:

1. *Council notes that the costs of the waterfall in 2023/24 were £3,060 and the budget estimate for 2024/25 has a figure of £3,750 for "water feature - servicing maintenance & utilities". This is excluding officer time.*
2. *Council asks the Operational Services Committee and officers to assess whether a more sustainable operating regime is possible. The committee should look at the running costs, the number of hours and days the fountain is switched on and to publicise more widely the in-depth history of the fountain and its connections to Kidderminster. The Operations Services Committee to make its recommendations back to Full Council for decisioning alongside a report containing the full history of the waterfall as well as full costings.*

24. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2023-2024

The CEO presented the Internal Audit Report.

The meeting noted that the Council had appointed a new Internal Auditor following the ending of the service from the District Council under the Council's Service level Agreement.

It was noted that the report addressed 15 different criteria and all passed, except for the qualification raised regarding the Council's Register of Fixed Assets. The CEO said that the report raised a number of challenges, to which responses have been provided in the report as presented to the Council. He told the meeting that a revised Asset Register, addressing the concerns raised by the internal auditor, would be presented to the next meeting of the Finance and Overview Committee on 10th October, for approval by Full Council on 23rd October. The Council appointed Cllrs. D. Hine and F. Oborski to a Working Group to assist in the drafting of the Register.

RESOLVED:

- A. To receive the Internal Auditor's report in full, as presented
- B. To approve the responses from the CEO to the items raised in the report
- C. To improve governance and oversight by commissioning more regular internal audit reports (3 per annum, including the year-end report)

25. End of Year Accounts 2023-2024

The Town Mayor told the Council that the CEO had signed and published the Council's annual accounts for approval.

The CEO told the meeting that both the income and expenditure had increased significantly due to the costs of the Town Hall Transformation Project. He presented the Annual Internal Audit Report, which included a qualification at H. "Assets and Investment Registers were complete and accurately and properly maintained", as referred to in the previous Minute.

RESOLVED:

- A) To receive the Annual Return (subject to external audit) for the financial year 2023/24.

- B) To receive and note the Annual Internal Audit Report.

- C) To approve each individual paragraph (1-9) of the Annual Governance Statement as defined at Section 2 of the Annual Return:
 - 1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements.
 - 2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness.
 - 3. We took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant financial effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances.
 - 4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit Regulations.
 - 5. We carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required.
 - 6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems.
 - 7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit.

8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on this authority and where appropriate, have included them in the accounting statements.

9. (For local councils only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required. Independent examination or audit.

D) To authorise the signing of the Annual Governance Statement by the Mayor and the Clerk

E) To adopt the accounts and to authorise the signing of the Annual Return (subject to external audit) by The Town Mayor and the Chief Executive Officer, in line with the regulatory requirement to sign the accounts by 30 June 2024.

26. REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The meeting received the review prepared by the CEO. He told the meeting that it was good practice to review the Regulations on an annual basis and that the review had regard to the following matters:

- A. Issues raised in the internal auditor's report
- B. Guidance in the recently published Model Financial Regulations (National Association of Local Councils)
- C. Some anomalies in the current regulations
- D. The raising of some thresholds to reflect inflationary changes.

RESOLVED: to approve the Financial Regulations, as reviewed.

27. THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGY AND VISION 2025-2029

RESOLVED:

- A. To approve the Terms of Reference for the Council's Strategy Working Group
- B. To appoint the following members to the Working Group:
Councillors S. Hollands, F. Oborski, H. Dyke, L. Carroll and the Town Mayor.

28. TOWN HALL UPDATE

The Meeting received the Town Hall update.

29. ST. GEORGE'S PARK PADDLING POOL UPDATE.

The meeting heard that there was no update regarding funding for this project.

The following Council members were appointed to the Working Group:

Councillors S. Miah, B. Brookes and S. Hollands.

(An invitation to join the Working Group would be offered to Cllr. V. Caulfield.)

30. CIVIC AND COMMUNITY EVENTS

The meeting received a report from the Interim Civic, Community and Events Manager, setting out events and budgets for the Council to consider.

RESOLVED: To request the Civic, Community and Events Committee to consider resources and arrangements for the following events:

- Remembrance Sunday – Sunday 10th November 2024
- Kidderminster Christmas Lights Provision and Switch On Event – Saturday 16th November 2024 to January 2025
- Santa in the Town – Saturday 7th December 2024
- Mayor’s Sunday
- Mayor’s Community Christmas Service
- The 80th Anniversary of VE Day (8th May 2025)

Also to consider how the Council might support the following Community Events:

- Food Festival
- Sheep Trail
- Music Festival
- Celebration of Cultures.

31. BIODIVERSITY

The Mayor invited Councillor Doug Hine, who chaired the Working Group, to present the Biodiversity Policy which had been recommended by the Operational Services Committee.

Councillor Hine outlined the development of the Policy and its importance for how the Council delivered its services in the future. He also asked the Council to add the following to the Terms of Reference of the proposed Working Group:

7. Consider a draft Local Nature Action Plan.

RESOLVED:

- A. To approve the Council’s Biodiversity Policy
- B. To Approve Terms of Reference for a Biodiversity Working Group, including 7 above, and
- C. To appoint the following members to the Biodiversity Working Group:
Councillors J. Beckingham, N. Gale and D. Hine

32. APPOINTMENTS TO OUTSIDE BODIES

RESOLVED: To make the following appointments:

	Organisation	Councillor Appointments
1)	Carpet Museum Trustees (1)	Liam Carroll
2)	CALC (1) NALC Super Councils Network	Doug Hine John Beckingham
3)	Friends of St Mary's Church Committee (1)	Steve Hollands
4)	Historical Societies Group (1)	Darren Chambers
5)	Community Transport in Wyre Forest	George Connolly
6)	Fairtrade	Bernadette Connor
7)	Wyre Forest Young People's Forum	Vicky Caulfield
8)	Kidderminster BID- Observer at Board meetings	Liam Carroll
9)	The Kidderminster Dementia Action Alliance	John Aston
10)	the Kidderminster Town Centre Community Partnership Steering Committee	Doug Hine
11)	Historic Opportunities Group	Fran Oborski, Darren Chambers and Daniel Round

The meeting also approved that Councillor J. Beckingham replaced Councillor B. Connor on the Operational Services Committee.

33. FULL COUNCIL FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME 2024-25

The Mayor presented the Forward Programme and invited members to comment or propose any additions for future meetings.

Councillor Hine pointed out that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency in 2021 and asked that this matter be put on the agenda for the October meeting.

The Meeting concluded at 7.44pm.