



Needham Market Town Council

Town Council Minutes

15.01.2025

Place: Green Room of the Needham Market Community Centre, School Street, Needham Market.

Present Councillors:

Terry Lawrence
John Reardon
Tina Cooke
Chris Goodchild
Kevin Hunter
Mike Norris
Martin O'Shea
Martin Ost
Amanda Reardon

Also in attendance: Councillor Kay Oakes

NMTC/24/49 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors L. Cornish, R. Darnell and I. Mason and G. Sinnerton

RESOLVED That the apologies be received and approved.

NMTC/24/50 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting 13th November 2024 were received.

RESOLVED That the minutes of the meeting 13th November 2024 be received and approved.

NMTC/24/51 INTERESTS

No interests were declared.

NMTC/24/52 QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No members of the public were present.

NMTC/24/53 TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's report on matters arising was received.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/54 RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER' REPORT

The Responsible Financial Officer's report on matters arising was received.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/55 INTERNAL PASSWORD PROCEDURE

An internal password procedure was received.

It was suggested that this procedure be re drafted to include provisions for when staff or councillors change, and that further discussion was needed regarding where/how the passwords were to be stored.

It was commented that this procedure was beneficial to have in place and that it was unfortunate there was not an existing procedure in place at the time of previous staff and councillors leaving the council in May.

Councillor K. Hunter queried whether the council had ultimately had access to the passwords needed at the time and it was confirmed that members did after requesting them.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/56 COMMITTEE REPORTS

The following committee reports were received from the committee chairperson:

a) Community & Assets

Cllr C. Goodchild explained that when the committee last met on December 11th, 2024, the issue of crime and vandalism were discussed due to recent damages to council property. It was also discussed that it would be beneficial to explore the idea of having a policy for grant awarding

He informed members that 'CIL funding priorities' was to become a standing item on future Community and Assets agendas, and it was planned to review existing and potential projects, such as park and bus shelter improvements

He also explained that the Town Clerk brought suggestions of potential events that could be run by the council in 2025, and that the committee had agreed to proceed with an Easter event, with the details to be confirmed.

RESOLVED That the recommendation of an Easter event be approved.

b) Finance & Governance

Cllr T. Cooke informed members that the last meeting was held on December 11th, 2024, in which the budget and precept setting had been discussed.

She explained that the newsletter was discussed, and that the committee suggested that working group be set up to explore changes and recommendations.

c) Planning

Cllr M. O Shea explained that the last meeting had been cancelled due to lack of business, so there was not much to report.

RESOLVED To receive and approve the reports.

NMTC/24/57 COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLOR REPORTS

Cllr Kay Oakes explained that a report was submitted regarding the devolution process and the production of a White Paper outlining the government's intent to install unitary councils. Suffolk County Council (SCC) and Norfolk County Council were contacted to determine whether they wished to be included in the priority programme. While the decision only required executive approval, all councillors were consulted for transparency. The proposal involved the dissolution of borough, district, and county councils.

To secure a better deal and a faster outcome, a fast-track approach was pursued. This process would allow for early engagement, shaping discussions, and maintaining an open dialogue. The proposed plan included a single mayor for both Suffolk and Norfolk.

She informed members that an extraordinary meeting was held with the primary focus being the anticipated cost savings. However, the exact number of unitary authorities remained uncertain. The fast-track process would result in the cancellation of the county council elections in May due to the purdah period, which prevents significant governmental decisions six weeks before an election.

She explained that the decision was passed by majority vote, and a letter was submitted. A response was expected by the end of January 2025 regarding acceptance into the programme. Norfolk had also voted in favour of the proposal. The division of administrative regions would be determined by the government, with unitary council elections anticipated in 2026 or 2027.

There was a query regarding an appeal process. However, due to the nature of the agreement, there is no formal appeal. Concerns were raised about whether the changes would distance politicians from local constituents, but this will depend on the final structure and representation model. Cllr Oakes explained that updates would be provided at each stage of the process.

Cllr T. Lawrence explained that members had received his report. He informed members that the joint local

plan revision for Mid Suffolk was discussed, with planning inspectors reviewing changes in response to updates in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). The increased housing targets rendered the current plan outdated, requiring a review and update to ensure it is based on accurate figures and that there was a risk that developers could challenge the plan if it is not revised accordingly.

It was noted that updating neighbourhood plans would be beneficial, with the new term being "Neighbourhood Development Plan." Concerns were raised about the number of planning policies in place, leading to arguments over developments. It was agreed that a key focus should be deciding where development should occur rather than what type of development is allowed.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/58 SKATEPARK

Cllr C. Goodchild informed members that he had not had any further contact with the skatepark committee and therefore had no update to provide.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/59 BUDGET/ PRECEPT

The council discussed the budget considering the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. While the proposed precept increase may not seem significant, concerns were raised about the financial impact on residents who may struggle with any rise. However, due to increased council expenses, additional funding was still necessary to maintain services.

Members acknowledged that residents often focus on percentage increases, and an 8% rise might be perceived as too high. A middle-budget approach was considered the most balanced option, ensuring financial stability without an excessive increase. It was noted that keeping the precept in line with inflation is essential to prevent larger, more abrupt increases in the future.

Following discussions, the council agreed on a precept figure of £180,920.00, representing a 5.79% increase.

RESOLVED To agree on a precept figure of £180,920.00, representing a 5.79% increase.

Proposer : Cllr T. Cooke

Seconder : Cllr M. Ost

NMTC/24/60 VAT

The Town Clerk informed members that the VAT return had been submitted.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/61 HEADSHOTS

The Town Clerk proposed that headshots be taken of staff and councillors.

It was explained that photographs have been taken of councillors previously and that these would be sent to the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/62 CCTV

The report proposing the purchase of CCTV cameras be received.

The benefits of the proposed were discussed.

RESOLVED To proceed with the purchase of the cameras.

Proposer: Cllr J. Reardon

Seconder: Cllr M. Ost

NMTC/24/63 BANK SIGNATORIES

The councillors bank signatures were ratified and approved.

RESOLVED That the bank signatures be agreed as the following councillors:

C. Goodchild

T. Cooke

T. Lawrence

J. Reardon

NMTC/24/64 STAFFING/ COMMITTEE MATTERS

It was proposed that an additional member was needed for the Employment Committee.

RESOLVED That councillor M. Ost be appointed to the Employment Committee.

Proposer: Cllr J. Reardon

Seconder: Cllr M. O Shea

NMTC/24/65 COMMITTEE STRUCTURE/ MEMBERS

The Town Clerk informed members that there were two vacancies available, one to be filled through co option and one by election. Councillors discussed that ideas were needed in future to make the position more attractive access for younger and working people.

RESOLVED To receive the report.

NMTC/24/66 DONATION REQUESTS

A donation request was received from the Citizen's Advice Bureau.

RESOLVED To donate £6000 to the Citizens Advice Bureau.

Proposer: Cllr K. Hunter

Seconder: Cllr M. Ost

NMTC/24/67 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Town Clerk suggested the idea of forming a 'Strategic Plan' and that each committee should begin to consider what they would like included on this.

RESOLVED That the report be received and that 'Strategic Plan' be a standing item on each committee.

NMTC/24/68 STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND

Information regarding the proposed strengthening of the standards and conduct framework for local authorities in England was received.

RESOLVED That a draft response be formed by the Town Clerk and distributed to members to comment.

Proposer: T. Lawrence

Seconder: M. Ost

NMTC/24/69 NEWSLETTER WORKING GROUP

Cllr T. Cooke informed members that an informal meeting was held amongst members on January 7th, 2025, which was a good opportunity to discuss ideas.

Amendments were considered and it was agreed that any changes should not decrease the quality of newsletter.

It was recommended that the formation of a 'Newsletter Working Group' be approved.

RESOLVED That the report be received

RESOLVED That a 'Newsletter Working Group' be formed and be open to all members.

NMTC/24/70 MATTERS TO BE RAISED BY MEMBERS

Some general outstanding matters were discussed:

- GDPR Compliance – The council will review and address any GDPR-related issues, including access to certain information, to ensure compliance.
- Civic Events – Meetings of the Civic Events Group will be scheduled to plan the VE Day celebration.
- Outstanding Minutes – The minutes from the September council meeting remain outstanding and need to be followed up.

The meeting closed at 21:20 pm.

Chairperson..... Date.....