

**MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF HIGHAM FERRERS TOWN  
COUNCIL HELD ON WEDNESDAY 17<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2018 AT THE TOWN HALL  
AT 7.00PM.**

**PRESENT:**

	The Mayor (Councillor P Tomas)	
	The Deputy Mayor (Councillor J Smithers)	
Councillor D Drage		Councillor Mrs V M Newbery
Councillor Mrs A Gardner		Councillor B Prigmore
Councillor R Gell		Councillor C P O'Rourke
Councillor R D Hamblin		Councillor Mrs T Reavey
Councillor H L Jackson		Councillor A M T Reading
Councillor D C Lawson MBE		Councillor Mrs A Sauntson
Councillor Mrs S Mantle		Councillor Mrs P H Whiting
Mrs S J Mitcham (Town Clerk)		Miss A Schofield (Assistant Town Clerk)

**IN ATTENDANCE:** 13 members of the public

18/001. **APOLOGIES**

None.

18/002. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

**Other Interests**

Cllr C P O'Rourke – item 6, member of Candocare.

18/003. **PUBLIC FORUM**

6 members of the public indicated they wished to address the meeting.

**RESOLVED:**

That the 15 minute period of time for the public forum be extended to allow the 6<sup>th</sup> member of the public to address the meeting.

Councillors noted the following 6 opinions put forward by members of the public.

Mr Davidson and his wife are both members of the library. He spoke with regard to the reduction in the use of libraries, 30% between 2010 and 2016, with the advent of cheaper paperback books, amazon and ebooks. Libraries have had their hayday, much like the reduction in the number of banks on high streets following the growth of internet banking. The community groups who use the library could use other spaces in the town. Tax payers are funding the library. Mr Davidson referred to the Town Council's consultation and the number of respondees in relation to the population of the town as a whole and felt the response was not a mandate to increase the council tax, as a larger percentage of the town had not responded and indicated they were supportive of the increase.

Ms Austin is a member of the Liberal Democrats, Kettering and a resident of Higham Ferrers who lives close to the library. She spoke of the library building originally being the Parish Rooms, purchased by the town in 1904. She referred to the petitions with signatures in the region of 500. She referred to the town already having one of the highest town precepts in the county and that the town are effectively paying for the building a second time. The library in Higham Ferrers offers services that are not offered by others, with Ms Austin referring in particular to access for the disabled. She spoke of the County

Council cutbacks and the desire to see less vital services cut and not the closure of libraries.

Ms Woodcock uses the library regularly and spoke of the library being a vital part of Higham Ferrers. She asked if the Town Council were accepting the fight has been lost and if the cuts from the County Council should be accepted. Why should the County Councils problems become ours? She urged the Town Council to refuse Options 1, 2 or 3 and resist the cuts and support the petition for Option 4 which seeks full funding from NCC for the libraries. It was felt notice of the extraordinary meeting had not been well publicised.

Mr Broadbent is a resident of Higham Ferrers and spoke of the vital role of the library. He referred to himself as a political atheist but urged the Town Council to fight to save the library.

Ms Reed is a Mental Health Nurse and a mother with 2 children. She spoke of the importance of the role of the library in providing a vital resource for those with mental health issues and as a means for bringing groups and people together, referring in particular to the relationship between the young and the old.

Mrs Easter, Friends of Higham Library, suggested that membership of libraries should be offered on prescription. On the assumption the library stays opens a plea was made for the retention of paid professional librarians, currently there are 2 staff roles, a Manager and a Customer Advisor. The roles of the 2 staff were outlined and those of the volunteers.

18/004. **BUDGETS 2018/19**

The Clerk outlined the difficulties involved in preparing the budget this year due to the lack of information available with regard to the potential costs for the management of the library. An increase of 5.8% on the precept is proposed which includes provision for the management of the library. The Clerk made comparison to Thrapston Town Council whose precept has been set with an increase of over 20%, Irthlingborough with an increase at 16.5% and Oundle looking to increase by a similar figure.

**RESOLVED:**

That the budgets for 2018/19 as per the attached report be agreed.

18/005. **PRECEPT 2018/19**

On a tax base of 2846, £365,000 is a Band D figure of £128.25, which is an increase of £7.04 per annum.

**RESOLVED:**

That the precept figure for 2018/19 be £365,000.

18/006. **LIBRARY**

Cllr C P O'Rourke, having declared an interest, withdrew from the discussion and vote. **To discuss the report from the Town Clerk on the future of Higham Ferrers Library and to agree to establish a working party.**

The Clerk explained the Town Council had been placed in a very difficult position by the County Council. An informal expression of interest to manage the library has been submitted. The building has been valued at £367,500, with a lease value of £33,000pa with lease terms and other property information requested. The County Council will consider at a cabinet meeting 13<sup>th</sup> February their recommendation with a final decision by the full council on the 22<sup>nd</sup> February. Timescales set by the County Council are

extremely tight with submission of a formal expression required by the end of March. The Clerk has produced a SWOT analysis for the management of the library to help any working party, this is a starting point and can be added to/amended. Councillors made comment regarding the way forward with regard to the future of the library.

**RESOLVED:**

(i) That the report be received and noted.

(ii) That a working party be established with the following Terms of Reference:

- To research and consider possible organisational structures for managing the library for recommendation to full Council.
- To consider options for use of the accommodation, e.g. Town Hall offices for agreement by the Town Council.
- To liaise with other stakeholders.
- To explore possible income streams.
- To review condition survey and work required.
- To review costs of running the building.
- To look at other community managed libraries.

(iii) That a public meeting will not be held.

(iv) That a budget be set of £2,000 for the library project and that a condition survey and a valuation be commissioned.

Mayor

Date