

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**ROYSTON AND DISTRICT COMMITTEE**

**MEETING HELD IN THE HARDWICKE HALL, ROYSTON TOWN HALL, MELBOURN  
ROAD, ROYSTON  
ON THURSDAY, 23RD MARCH, 2023 AT 7.30 PM**

**MINUTES**

**Present:** *Councillors: Tony Hunter (Chair), Gerald Morris (Vice-Chair), Ruth Brown, Adam Compton, Jean Green and Chris Hinchliff*

**In Attendance:** *James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Claire Morgan (Community/Partnership Team Leader)*

**Also Present:** *At the commencement of the meeting Herts County Councillors Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis, and approximately 6 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

**66 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 19 seconds*

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Carol Stanier.

**67 MINUTES - 30 NOVEMBER 2022**

*Audio Recording – 2 minutes 27 seconds*

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed and Councillor Adam Compton seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 30 November 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

**68 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 44 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

**69 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 49 seconds*

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair placed on record thanks to the former Community Engagement Officer, Ashley Hawkins, for the hard work and assistance he provided to the Committee and Councillors over the last few years. This was agreed with all Councillors present.

## 70 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY - UPDATE

*Audio recording – 4 minutes 11 seconds*

The Chair invited PS Jon Vine, Hertfordshire Constabulary to present. PS Vine thanked the Chair, gave a verbal update and advised that:

- He had been in the role for around 12 years now and was aware of what was happening in the town, as well as the demands and needs of the community.
- A new Chief Inspector had started.
- The data provided covered from 1 April 2022 through to 1 March 2023 and was compared with the same period last year.
- Overall crime was down 12.1%, from 924 recorded crimes to 812 this year.
- Residential burglary had increased from 33 to 48 this year, but only 8 of these had been 'traditional' burglaries from a property. This was relatively low for an area of this size and communication through the OWL network had made the community aware of ongoing issues.
- Burglary from a business had increase from 24 to 26, with one particular premises having been targeted 4 times.
- Theft from a motor vehicle, including catalytic convertors, had decreased from 81 to 62. This figure had previous been higher due to a series of catalytic convertor thefts and this had now reduced in the area but remained a wider issue nationally.
- There had been no robberies this year, compared to 8 last year.
- There has been 330 reports of violence against the person, which included stalking and harassment, for 2022/23.
- Common assaults were down from 154 to 118 and assault with injury had reduced from 103 to 84.
- There had been a 9% reduction in criminal damage to 101 incidents this year.
- There had been an increase in shoplifting, which had risen from 33 incidents last year to 44 this year. This had been attributed to increasing cost of living, which usually led to a spike in shoplifting.
- Drug possessions had reduced from 33 to 14, public order offences had reduced from 73 to 40 and possession of a weapon was also down.
- Generally, the area was a very safe place to live, with little to report as a major concern and the team were not facing the same challenges as reported last year.
- There had been a spike in crime in the rural areas last year, which saw a telehandler stolen from Nuthampstead as well as other high value items. In conjunction with Cambridge Police, an arrest was made relating to this in December 2022 and no further issues had occurred since this arrest.
- There continued to be reports of hare coursing in rural areas, however previous issues in town had not continued.
- The crime figures for the area had allowed the team to focus on youth engagement, including the Thursday Night Project, run alongside partners, to engage with and conduct important outreach with young people in the area. A further request for funding for this scheme for a further 12 months was to be submitted.
- This outreach work had helped to reduce the number of antisocial behaviour reports.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Gerald Morris

In response to questions, PS Vine advised that:

- Theft of petrol figures had previously been reported as bilking, however this had now been incorporated into theft figures.
- Police would only get involved in theft of petrol where other crime had been involved, for example violence or threat of violence or fake number plates.
- Despite population expansion in the area, crime had not risen accordingly.
- The area generally did not have 'home grown' criminals and generally these had come from surrounding areas to commit crime.
- There had been an increase in domestic crime, which was likely due to the increase in housing in the area.

The Chair thanked PS Vine for his presentation and for the ongoing work done by him and the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

## 71 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

*Audio recording – 17 minutes 47 seconds*

The Chair invited Ms Suzy Brandes from the Cambridge Russian School to provide a presentation in support of their grant application. Ms Brandes thanked the Chair and advised that:

- County Councillors Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis had assisted with the application and had provided funding from their Locality Budgets.
- The School had received funding from Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire Councils to provide support for Ukrainian children who could not attend other schools.
- The scheme was initially run free-of-charge, but this was not sustainable long term.
- A couple of families from the Royston area had recently joined and therefore this application for funding was submitted.
- In summertime meet ups were possible in Royston, or the surrounding areas, however opportunities were limited in the winter months.
- The Old School House had been identified and agreed at cost price for hires, but funding was required to cover the cost of this.
- The application amount was to match the funding for courses provided from other Councils, as well as to run social meet ups for attendees.

Ms Brandes advised that Ms Alina Bila had attended the meeting alongside her as she and her family attended the classes. Ms Bila spoke in Ukrainian, and a translation was provided by Ms Brandes, and it was advised that:

- The classes were important to help children to adapt.
- At home in Ukraine children had families and friends they could interact with, but these options were limited in the UK and the opportunity to play with likeminded children, with a similar experience, helped make children feel more comfortable.
- For adults the meet ups were important so they can share their experiences of living in the UK, including working and learning the language.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Ruth Brown

In response to questions, Ms Brandes advised that:

- There were around four or five families from Royston area using the scheme. They could not always attend every session but it was important the venue was in place so that people had the option.

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- There was a similar group running, but these meet ups were in the daytime, which were often difficult to attend for those people who were working.
- English language support was provided at the evening sessions.
- The application was to cover the cost of these evening sessions, as well as the attendance of one family at classes at the School.
- The Old School House was a suitable venue and the staff had been extremely supportive.

The Chair invited Miss Vicki O'Brien and Ms Lucy Xia from Roman Way Supporters to provide a presentation in support of their grant application.

Councillor Jean Green noted that she was a governor at the school and therefore would not take part in the debate or vote on this item but would remain in the room.

Miss O'Brien and Ms Xia thanked the Chair and advised that:

- They represented the PTA of the school, which had around 20 active members, and was registered as a charity in 2019.
- The association worked with teachers to increasing fundraising to improve facilities at the school, examples of the fundraising conducted included Hawaiian Disco, Christmas Fair, sweet sales, and second-hand clothing sales.
- Money raised had so far funded a new book scheme and a bike and scooter shed at the school.
- Remaining funds raised had gone toward the Woodland Area, which would be an outdoor learning resource and classroom. It was hoped the official opening would take place on 5 May 2023, as it was to be named the Queen Elizabeth II Nature Garden.
- The PTA had identified that several students in the current cohort lived in disadvantaged areas or had no access to outdoor space at home and therefore this would benefit them.
- The site already hosted the Woodland Club and had a wide mixture of children attend from years 1 to 4 and it was providing an outlet for those who struggle in a classroom environment. It was hoped this funding would expand the offer.
- Several subjects could be taught in the area, including science and nature, maths and music.
- However, the initial focus would be on English skills, with a number of children entering nursery with a below expected English standard and 10% of students having English as a second language.
- The experience provided helped to develop confidence, building social, physical and mental skills, and motivation to learn.
- The site could be offered out to other community groups in the area, for example cubs, scouts and guides, and specific sessions could be run offering different community benefits, outside of the school environment.
- Funding had previously been received from County Councillors Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis, as well as money raised by the PTA and other charitable donations, and this had funded prep work for the site, a black board, bark for paths and a mural at the entrance to the site.
- Additional funding from the Council would help to fund further wooden structures for learning and play, tree chairs for sitting and English specific resources, to aide with learning.
- Generally there was a need to invest further funds to increase the usability of the area and make it suitable for whole class teaching.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Ruth Brown

In response to questions, Miss O'Brien and Ms Xia advised that:

- There was one student with a physical disability who was able to use the site currently and therefore no further consideration had been given to accessibility at this stage, but this would be reviewed as required.
- The general thought was that rules should be inclusive and apply to all students, not just limit the actions of those with a disability. This meant monitoring the ground situation, ensure rules were in place for all children to ensure safety and make the area work for all children.
- Where there were additional needs, these children would be supported to become involved.
- Wilding of the area had not been considered at this stage, but the possibilities for the site were endless for teachers.

The Chair thanked the participants for their presentations and advised that the Committee would vote on the applications under the next item.

## 72 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

*Audio recording – 40 minutes 38 seconds*

The Chair invited the Community and Partnerships Team Leader to provide an update on the grant funds remaining to the Committee, including that:

- The base budget for the year was £6k, with £3130 remaining from 2021/22, which totalled £9130 for this year.
- £5452 had been allocated to date, which meant £3679 was remaining for the Civic Year.
- Grant requests at this meeting totalled £2863, which would leave £816 outstanding to carry forward into next year.

Councillor Hunter noted that the £1500 for the Free After 3pm scheme had not been allocated this year and therefore, if all grants were approved this evening, this would leave a shortfall to cover that scheme and funds to cover this would need to come out of the budget for next year, should Members wish to continue with funding this scheme.

Following a discussion amongst Members it was agreed that the Committee would proceed to decide on the grant applications tonight and would look for other ways to fund the Free After 3pm scheme.

Councillor Adam Compton proposed to grant the funds requested to the Cambridge Russian School, and this was seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That £777 be allocated to the Cambridge Russian School towards social and English language sessions for Ukrainian residents as outlined in paragraphs 8.1.1-8.1.4 of the report.

Councillor Adam Compton proposed to grant the funds requested to Roman Way Supporters, and this was seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That £2086 be allocated to Roman Way Supporters towards overhauling their nature garden as outlined in paragraphs 8.1.5-8.1.11 of the report.

The Chair invited County Councillors Fiona Hill and Steve Jarvis to provide the Committee with an update on Highways Issues. County Councillor Hill advised that:

- Integrated Works Programme and Highways Locality Budget schemes for 2022/23 were mostly completed. There had been a delay to the footpath works in Serby Avenue, as it was agreed to wait until utility works were complete before starting on the footpath.

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- Works had been completed around the A10 and Barkway Road area, Priory Close, and King James Way.
- Work had also been completed on Morton Street, Honey Way, Yeats Close, Shepherd Close, Thackeray Close and Masefield Way.
- Work scheduled for 2023/24 included resurfacing works in Mill Road, Queens Road, Melbourn Road, Eliot Road, Grays Close, as well as parts of the A10. Drainage work was planned for Grange Bottom and footpath works scheduled for Gage Close and Icknield Walk.
- Further patching work was included in 2023/24 for Serby Avenue, Studlands Rise and Burns Road.

County Councillor Jarvis advised that:

- All current work for the 2022/23 year had been completed.
- In 2023/24 work was expected on the Briary Lane footpath, village gateways in Therfield and the footway on Orchard Road.
- Investigations were due to begin to explore how to improve crossing London Road. This was initially suggested as a crossing, but this was deemed unaffordable, and it may now be an island, but this would also present complications.
- Work had begun on surface patching the A505.

The Chair noted that it was not always easy to deal with potholes, especially the number on the roads currently, but he had been reporting these and they were being dealt with.

In response to a question from Councillor Adam Compton, County Councillor Hill advised that she would look into road markings and the status of the Kingsway traffic island.

The Chair invited the Community and Partnerships Team Leader to provide an overview of the ongoing work of the Community Engagement Team, who advised that:

- The team had supported the North Herts Heroes award ceremony, which saw two winners from the Royston area.
- A professional videographer had been funded to support this and groups could use these as their own promotional materials.
- They had supported the All About Us conference, alongside the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and North Herts CVS. Further funding was being provided by NHDC to cover daytime and evening sessions to attract more people from the voluntary sector to attend.
- Had assisted with organising and running the Holocaust Memorial Day service which took place at the end of January 2023.

Councillor Tony Hunter proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

***RESOLVED:***

- (1) That the Committee agreed that any unspent funds from the 2022/23 financial year be allocated to the Royston Area Committee budget for the 2023/24 period.
- (2) That the Committee endorsed the actions taken by the Community Engagement Team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Royston.

***REASONS FOR DECISIONS:***

- (1) To ensure Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.

- (2) This report is intended to inform Members of the financial resources available to the Committee. It draws attention to the current budgetary situation by assisting in the effective financial management of the Area Committee's budget. This ensures that all actions are performed in line with the Authority's Financial Regulations, the Council's Constitution, and the guidance of the Grants Policy as agreed by Cabinet in July 2021.
- (3) The awarding of financial assistance to voluntary organisations and the use of discretionary spending allows the Committee to further the aims of the Council Plan.

## 73 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

*Audio recording – 71 minutes 00 seconds*

### North Herts Citizens Advice

Councillor Ruth Brown provided an update for Members including that:

- The number of enquiries received was up, with a specific rise regarding cost of living, debt and benefits.
- They had run Cost of Living workshops in Baldock but were looking for funding to expand this offer to Royston.

### Royston First

Councillor Brown provided an update for Members including that:

- The renewal ballot for the Royston BID was due by 2024, but no date had been set for this yet and meetings were scheduled to take place with Letchworth and Hitchin BID managers to agree this.
- Preparations were ongoing to develop a prospectus and it would seek to authorise a further 5-year term, with businesses voting on this.
- Advertising was now in place for a full time BID Manager, which would relieve pressure and increase capacity of the organisation.
- They were working closely with the Royston Environmental Group, including arranging a litter pick on 22 April.

Councillor Brown also noted that, following a request from a resident, a proposal had been made to the Town Council to name the footpath located off Briary Lane to Princes Mews as 'Jockey Way', and this had been agreed by the Town Council.

The meeting closed at 8.37 pm

Chair