



West Mersea Town Council - 2018/19

Cllr Powling – introduction.

Welcome to the Town Meeting. To clarify the purpose of this meeting, I can confirm the following:

Under the Local Government Act 1972, every Town must have a meeting for the whole of the Town which has a separate Town Council. The meeting is for local electors, and where there is a Town Council, the chairman of that Council *must* preside. The meeting must be held between 1 March and 1 June, *must* be convened by the Town Council and must not be before 6pm. The agendas, unlike Council agendas, have to be published 7 clear days before the meeting.

The right of the parish meeting to discuss parish affairs extends to any public matter of parochial nature and *is not* confined to the exercise of the statutory functions of the Town Council. In other words, as long as it is about West Mersea, you can talk about it.

Any expenses of the Town Meeting must be met by the Town Council. Tonight's meeting is costing £30 for the hire of this room (as we felt the Chambers would be too small) and £20 for refreshments afterwards.

Tonight the Council can listen to your views but we cannot legally debate any issues. We can agree to consider listing items on the next available Council agenda, which will be 16 May or later.

Tonight I am going to give you a brief summary of the work of the Town Council over the last 12 months and Petra will give a similar short report on the accounts and finances which we hope will be of interest to you.

We have checked with the Monitoring Officer and Electoral Services manager at Colchester Borough Council and this does not breach the purdah rules.

After our reports there will be time for questions from you all and then a talk from our special guest tonight, CI Rob Huddleston, Colchester's new District Commander.

Communications

- Continued to improve the West Mersea Town Council website to enhance information base and access and to comply with the transparency code 2015.
- We continue with the on-line Council newsletters which go out to 722 of our customers on a regular basis.
- We phased out the Councillor Surgeries after a 12 month trial period as our customers were satisfied they have a number of ways they can contact us.
- We continue to improve the professional face of the Council with all Councillors using a WMTC email address.
- We continue to convey key messages via social media on our WMTC Facebook page.
- Following the success of introducing guest speakers at the Annual Town Meeting in April, we have continued to arrange this and tonight we have Chief Inspector Rob Huddleston talking to us.
- We have updated the phone and IT system to improve efficiency.
- Also successful was the introduction of WMTC uniforms for ground staff, so we have introduced WMTC fleeces for Town Clerk and Cemetery Clerk when they are on official duties outside of the office. This has raised the profile of Council staff in the eyes of the public and increases staff accountability.
- Our engagement with stakeholders and community organisations continues to remain a priority e.g. CBC, ECC, Police, EALC, EMPC, NHW, Proud of Mersea, Refresh Mersea, M.I.S.
- There have been regular meetings held of the Bradwell Monitoring Committee with residents in attendance. The Committee has met with guests from EDF/CGN, the potential developers of a new Bradwell Power Station and Dr Tom Cameron from Essex University representing the Essex Native Oyster Restoration Initiative (ENORI).

Crime and Safety

- Programme to recruit up to 4 Community Police Special Constables instigated. Currently 2 officers will be starting on Mersea during 2019.
- Programme of co-ordinated community action developed to be run by the "Specials". Details incorporated in the Neighbourhood Plan.
- Initial meetings have been held with the NHW and other stakeholder groups to plan intelligence gathering arrangements ahead of the "Specials" arriving on Mersea.
- Plans to provide ANPR on the Strood.

Improved public facilities

- Following the complete revamp of the children's play equipment in West Mersea Park last year with old equipment removed and £100,000 spent on new equipment, paths, waste bins, signage and improved safety features including CCTV. Cost 80% funded by grants, we received a further grant to replace the old basket swing which has recently been installed.
- Safety work carried out at the Wellhouse play area at the Glebe with unsafe equipment replaced, unsafe ground surfaces and safety gates repaired.
- New basketball posts planned for Glebe which should be completed any day.
For this we have to thank two local residents that have donated money and given their time towards these new installations.
- Willoughby toilets updated with new facilities including new WCs and urinal, hand washing facilities, baby change in both Men's and Ladies, improved disabled provision, decoration, and water and electricity cost saving features added. Cost £32,000, 80% funded with support from CBC and S106 Borough funds.
- Council offices have been restructured and reorganised presenting a much more efficient and organised appearance to visitors.
- Lobbied for improved roads - programme now agreed by ECC for major roads in West Mersea to be re-surfaced in 2019, some of which are underway.
- Provided increased amenity space for WM Rugby Club (2 additional pitches).

Improvements to WMTC properties and Estate

- Fountain at Queens Corner was replaced in 2016 but this has ongoing maintenance issues and cannot be on in the winter so we have liaised with Refresh Mersea who have agreed to fill it with plants.
- New efficient cost saving lighting installed in Council offices and Chamber. Plus heat saving insulation to ceilings and other controls to reduce electricity bills. New door and window fitted for improved security and better insulation.
- Hearing loop installed in Council Chamber and screen/projector purchased to assist Councillors and members of the public to more fully participate in proceedings. This also saves paper and printing time. All meetings now recorded.
- Tree survey commissioned to establish a 5 phase programme of improvement to tree stock, including replacement trees for parks and cemeteries. Phases 1 & 2 complete; on-going programme of works in place.
- New fencing to Glebe carpark and permissive footpath alongside Feldy cemetery.
- Enhanced security measures for Rushmere Depot and Melrose Road (on-going).

Statutory Requirements and Training Programme

- Improved compliance of cemetery regulations (coffin plate checks, record keeping, staff training programme); financial regulations and standing orders; general record keeping; Health and safety regs and new staff contracts.
- Training programme instigated to improve skills and qualifications of councillors and staff.

Environment

- Twice yearly major litter picks organised by WMTC which started with the Clean for the Queen national campaign in 2016.
- Support for Proud of Mersea with some Councillors being members of the initial steering group or latterly trustees of the charity. A big thank you for their work.
- Supported Refresh Mersea in their excellent work in improving the Town. And how wonderful it looks all year around now.
- Recycling bins introduced into Seaview Carpark. Finance in place to roll this out to other areas.

- Cleared Village Green area next to Dabchicks of “dumped” boats and other clutter. New signage at Town Hard and Village Green. Old and obsolete signage removed.
- New signage on the Glebe to restrict movement of dogs in the hope of improving the dog fouling problems on the sports pitches. Old signage removed or repositioned. New clubs signage at entrance planned for Spring 2019.

Neighbourhood Plan (A community led team instigated by WMTC)

- Initially set up by the Council with members of the public and Councillors working to provide a NP. Funding obtained by grants and via the precept.
- Responses made to CBC Local Plan (LP) consultations. Participation in LP public meetings in Colchester.
- New website established for the NP.
- A number of questionnaires circulated to the residents of West Mersea responses to which have been analysed and appear on the NP website. They will form part of the draft NP document to be finalised in 2019.
- Held regular (monthly) Steering Group meetings and public engagement sessions to assist in the drafting of the NP document.
- Interfaced with special interest groups to pool resources and information.

All WMNPSG meetings are open to residents; a warm welcome awaits all who attend.

Highlights

- Lighting the beacon ceremony - 100 years on from the end of WW1.
- The Town Clerk passed her CiLCA qualification (Certificate in Local Council Administration) in October 2018. This gives the Council ‘The General Power of Competence’ which allows the Council to do “anything that individuals generally may do” and allows the Council to make local decisions.
- The Council will be ending its 4 year term with a full complement of 9 experienced Councillors, with a minimum term in office of 15 months.
- Mayor and Mayoress leading the Boxing Day dip in 2018.
- Also the Mayor tackling the greasy pole challenge!

Petra Palfreyman Town Clerk – Finance Report

Reduction in costs

Over the last year the Council has continued to achieve further cost reductions. This is due to keeping on top of the utility contracts and making sure we have the best prices, the 3 year deal for our insurance policy which keeps the price down, general good housekeeping, a move away from cheques to BACS payments which saves time and money, continued arrangements for bin emptying, major reforms around operations at the Glebe, and other smaller savings. 2019/20 will also benefit from a saving in wages of some £13,000 plus a savings in the operational costs of Meals on Wheels, and a saving of £750 in water and energy consumption.

Areas where revenues increased.

We have also continued to increase revenue in some areas which has improved the income stream by a few thousand per year, and adjusted prices to meet those being charged throughout the Borough. These increases have been achieved through higher daily car parking charges, reforming of long established parking concessions and increased gate licence charges. In future years the Council’s income will benefit from charges rising with inflation.

Council Finances

- We have appointed a Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) with the brief to establish a stronger financial base and provide up-to-the-minute information on the Council’s financial position so as to aid decision making and budgeting to focus solely on the finances.
- A programme is also in place to review all aspects of our finances with plans to future-proof the Council against the forthcoming devolution of services from ECC, and possible HMG referendum rules that will restrict precept increases to 2%, so curtailing any major improvement works.
- We are working on a detailed operating budget introduced to assist the day-to-day control of finances and to drive forward the Council’s agenda for improved facilities and services.
- The cash balances of the Council are arguably insufficient under parish governance guidelines; plans are in place to correct this situation and to earmark funds against future demands/projects.

- A major reform of financial arrangements has taken place around burials and our cemeteries in respect of our internal accounting procedures, certain charges being increased in line with higher costs and other costs being reduced. This has led to a strengthening of our reserves with a view to covering the Council's accrued liabilities within 5 years.

A copy of the accounts will now be shown on the screen. I'm happy to take any general questions.