

Minutes of the Market Harborough Special Expenses Advisory Panel



Location: Council Chamber, The Symington Building, Adam and Eve Street, Market Harborough, LE16 7AG

Date: 23rd July 2024 commencing at 6.30pm

Present:

Councillors: Anderson, Asher, Finan, Forman, James, Johnson, Knowles, Woodiwiss

Officers: J. Richardson – Chief Executive
C. Hartley – Director of Communities & Wellbeing
C. Mason – Director of Resources (&S.151)
E. Newman – Democratic Services Officer

Welcome and Introductions

In place of the Chairman of the Harborough District Council, the Democratic Services Officer opened the meeting, and each member of the Panel introduced themselves.

1. Election of Chair 2024/25

The Democratic Services Officer presided over the election of the Chair for the Market Harborough Special Expenses Advisory Panel. She invited nominations from the Panel. Councillor Woodiwiss was proposed by Councillor Knowles and seconded by Councillor Asher. There being no other nominations, Councillor Woodiwiss was duly elected.

Councillor Woodiwiss assumed the Chair.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received by Councillor Taylor.

3. Declarations of Interests

The Chair clarified that if Panel Members were part of Neighbourhood Forums, they would need to declare this.

It was questioned as to what 'membership' meant, and if they had attended meetings of these forums in their capacity as councillors, whether this counted as being a member. The Monitoring Officer would review this in time for the next meeting.

In the interest of transparency, the members declared the following;

Councillor Woodiwiss declared he attended the Welland Neighbourhood Forum and was a signatory in its creation.

Councillor Knowles declared he attended the Great Bowden and Arden Neighbourhood Forum.

Councillor James declared he attended the Little Bowden Hub, and Market Harborough Town Hub.

Councillor Forman declared she attended the Welland Neighbourhood Forum.

Councillor Asher declared that she had attended the Logan Neighbourhood Forum.

Councillor Finan declared he attended the Little Bowden Neighbourhood Forum.

4. Terms of Reference for Market Harborough Special Expenses Advisory Panel

The Chair of the Panel reviewed the Terms of Reference for the Panel with the panel members.

He then invited the Panel to ask any questions and make any comments on the Terms of Reference.

It was suggested that any grant/funding Application Proposals that may be presented to the Panel, should be 'sponsored' by the ward councillor(s). The

ward councillor would have the opportunity to champion the schemes and bring the proposals to the meeting. This was proposed by Cllr Knowles, and seconded by Cllr Asher. **This would be added to the Terms of Reference of the Panel.**

It was also suggested that town bodies/organisations within Market Harborough could attend meetings to speak on their grant applications, **the process for this would be developed by officers, and presented to the next Panel meeting.** Grant applications could either be presented by the Ward Councillor Champion, or alternatively, the group making the application.

It was determined that a Vice Chair of the Panel be elected at the next meeting.

Cllr Anderson entered the meeting at 18:47.

It was confirmed that the Revised Terms of Reference would be brought back to the next meeting of the Market Harborough Special Expenses Advisory Panel.

5. Special Expenses Overview

The Director of Communities and Wellbeing provided a presentation on the details of Special Expenses and how this relates directly to Market Harborough.

Special Expenses represent expenditure incurred on the delivery of services by the District Council in parished or unparished areas, which elsewhere is provided and incurred by either the town or parish council in other parished areas.

Harborough District Council's special expenses policy covers expenditure relating to; all cemetery provision, allotment provision, Harborough in Bloom, Harborough Town Centre Support, Parks, Open Spaces and Recreation Grounds.

There is a need for the Panel as currently there is no formal mechanisms for considering priorities and expenditure for the unparished area of Market Harborough. This Panel will provide formal governance and transparency for

residents and stakeholders. Priorities for the Panel to be agreed are likely to include open space projects, events and Community Grants.

6. Finance & Budget

The Director of Resources (& S151) provided a presentation on the financing of Special Expenses. He explained that the Market Harborough Special Expenses are part of the council's overall budget. If the Special Expenses are increased, the overall budget for the Council is increased. There are specific pots of money for each special expense, which can only be used for that specific purpose. Special Expenses fund services that would normally be provided by a town or parish council.

He also reviewed the Market Harborough Special Expenses since 2021/22. He summarised the current Market Harborough Special Expenses from the 2023/24 Budget. This specified the money available for Parks and Recreation, Allotments, Cemeteries, War Memorials, Public Conveniences, Harborough Town Centre Support, Harborough in Bloom, and Bus Shelters.

There will be a review of Harborough District Council's Special Expenses undertaken in 2024/25, including a review of what is defined as a special expense; a fundamental policy review; attributable land and services; and support service charges.

Councillor Asher asked whether the higher amount of households in Market Harborough affected the amount of council tax collected, and therefore the amount of special expenses. It was clarified that this was correct, it was affected proportionally.

She also asked whether money obtained through section 106 grants could be used for projects across the District that fell under the special expenses category, specifically the cemetery. It was confirmed that this was correct, and officers were looking into various options to specifically fund the cemetery.

Councillor Finan asked if the funding has already been allocated to various Special Expenses areas, then what leeway is there in providing money to projects? It was specified that the Council would have to cut back or increase income streams through creative ways.

Councillor James also asked whether money was being lost on cemetery provision? The Director of Resources clarified that it does cost for the maintenance of the space, and when there is a new cemetery in the area, there will be a net cost.

Councillor Knowles asked whether **a report on the development of income streams and costs for the Market Harborough Special Expenses could be brought to the next meeting.**

Councillor Asher also asked whether the money being spent on cemeteries is like other local authorities and are there other paid-for services that could be provided to increase the revenue. Officers would investigate cemetery spending (potentially all of SEs) in comparison to other councils (specifically other unparished areas).

Councillor Woodiwiss also questioned if council tax was not raised by its full 2.99% could the size of a special expenses pot be increased. It can be, but it is strongly advised against. It has already been shown that with the council tax freeze, Special Expenses have increased.

7. Priorities for 2024/25

The Director of Communities and Wellbeing introduced the discussion, and gave some suggestions on what the Panel could prioritise throughout the year.

She suggested income possibility and potential; open spaces plans (maintenance and redevelopment); town events (how much support the Panel wants to provide; programme of events); new community provision (scope, ownership and future management of community facilities); community grants (considering applications specific to Market Harborough); UK Shared Prosperity Funds (considering any projects funded by this programme); consideration of proposals and applications for S106 applications (as with Parish and Town Councils elsewhere in the District).

Councillor Knowles asked how the Advisory Panel's priorities align with the Cabinet priorities. This would be reviewed by the officer and update at the next Panel meeting.

Councillor Knowles also suggested that the specifically in relation to the Community Grants scheme, information needed to be provided as soon as possible, so the project could be adequately championed and presented at a meeting of the Panel.

Councillor Anderson suggested that Green and Open Spaces be a priority for the Panel.

Councillor James suggested that Cycling and safer and increased cycling provision be considered as a priority.

Councillor Johnson suggested that Community Proposals from the area could encourage innovative projects for the Panel to consider.

8. Specific Projects

The Director of Communities and Wellbeing introduced a report on the specific project regarding the Northampton Road Pocket Park. The site is currently a mobile phone mast site on Northampton Road, which had lent itself to some anti-social behaviour. She explained the actions that had already been taken in relation to the site, for example, removing dead and diseased trees, as well as tree cover which was exacerbating the anti-social behaviour. A full range of surveys had been completed to understand the potential of the site. She also clarified that the owner of mobile phone mast had been notified of the intent to remove the mast, they had been given a deadline of February 2025 for negotiation. She also detailed the work that had been planned for the pocket park including new seating, wide paths, addition of bird and bat boxes, bulb planting, hedging and fruit tree planting. The cost of the site, including annual maintenance costs, were then reviewed. The total cost of the work would be £30,000, there had already been £6000 allocated, and the rest would be obtained through section 106 applications. The maintenance costs had been estimated at approximately £500-£1000 per year. She also discussed next steps for the project. There would be more stump removal, ongoing maintenance, repointing of walls, and preparing the

site for planting. Community engagement would continue as the project moves forward.

The Chair then opened to the Panel for any questions or comments on the project.

Councillor Forman asked whether the mobile phone mast currently generated any income for the Council. The income does not contribute to Special Expenses but does generate income for the Council as a strategic national asset. There is ongoing discussion with the company currently using the mast, and they have been issued with one year's notice for the removal of the mast.

Councillor James also noted that there was a large community group meeting regarding this site, and there is continuing interest in the project from the community. It was advocated that the community groups first engaged, be re-engaged regarding the last stages of this project, especially regarding the planting and landscaping.

It was suggested that the ward members engage with the local community regarding the last stages of the project.

Councillor Asher asked whether there would be a litter bin in the park. It was confirmed that there will be a litter bin in the park.

It was suggested that the park be named the Northampton Road Friendship Park. This was proposed by Cllr James and seconded by Cllr Finan. It was therefore **AGREED** that the space be called the Northampton Road Friendship Park.

9. Future Meeting Dates

It was suggested that there be 3-4 months until the next meeting. **The officers would contact the Chair with suitable dates, and the confirmed date would be circulated amongst the members and publicised on the Council's calendar of meetings.**

10. Any Urgent Business

There was none.

The meeting ended at 19.17

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