

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 4TH NOVEMBER 2008 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBIN ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD

PRESENT: Councillor Miss C J Geall, in the Chair

Councillors J F Cook, J C Hedley, P A Ruffles, Dr L E Radford and Mrs B M Wrangles

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs N L Villa, Town Clerk
Mr S Davies, Finance and Administration Manager

158. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from The Mayor (Mayoral Engagement).

159. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Miss C J Geall declared a personal interest in any matters relating to Hertford Museum as a Patron of Hertford Museum.

160. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee held on Monday 29th September 2008 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

161. ACTION SHEET

Cllr B M Wrangles suggested offering a rent free period to attract potential tenants for the 2nd floor of the Castle. Cllr C Geall explained that the agent retained by the Council was doing everything possible to attract new tenants and the Council would consider any interest accordingly. Cllr J Hedley stated that the Citizens Advice Bureau may be seeking accommodation and the Town Clerk advised that they had already made contact to view the space. Cllr J Sartin requested a tour of the space available in order for Members to better understand the difficulties involved in attracting potential tenants. This will be arranged by the Town Clerk.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The action sheet be received and noted.

162. QUESTIONS AND/OR STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

163. TOWN PLAN

Cllr C Geall introduced the latest update report on the development of a Town Plan which the Committee had given 'in principle' agreement to at the meeting on 29th September 2008 (minute 125 refers). The report outlined the stages involved in the development of a plan for Hertford and called for Councillors volunteers to serve on working parties for each of the core areas identified in the report.

Cllr J Cook asked for an explanation of the aims of the plan and was referred to the report presented to the previous Committee which outlined the aims and objectives of the development of a plan for Hertford.

Cllr S Newton expressed her support for the proposal stated that several other towns already have such a plan and asked how the Council is going to ensure that it works collaboratively with East Herts Council and Herts County Council to ensure that a joint approach. Cllr J Sartin also stressed that East Herts Council are keen to work with Parish and Town Councils on the development of plans and the need for Hertford Town Council to cooperate with the other authorities. Cllr C Geall confirmed that the Council would identify opportunities for joint working during Stage One of the process and suggested a preliminary meeting be arranged with the relevant authorities to identify such opportunities. This is to be arranged by the Town Clerk.

Cllr C Geall requested volunteers to assist on the various working group, while recognising that Members from other Committees may also wish to become involved. The following Members expressed their interest:

Cllr J Cook - Transport
Cllr J Sartin - Retail Sector
Cllr L Radford - Tourism
Cllr S Newton –Environment

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee agreed the production of a Town Plan as detailed in the report, subject to the addition of an initial scoping meeting with East Herts Council in phase 1.

164. DEBTOR AND CREDITOR PAYMENTS TIMES

The Finance Manager presented a report on the introduction of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to monitor the time taken for the Council to make payments to its suppliers and recover money from its customers in the first two quarters of the 2008/09 financial year. This is to ensure that the Council meets its obligations to pay its debts in a timely fashion and to ensure that it receives all debts owed. There was some discussion and subsequent explanation about the mechanism of recording and presenting the figures.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The report on Debtor and Creditor payment times be received and noted

- b) The suggested KPIs are adopted and that the Committee will receive a half yearly update on the performance against the KPI.

165. DRAFT BUDGET FOR 2009/2010

The Committee received a draft budget and report for 2009/10 which outlined the base budget required to maintain current service levels and a list of proposed projects which the Council may wish to consider undertaking in the next financial year.

Cllr J Sartin stated that there were some reports on budget proposals still to be presented to Development and Leisure Committee and she expressed her hope that these will still be considered. Cllr C Geall stressed that the proposals were the first draft of a developing budget and that further discussion and proposals will be incorporated during the process.

Cllr J Sartin asked for clarification on the figures, especially in relation to the Band D Council Tax increase and the Finance Manager explained that the exact increase on the 2008/09 budget will not be available until the revised tax base figure is announced in late December.

Cllr J Hedley queried the increase in the External Audit costs for 2009/10. The Finance Manager explained that this is due to the increased auditing costs associated with Larger Council status. Cllr Hedley voiced his support for the proposals as presented.

Cllr B Wrangles queried the amount of income from allotments against the base budget for 2008/09. The Finance Manager explained that there is a mismatch between the allotment rentals year and the financial year and that the income figure projected is likely to be achieved.

Cllr J Cook expressed his concern over recent banking problems and queried where the Council's reserves were being held. Cllr C Geall explained that they were being held in a high interest account in a UK bank.

Cllr B Wrangles asked whether the electronic gates to the Castle grounds were now complete and operational. The Town Clerk confirmed that they are now fully operational. Cllr S Newton explained that the electronic pads are very sensitive and the gates will not open if the car is too close to the gates. The Town Clerk advised that signage around the operation of the gates is on order.

The Finance Manager suggested the creation of a reserve for CCTV to cover cost of maintenance and repair and was asked to present a report to the next Committee with proposals.

Cllr C Geall explained the General Reserve and Building Reserve figures, stressing that the Building Reserve will be built up over a period of time and is an annual commitment.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The report on the Draft Budget for 2009/10 be noted.

- b) The Committee approve the target general reserve of £120,000
- c) The Committee approve the target building maintenance reserve of £70,000 as at 31st March 2010.
- d) The Cemetery Railing replacement project be referred back to Community Services Committee with the recommendation that the project be spilt over 2 years.
- e) Development and Leisure Committee would consider its proposed projects for 2009/10 and present its recommendation to the next Finance Committee.

166. CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR OPENING ARRANGEMENTS

The Committee received a report proposing the Council's Christmas opening arrangements.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approve the proposed Christmas opening arrangements

167. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

In view of the confidential nature of the following items, which relate to the business matters of other individuals and organisations, the public shall be excluded while the following item is discussed. This is in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by the Local Government Act 1972.

168. PAST DUE DEBTS

The Committee received a verbal report on the circumstance surrounding a long overdue unpaid invoice which was owed to the Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The debt be written-back through the Christmas Lights budget for 2008/09.