

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 12 MARCH 2012 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBING
ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD**

PRESENT: Councillor Miss C Geall, in the Chair

Councillors: Mrs B Mansfield, M McCormick, Mrs S Newton, Dr L E Radford
Miss J Sartin, Miss I Sigmatic and Dr A Stevenson

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr P Ruffles
Mrs N James, Town Clerk
Ms T Carpenter, Civic Administration Manager
Mr S Davies, Responsible Finance Officer
1 Member of the Press
2 Members of the Public

446. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillors Mrs P Moore (Family Commitment)

447. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Miss I Sigmatic	Personal	Agenda item 7, Community Grants. Hertford Music Festival, if discussed.	Is the Council's representative for the group
Cllrs: Miss Geall, McCormick Mrs Newton, Dr Radford and Miss Sartin	Personal	Agenda item 7, Community Grants. Hertford Voices	The applicant is known to Cllrs
Mrs N James, Town Clerk	Personal	Agenda item 11, Personnel Sub Committee Minutes and Agenda item	Officer of Town Council and

448. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee meeting held on Monday 19 December 2011 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

449. ACTION SHEET

Seed Warehouse

It was noted that lease discussions continued with the current tenant at the Seed Warehouse regarding service charges, however it was also noted that the current lease with the tenant had expired and it was requested that Officers seek a speedy resolution to the discussions. Credit checks were awaited for a potential new tenant.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The action sheet be received and noted.

450 QUESTIONS AND/OR STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

There were two members of the public wishing to speak: PC Owen Davies of the Hertford Community Safety Team and Mr John Ivens of East Herts Council.

PC Owen Davies had asked to speak on both Taxi Marshalling and the locking of the Castle Gates.

PC Davies wished to advise the Committee that the presence of the Taxi Marshalls in the town centre late at night greatly assisted in the prevention of disorder in the town, which led to the low level of common assaults in the area and reduced public order offences through ensuring that likely trouble makers were moved out of the town as quickly as possible. The presence of the marshalls also assisted the Police by giving one less area of the Town Centre for the police to manage.

PC Davies additionally wished to express his concern at the possibility of the Castle Grounds being left unlocked at night. He was of the opinion that this could potentially lead to an increase in serious crime, given that the area was dark, isolated, not covered by CCTV and used as a thoroughfare late at night. Monitoring this area would lead to a further stretch on police resources.

Mr John Ivens wished to speak on Taxi Marshalling. Mr Ivens wished to echo the comments of PC Davies and add that the loss of the Marshalls would not only increase demand on police resources but also those of the other emergency services.

451. TAXI MARSHALLING

The Committee had received a request for funding to contribute towards the continuation of the Taxi Marshall scheme for Hertford.

The Committee was disappointed that East Herts Council had withdrawn funding for the scheme and recognised that Taxi Marshalls greatly assisted in the prevention of disorder in town by facilitating the rapid removal of people from Town late at night. It was noted that a change of legislation in late 2012 to impose a levy on the licence fee of the venues would assist in future funding of the scheme, but at present there remained a funding gap. Hertfordshire County Council currently funded 50% of the overall cost, leaving a funding gap of approx. £11,000 and the Council was asked to cover this shortfall.

The Committee was prepared to support the scheme for a further year but expressed concern that a question mark remained over future funding. The Council would seek to influence East Herts Council to ensure that funding from the licencees became a reality.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approves the proposal to make a £11,000 contribution to the Taxi Marshalling Scheme in Hertford for the financial year 2012/13. The contribution being funded from the News Homes Bonus received by the Council in February 2012.

452. CONTINUED MEMBERSHIP OF NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approves membership to NALC for a further year from April 2012.

453. COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Community Grant Budget for 2011/12 was £13,000, with an additional £4,902 rolled forward from 2010/11. The Committee noted the approved grant criteria which stated that grants would not normally be awarded for general revenue expenditure, but for items of capital expenditure.

The Committee considered the following applications and **RESOLVED** in accordance with its powers under section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 that the Committee should incur the following expenditure, which in its opinion is in the interest of the area, or its inhabitants and will benefit them in a manner commensurate with the expenditure:

The Company of Players (Hertford) be awarded £500 towards the cost of a replacement lighting board and computer screen.

Home Start East Herts be awarded £600 towards the cost of a summer outing and Christmas Party

Hertford Lipreading Group be awarded £280 subject to the money being used specifically for the benefit of residents of Hertford to attend lipreading classes

River Beane Restoration Association be awarded £100 towards revenue costs.

Hertford and Ware Street Pastors be awarded £1000 which should be directed specifically towards training costs.

Hertford Voices be awarded £700 towards the cost of catering for guests visiting from Wildershausen, Hertford's twin town. It was noted that members of Hertford Voices would be providing entertainment during the Council's Jubilee beacon lighting ceremony.

The Folly @ The Folly be awarded £300 to provide signage and publicity material for the event.

Keech Hospice Care. No grant was awarded given that the application was for revenue funding. The Council requested that any future grant applications be for funding of a specific project.

454. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING

The Committee received a report which provided some background information on the introduction of Neighbourhood Planning. The Localism Bill received Royal Assent in November 2011 and one of the measures included in the Act were those for Neighbourhood Planning. The specific regulations were currently being drafted and should be available in April 2012. A Neighbourhood Plan forms a statutory document which can give local communities a greater say over the design and location of new developments or set out design policies to steer decisions of planning applications, although the Plan must dovetail into the Local Development Framework of the local planning authority.

Costs surrounding the preparation of a Neighbourhood Plan were estimated to be in the region of £10,000 - £20,000 and in a town the size of Hertford there was a possibility that several plans could be required to cater for the different neighbourhoods within the town. Engagement with the Parish Councils on the boundaries of the town would also be necessary. Cllr Stevenson had recently attended a course organised by the organisation 'Action for Market Towns' and had established that it would probably be possible to prepare a Neighbourhood Plan, which would be dependent on sustainable assessments, for approximately £10,000, with East Herts Council being required to fund referendum costs. Cllr Stevenson considered that the Council should not lose sight of the real input the local community could have on the future development of Hertford through the preparation and adoption of Neighbourhood Plans, and that scrutiny of the secondary legislation should be made as soon as it became available.

Whilst recognising that neighbourhood plans could provide the Council and the community with an opportunity to influence designs and types of development in the Town nevertheless the Council also had an important role to play in influencing the East Herts Local Development Framework, which was currently being drafted. If the Council was able to ensure that such requirements were included in the LDF, the need for a neighbourhood plan would be less important.

It was generally felt that it was important to keep the matter under regular review and take time to study the secondary legislation when it became available.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the report.
- b) The Town Clerk undertakes an assessment of the secondary legislation once it became available and present an interim report to the next meeting of the Finance Policy and Administration Committee.
- c) The Council would seek to proactively engage with East Herts Council on the production of the Local Development Framework.

455. INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

The Committee received a report which provided an update of the Investors In People Award (IIP)

The Council gained the IIP award in November 2010 and is due to be reassessed in two years time. Assessment would be via the Improvement Plan which had been drafted in discussion with the IIP Assessor, the Clerk and the Leader. The report provided an update of how the Council had progressed in meeting the requirements of the Improvement Plan.

The Chairman agreed to provide some feedback to the Clerk outside of the meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee notes the action plans and progress report as part of the IIP continual improvement requirement.

456. CASTLE GROUNDS

The Committee received a report seeking consideration of a re-design of the Castle Grounds flower beds and whether it wished to accept a gift of land, namely the Castle Moat Garden, from Hertfordshire County Council. A proposal to keep the Castle Grounds unlocked in the evening was also included in the report.

Re-design of Flower Beds

One of the most expensive areas of the Castle Grounds to maintain was the flower beds to the front of the Castle and the planting around the Castle itself. Officers had been seeking a more sustainable planting scheme for approval by members and some plans had been drawn up by Mudlarks, which had shown an interest in undertaking the design work incorporating members suggestions. Box hedging had been proposed because it was considered to be more in keeping with the listed building, but members requested that this be interspersed with colour, with some small bedding areas possibly to the sides of the main bed. It was considered that Autumn would be the most appropriate time to commence the re-design work. Concern was expressed that, whilst Mudlarks was an excellent charity, it did rely heavily on the leadership of one person and the Council should remain mindful of the key person risk in this case.

Moat Garden

Since the early 1980's the Council had had a licence agreement with Hertfordshire County Council for the maintenance of the Castle Moat Garden. The garden had been maintained under the East Herts Council maintenance contract for the rest of the Castle Grounds but was now being recharged to this Council with costs in the region of £5000.

It was noted that the Council could terminate the licence agreement with Hertfordshire County Council, however the Garden had always been viewed as an integral part of the Council grounds and it was felt that it would be difficult to ensure that a high standard of maintenance was maintained. During the discussions with the County Council it had been suggested that the County Council could gift the land to the Town Council and this proposal had already been before the relevant Cabinet Member for HCC, who had given an 'in principle' agreement.

The Committee considered that the gift of land would be the most equitable solution to the problem and that the maintenance of the Moat Garden be included in the Service Level Agreement with Mudlarks along with the maintenance of St Leonard's Garden and Holy Trinity Churchyard.

Castle Gates

A significant proportion of the maintenance budget of the Castle Grounds was the cost of employing the East Herts Council contractor to lock and unlock the Castle Gates on 365 days per year. It had been suggested, as a trial, that the gates of the Castle on the area occupied by the Town Council be left unlocked overnight from 1 April 2012. The Castle building was well alarmed and the gates were not always a deterrent to those who were determined to gain access. The Committee noted that the local police had expressed concern at the proposal and the Committee considered that the Castle would become more vulnerable at night. The Committee therefore decided not to proceed with the trial.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** the proposal to accept the transfer of the gift of land, in the form of the Moat Garden, from Hertfordshire County Council for maintenance as a public garden.
- b) The Committee **approves** the proposal to re-design the flower beds, subject to the inclusion of a high level of colour in the scheme and requested that formal designs be presented to members for consideration prior to the next meeting.
- c) The Committee **rejects** the proposal to leave the Castle Gates unlocked for a trial period from 1 April 2012.

457. PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 9 January 2012 and 20 February 2012.

It was noted that the performance framework for the Town Clerk had been completed and that the performance objectives could now be cascaded to down to other officers.

The Committee had also recommended consideration of a Social Media Policy and Member/Officer Protocol Policy. The Committee was happy recommend the policies to full Town Council for inclusion in the Constitution.

The Policy for Additional Hours for Senior Staff was approved subject to re-wording in paragraph 3, which the Chairman of the Personnel Sub Committee was authorised to amend.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 9 January and 20 February 2012
- b) The Committee **recommends** to Full Town Council the proposed Social Media Policy and Member/Officer Protocol for inclusion in the Constitution.
- c) The Committee **delegates** authority to the Chairman of the Personnel Sub Committee to amend the wording of paragraph 3 of the Policy for Additional Hours for Senior Staff and subsequently **recommends** the Policy to the Full Town Council for inclusion in the Constitution.

458. DIVERSIONARY ACTIVITIES FUNDING REQUEST

The Committee had received a copy of a letter from the East Herts Community Safety Team to request a contribution towards the cost of providing summer activities to young people age between 11- 19 years old.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** a grant of £500 to contribute to the provision of summer activities for young people, to be funded from the s137 grant fund.

459. **LICENSING OF THE CASTLE**

The Committee had received a report requesting consideration for a variation to the Hertford Castle premises licence to include additional provision of regulated entertainment, entertainment facilities, late night refreshment and sale of alcohol and variations to the operating hours.

Following the preparation of the report, officers had given the matter further consideration and concluded that the need for an alcohol licence would not be necessary, given that there has never been a problem with hirers obtaining one of the 12 temporary event notices which the Council was permitted each year. Given the advice of the Officers, the Committee approved the changes to the licence, without the application to sell alcohol, however it was requested that the matter remained under review in case a shortage of temporary event notices became an issue in the future.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** the proposed variation to the Premises Licence Operating Schedule, without the application to serve late night refreshments and sale of alcohol.
- b) The Committee **approves** the extended hours of operation.
- c) The Committee **approves** the Marketing and Promotions Manager to submit an application to vary the premises licence for Hertford Castle subject to any recommendations by East Herts Council and the Hertford Police Licensing Officer.

460. **FINANCE**

(a) Bank Reconciliations

The Committee received bank reconciliation summaries for November and December 2011.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee notes the bank reconciliation summaries for November and December 2011

(b) Payment Schedules

The Committee received payment schedules for December 2011 and January and February 2012

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee notes the payment schedules December 2011 and January and February 2012.

(b) Bank Mandate

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approves changes to the cheque signatories to include Councillors: Mrs Newton, Dr Radford, Miss Sartin and Stevenson. Previous signatories should be removed from the mandate.

(c) Treasury Deposit Account

The Committee had received a report outlining the interest rates which would be achievable through the use of a treasury deposit account.

The Committee noted the slightly enhanced interest rate available if a minimum deposit of £50,000 was deposited for a fixed term of at least a month. The Committee agreed to proceed in opening an account, whilst noting that the account would be with HSBC and would be a low risk method to achieving slightly enhanced levels of interest. There would be no change to the Council's risk profile.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee authorises the Finance Manager to open a treasury Deposit account, in consultation with the Chairman, and place deposits of earmarked reserves for a period of two to six months.

(d) 3rd Quarter Income and Expenditure

The Committee received details of the 3rd Quarter Income and expenditure for 2011/12.

The Committee noted the receipt of the Town Council's portion of the New Homes Bonus and requested that enquiries be made of East Herts Council to ascertain how its portion of the Bonus would be spent, noting that it should be designated to be spent within Hertford.

The Committee had been disappointed to note the slightly misleading figure which had been included in a recent report to East Herts Council which indicated that the Town Council portion of the Council Tax had increased by 1.3%. The Committee wished to confirm that the increase had been linked to the house base, meaning that there would be no increase in the Council Tax to householders, with the rate remaining at £91.47 for a third consecutive year.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the 3rd quarter Income and Expenditure for 2011/12.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.30 pm