

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 17 MARCH 2014 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBING
ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD

PRESENT: Cllr Miss C Geall, in the Chair

Councillors: Mrs S Newton, Dr L E Radford, Miss J Sartin and Miss I Sigmac.
Cllr Ruffles arrived to the meeting at 8.50pm

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr P Boyle
Cllr A Turner
Ms N Villa, Town Clerk
Ms P Carpenter, Civic Administration Manager
Mr S Davies, Responsible Finance Officer

439. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Mrs B Mansfield, Cllr M McCormick, Cllr P Ruffles and Cllr A Stevenson.

440. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr P Boyle	DPI	Community Grants, Simon Balle School PSA	Employed at Simon Balle School
Cllr Miss I Sigmac	DPI	Community Grants, Hertford Music Festival	Council's rep, Hertford Music Festival

441. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee meeting held on Monday 16 December 2013 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

442. ACTION SHEET

Museum Lease

An update was sought regarding the position of the lease. The Clerk confirmed that initial discussions had taken place with the Curator and the Chairman of Trustees, and that enquiries had been made regarding the possibility of the Museum taking over extra accommodation at both the Seed Warehouse and the Mill Bridge Rooms. Additional accommodation was not currently available and there remained a need to progress and finalise the lease and it was therefore requested that the matter be referred back to the Committee as an item for inclusion on the next agenda.

Transfer of Moat Garden

It was noted that the Council had accepted the terms of the lease and that the final transfer of ownership was being processed by Hertfordshire County Council.

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

None

444. COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Committee considered the following applications and **RESOLVED** in accordance with its powers under the General Power of Competence as defined in the Localism Act 2011 and SI 965 The Parish Councils (General Power of Competence) (Prescribed Conditions) Order 2012, that the Committee should incur the following expenditure.

Note: Having previously declared a DPI, Cllr Boyle left the meeting prior to the discussions on this agenda item.

Home Start East Herts was awarded £600, which would be paid from the 2014/15 budget since the charity had already been awarded a grant in the current financial year.

Friends of Sele Road Lovely Grub Garden was awarded £251 for the initial outlay on tools, insurance and member training.

Hertford Cricket Club was awarded £1000 towards the cost of replacement cricket nets.

Macular Society Hertford Support Group was awarded £420 towards reducing newsletter fees. Whilst the Committee was happy to support the organisation on this occasion, nevertheless the application could have been interpreted as a request for assistance towards running costs, which the Council would not usually fund. The Committee would wish to see any future application be for funding towards a specific project.

The Rotary Club of Hertford was awarded £1200 towards the cost of staging the Hertford Carnival.

Simon Balle School PSA was awarded £1000 towards the purchase of a new mini bus. Noting that fund raising was due to take two to three years the Committee requested that the PSA be asked to ring fence this sum for the minibus purchase.

The application for the **Hertford Youth Trust** was deferred pending further information from Cllr Roger Willis concerning the viability of the Trust.

2nd Bengeo Scout Group had benefitted from funding from Rock at the Castle and therefore a further grant was not awarded on this occasion.

Country Bus Rallies was awarded £680 towards public liability insurance and publicity. The Committee requested that the Bus rally took place on the same date as one of the Council's events, in order for the two to complement each other. This grant would be funded from the 2014/15 budget since the organisation had already been awarded a grant in the current financial year.

The Gifted Organisation Ltd was awarded £500 towards the cost of an event for young people to be held on Hartham Common in August.

The application for the **Hertford Music Festival** was approved in principle, but the submitted form was incomplete. The grant would be determined by the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, pending further information from the applicant.

No grant was awarded to **Magpas – The Emergency Medical Charity**. The Council would not normally support an application towards running costs.

Hertford and Ware Young Carers was awarded £600 towards art materials, sports equipment and refreshments.

Future Living Hertford was awarded £500 towards the cost of the new website and promotional literature. The Council would not normally fund running costs.

Hertingfordbury Recreation Ground was awarded £500 towards the cost of ground reinforcement mesh for bad weather purposes.

Hertford Childrens Book Festival was awarded £1200 towards Author's fees, and expenses, printing costs and a new website.

Bengeo Women's Institute was awarded £950 towards the cost of an outing.

The balance of the grant funding available after these applications were approved stands at £971.00. Outstanding funds would be rolled forward into the next year's budget.

445. PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE

A copy of the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 3 February 2014 had been circulated to the Committee. These have yet to be approved by the Sub Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the report of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 3 February 2014.

446. REVIEW OF CONSTITUTION AND AIMS AND OBJECTIONS

The Committee reviewed the documents which form the Council's Constitution and its Aims and Objectives. It was anticipated that revised Standard Orders and Financial Regulations were shortly to be issued by NALC, which was likely to result in a need for further updates.

One item which did not appear to be included within the Constitution was details regarding proportionality of representation of the political groups. The Town Clerk was requested to provide a policy with suitable proportionments.

Other requested amendments included correction of spelling, grammatical and formatting errors and the following:

Introduction 3.1 – Remove reference to ETB.

Council Assets. Reference to be made to paintings currently housed in Shire Hall.

Mayor and Deputy Mayor Protocol. That suitable wording be included to add an age restriction on the wearing of the Consort badge/Mayoress chain, and being appointed consort/mayoress. Over 16 was considered appropriate.

Mayor and Deputy Mayor Protocol. Change wording to allow for more than one Consort/Mayoress to wear the Chain.

Standing Orders: Petitions. It was considered that 5 working days for the inclusion of a petition on an agenda remained appropriate, given that the agenda could be re-issued if necessary.

Standing Orders: Role of Marketing and Events Manager should be updated to reflect the new role profile.

Standing Orders 1.3.2, To change from 5 to 4 Full Town Council Meetings per year.

Financial Regulations: The annual accounts to be reviewed by FPA prior to recommendation to Full Town Council.

Standing Orders: Refer to person chairing Committee rather than presiding.

Objectives: Remove 'early' from launch of website.

Objectives: Tweak wording in reference to Heritage Trail to indicate how the Council would engage with the District and County Councils.

Objectives: New Homes Bonus referred to twice. Remove one.

Objectives: Reference to Vibrant Town – Re-word to enhance the scope beyond hanging baskets and flyposting removal.

Objectives: Remove the word specific from 'Town Centre based officer'. The Officer may not be solely Town Centre based.

Objectives: Busking Scheme – To be more proactive.

Objectives: WWI events – indicate what is happening, more than just liaising with MOD.

Objectives: Remove 'Create SLA for CCTV'. This was not possible given the partnership arrangements.

Objectives: Council to review the upkeep of St Leonard's Garden.

Objectives: Castle as a venue. Business Plan not just a Marketing Plan.

Protocol, Communications: Address protocol/governance surrounding those maintaining the Council's social media sites.

Protocol, Communications: News release – quotation not always required.

Protocol, Communications: Should read and/or Leader

Protocol, Communications: Clarity concerning appropriateness of when the Mayor may comment.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **recommends** the proposed changes to the Constitution and the Aims and Objectives subject to the above amendments and any others referred from members outside of the meeting.

447. LETTER FROM THE CIVIC SOCIETY

The Committee had received a letter from the Civic Society which requested permission for a plaque to be erected on the Castle commemorating the time Thomas Malthus spent teaching at the Castle when it housed the East India College. The Committee noted that many people had resided at the Castle over the centuries and it felt that it would not be appropriate to recognise just one of those people. Members did however consider that it may be appropriate to have a list, in chronological order, of the previous uses of the Castle and the famous people who had been in residence over the years.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

A suitable response be drafted by the Town Clerk in consultation with Cllr Ruffles.

448. HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

The Committee received a report detailing the actions taken to implement safe systems of work within the Council to ensure the Council meets its health and safety obligations. A sample risk assessment and the Castle Fire Evacuation Policy had also been circulated to the Committee. An audit trail existed which demonstrated dates on which the various fire alarm tests etc had taken place, and these would be checked from time to time to ensure the Council continued to meet its obligations.

It was requested that when future PAT testing takes place, that care is taken that the checked stickers are not placed over fans on the IT equipment, as this could lead to a fire risk.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the report.

449. PINEHURST

The Committee received a report outlining a proposal to take over the maintenance of an open space and play area on the Pinehurst Estate, Hertford.

The site is currently in the ownership of Hertfordshire County Council and managed by East Herts Council, but not to its full potential. Improvements are necessary to make a decent space for the residents of Pinehurst to enjoy. The County Council has agreed to lease the land to the Town Council for a peppercorn rent of £600 per annum for 21 years, with future maintenance costs being met by the Town Council.

Several funding pots have been identified to fund new play equipment, and some outdoor gym equipment, however, if the Council took on the lease for the land it would become responsible for the ongoing maintenance of the play equipment and the grass cutting, with ongoing costs estimated to be in the region of £10,600 per annum. The Committee recognised that the Pinehurst area lacked a high quality play area and considered that it would be a good project to take over, although there was some reluctance expressed regarding the level of ongoing costs. It was felt that a defined proportion of the New Homes Bonus could be set aside to fund some of the longer term costs.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Committee **approves** the proposal to enter into a 21 year lease with Hertfordshire County Council at a cost of £600 per annum.
2. The Committee **approves** the proposal to take on overall project management of the redevelopment of the site in consideration of £5000 project management fee and £16000 (2 year) contribution towards maintenance costs.
3. The Committee **approves** the proposal to set aside a defined sum from the New Homes Bonus to assist with the longer term maintenance costs.

450. FINANCE

(a) Bank Reconciliations

The Committee received the bank reconciliation summary for November and December 2013 and January 2014

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the bank reconciliation summary for November and December 2013 and January 2014.

(b) Payment Schedules

The Committee received the payment schedules for December 2013 and January – February 2014.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the payment schedules for December 2013 and January – February 2014.

(c) Investment in the CCLA Property Fund and Review of the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy

The Committee received a report outlining an option to invest in the CCLA Local Authorities Property Fund along with a review of the Council's Treasury Management and Investment Strategy for 2014/15.

Having reviewed the detail regarding investment in the fund, the Committee held some concerns regarding the risk in investing in property as well as the cost of the investment as reflected in the bid/offer spread. The Committee did however recognise that it had a responsibility to try and achieve an appropriate return on the Council's reserves but felt that there would be more suitable options available from a risk/reward perspective, which the Finance Manager was requested to identify.

The recommended changes to the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy were no longer required and the Strategy should therefore remain unchanged.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The Committee **declines** the opportunity to invest in the CCLA Property Fund, but seeks alternative investment opportunities.
2. The Committee **recommends** to Full Town Council the adoption of the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy, unchanged

(d) Repeal of Section 150 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972 and Review of the Council's Financial Regulations

The Committee received a report which outlined the implications of the repeal of the above Act, which originally required for each payment to be signed by two Councillors. The repeal of this act would allow the Council to consider the use of internet payments, as opposed to producing cheques for signature.

Minor amendments to the Financial Regulations were noted which reflected the repeal of the Act and other minor changes.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that:

- (a) The Committee **notes** the potential use of electronic payment methods following repeal of Section 150(5) of the Local Government Act 1972.
- (b) The Committee **recommends** to Full Town Council the changes to the Council's Financial Regulations.

(e) Debtor and Creditor Payment Time

The Committee received a report which updated members on the time taken for the Council to make payments from its customers and to make payments to its suppliers.

It was recommended within the report that the KPI for debt collection be reduced from 30 days to 25 days to increase efficiency in receipt of debts.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) The Committee **notes** the report.
- (b) The Committee **reduce** the KPI for debt collection from customers to 25 days.

(f) Medium Term Financial Plan

The medium term financial plan is a document recommended by the auditor some years ago, and which sets out the projected financial framework for the 5 year period from April 2014 to March 2019.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **approves** the Medium Term Financial Plan.

(g) Internal Audit Report and Financial Risk Assessment

The Committee received the second interim report from the Internal Auditor, which confirmed that there were no items requiring attention.

The revised Financial Risk Assessment, which included the Hertford Museum liability to the Local Government Pension Fund, to which the Council was guarantor, was also noted.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) The Committee **notes** the Internal Audit Report
- (b) The Committee **notes** the revised financial risk assessment.

(h) Income and Expenditure to 31 December 2013

The Committee received a report regarding the Council's Income and Expenditure position as at 31 December 2013. A query was raised regarding the projected income figures, which appeared unrealistic given the level of income received to date. The Finance Manager confirmed that he considered the rent figures to be realistic given that re-charges were due shortly, although Downshire Suite projected income was probably now unrealistic.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the income and expenditure to 31 December 2013.

451. EXCLUSION OF 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 items are discussed. This is in accordance the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by the Local Government Act 1972.

452. STAFFING REVIEW

Having introduced the report, the Town Clerk left the meeting for the remainder of this agenda item.

Following a request from the Personnel Sub Committee, each Committee had been asked to review its staffing requirements to ensure the structure remained lean and fit for purpose.

Recommendations from the Community Services and Development and Leisure Committees had been referred to the Committee for consideration, and a review of the Council's Finance structure was also considered.

The Committee was broadly supportive of the proposals but felt that Members required further information on some issues, including clarification of the process, before any firm decision could be made.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approve** the recommendation of the Community Services Committee.
- b) The Committee **approve** part of the recommendation of the Development and Leisure Committee and **defer** the remainder of the recommendation pending further information.

- c) The Committee **defer** a decision on the finance structure proposals pending further information.

The meeting closed at 10.50pm