

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**  
**MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 19 DECEMBER 2011 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBIN**  
**ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD**

PRESENT: Councillor Miss C Geall, in the Chair

Councillors: Mrs B Mansfield, P Moore, M McCormick, Miss J Sartin, Miss I Sigmac 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

**329. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors Mrs S Newton (Unwell), Dr L E Radford (Family Commitment)

**330. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**331. THE MINUTES**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee meeting held on Monday 3 October 2011 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

**332. ACTION SHEET**

The Chairman requested further information and an item for future agenda concerning the Council's application for the Investors in People Health and Wellbeing Award

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The action sheet be received and noted.

**333. QUESTIONS AND/OR STATEMENTS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC**

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

**334. INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2010/11**

The Committee received the initial report of the new Internal Auditor which contained a number of constructive suggestions and recommendations,

several of which had already been implemented by officers, with others receiving attention.

The Finance Manager was requested to investigate the possibility of sourcing alternative deposit accounts which paid higher levels of interest, although it was felt that it would only be worth the administrative work of moving money to alternative accounts if the interest rates achieved were materially different to those currently received.

It was noted that the current tender rate in the Council's Financial Regulations was incorrect and it was requested that the rate be corrected to £25,000 and a formal recommendation be presented to Full Town Council for the amendment to the Constitution.

The Auditor was due to attend for a second visit in February 2012 when it was expected that recommendations would be increasingly challenging.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report from the Internal Auditor for the accounts for 2010/11 and resulting officer actions and **recommends** the proposed change in the Council's Financial Regulations to the Full Town Council.

### **335. 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 followed 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:

**Country Bus Rallies** be awarded £820 towards event publicity, national promotion in magazines, print costs and route blind production for use in future years. It was noted that in 2012 the event would not coincide with the Carnival/Funday, however it was noted that the bus rallies were popular in their own right and the Council would continue to assist in promoting the event.

The grant would be awarded in April 2012, and be paid from the 2012/13 grant budget.

**Friends of Sele School.** This organisation had requested £1,200 towards the cost of the annual firework display. It was noted that the event was a school fund raising event and therefore not something the Council considered it could fund from the Council Tax.

### **336. HEALTH AND SAFETY REVIEW**

The Committee received an update of the actions taken to implement safe systems of work with the Town Council to ensure the Council meets its health and safety obligations. The Committee was pleased to note that the recent review identified no significant health and safety issues, which is a result of significant investment in training and health and safety improvements over the last three years. It was further noted that all new staff received information of the Council's health and safety systems as part of the induction training.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the report.

### **337. CASTLE GROUNDS**

The Town Clerk advised Members of the latest position concerning maintenance of the Castle Grounds. It was noted that a consultant had been commissioned to draw up a specification which would enable the Council to move forward with its plans to maintain the grounds.

Various options were currently being considered to redesign the flower beds on the front lawn to enable a more sustainable planting scheme to be developed, possibly in a traditional knot garden style. The Committee approved the proposal in principle but awaits formal designs for approval. It was noted that a full re-design of this nature would be likely to involve significant initial investment as well as a period of transition.

The Town Clerk reported that, despite a year of chasing, she was no further forward with enquiries of the County Council regarding the maintenance responsibilities of the Moat Garden.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the verbal update from the Town Clerk on the Castle Grounds.

### **338. PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE**

The Committee received the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011.

The Committee noted the policy review which had taken place regarding travel and subsistence payments to staff and the formal process which was being drawn up to prevent the large accrual of TOIL by senior staff.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2011
- b) The Committee **recommends** to Full Town Council the proposed terms of reference of the Personnel Sub Committee for inclusion in the Council's Constitution.

### **339. TRANSPARENCY CODE OF PRACTICE**

The Committee received a copy of the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency issued by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

The Committee noted that the Council currently met many of the requirements within the Code, although possibly not all in an obvious format and that the Finance Manager was currently looking at a suitable format to publish the additional requirements on the Council's website. These included staff organisational charts and pay bandings and updated information on grant payments. The updates would be completed prior to the next meeting of the Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) That this Committee **notes** the requirements of the Code of Recommended Practice for Local Authorities on Data Transparency and the actions being undertaken to meet the requirements.

### **340. POLICING PLAN CONSULATION**

The Committee had received a copy of the draft Strategic Policing Plan 2012 and that it was invited to comment on the proposals contained therein. Members were asked to provide comments to the Town Clerk prior to the closing date of 20 January 2012 in order that the Council's formal response could be formulated. Observations regarding sufficiently addressing the need for partnership working with the Probation Service to reduce re-offending rates had already been submitted as well as concern regarding the increasing use of police and conditional cautions which obscured the crime figures.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Town Clerk formulate the Town Council's response to the consultation in discussion with the Chairman once comments from members had been received.

### **341. COMMUNITY NETWORK LUNCH**

The Council had been approached by the Team Rector of the Hertford Team Ministry regarding a request for support for a proposal to introduce a series of community networking lunches with all the key organisations in the Town. The Council had been asked to host and provide refreshments for the first meeting, which at future meetings would become bring and share lunches. It was proposed that the group would meet either monthly or bi monthly and that meetings would take place at a room in the Castle. The Committee was happy to approve the provision of the room and refreshments for the first lunch, but sought assurance that Council staff would not become involved administratively in the meetings.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee approves support to the proposal for the introduction of a Community Network Lunch in the form of the provision of the room (on an ongoing basis) and refreshments for the first meeting.

### **342 FINANCE**

#### **(a) Bank Reconciliations**

The Committee received bank reconciliation summaries for August, September and October 2011

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the bank reconciliation summaries for August, September and October 2011.

#### **(b) Payment Schedules**

The Committee received payment schedules October and November 2011.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the payment schedules from October and November 2011.

#### **(c) Non Cheque payments**

The Committee received a schedule of the Direct Debits and BAC's payments made from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011. The Finance Manager provided some clarification to the Committee regarding duality adjustment figures in respect of credit cards.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the schedule of the Direct Debits and BAC's payments made from 1<sup>st</sup> April to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2011

(d) Debtor and Creditor Payment Times

The Committee received an update report on the time taken by the Council to make payments to its suppliers and receive payments from its creditors. The Committee was pleased to note that all key performance indicators had been met over the last 3 years and it was therefore requested that the key performance indicator of 30 days for receipt of payments from creditors be reduced to 25 days to match that of the KPI for payment to suppliers, thus aiding Council cash flow.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the report  
b) The KPI for payment from suppliers be reduced to 25 days.

(e) Debtors

It was noted that the Council had no debtors over 90 days old.

(f) 2nd Quarter Income and Expenditure

The Committee received details of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter Income and expenditure for 2011/12. It was noted that the legal and professional fee budget was likely to be spent by the end of the financial year as a result of work on outstanding leases.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee notes the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter Income and Expenditure for 2011/12.

(g) Budget 2012/13

The Committee received a report on the second draft of the budget which highlighted the key projects planned by each Committee for 2011/12. It was noted that all the projects proposed by the various Committees could be undertaken whilst achieving the Council's aim of a 0% increase in precept for 2011/12.

It was noted that large sums were proposed in the Community Services budget to ensure standards were maintained in the Cemetery and Churchyards and it was requested that a report be presented to the next meeting of the Community Services Committee outlining proposals for how this budget would be spent.

It was further noted that, despite the 0% increase, the Council was still able to demonstrate its commitment to support to the Town Centre through provision

of a Town Centre Coordinator, hanging baskets and the Business Growth Initiative programme, as well as provision of a full events programme.

The level of the building reserve was noted and it was felt that a portion of this could be utilised to carry out much needed repair work to the Seed Warehouse and some redecoration to the public areas of the Castle. It was further proposed consideration be given to establishing similar reserve funds for future cemetery and closed churchyard maintenance.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- (a) The Committee **approves** proposed and ongoing projects for the forthcoming financial year.
- (b) The Committee **recommends** a precept of £1,059,555, representing a 0% increase in Band D Council Tax, to Full Town Council on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012.

### **343. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

In view of the confidential nature of the following item, which relates 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.

### **344. LEASE ARRANGEMENTS FOR TENANT AT THE CASTLE**

**Note:** Cllr Ruffles declared a personal interest as an Advisory Director of the tenant.

The Committee received a report outlining discussions for the renewal of the lease of one of its tenants. It was agreed that the proposals within the report regarding fixed service charges and rent be approved.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee delegates authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, to agree the Heads of Terms for the sublease for a tenant at the Castle.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.55pm