

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 19 OCTOBER 2015 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBIN
ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD

PRESENT: Cllr Miss Chantal Geall, in the Chair

Councillors: P Boyle, R Deering, Miss J Sartin and A Stevenson

IN ATTENDANCE: Ms P Carpenter, Civic Administration Manager
Mr S Davies, Finance Manager
1 member of the public

265. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr P Ruffles (another meeting), Cllr Dr L Radford (Mayoral engagement) and Cllr S Newton (family commitment)

266. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Miss Sartin and Miss Geall	DPI	Hertford Museum, if discussed	Museum Trustees
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267. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee meeting held on Monday 29 June 2015 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

268. ACTION SHEET

Museum Lease

It was noted that further information had been forwarded to the Museum Solicitor and a response was awaited.

Review of the provision of the Council's Solicitor

This matter would be progressed once the new Town Clerk was in post.

Disability Access to the Castle

The Interim Town Clerk was requested to progress this matter following the receipt of the pre-planning advice.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The action sheet be received and noted.

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

None.

270. COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATION – EAST HERTS CITIZENS ADVICE SERVICE

An application had been received from The East Herts Citizens Advice Service for funding of £1,200 towards the cost of moving to a new premises.

The Committee was happy to approve the grant in principle provided the move was to a premises in Hertford. Should the future location of the Service be outside Hertford, the Interim Town Clerk was asked to revert to the Chairman.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **approves** a grant of £1,200 once confirmation of the new premises had been confirmed.

271. PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE

A copy of the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 13 July, 17 August and 7 September 2015 had been circulated to the Committee, along with a revised Travel and Subsistence Policy for recommended to Full Town Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 13 July, 7 August and 7 September 2015.
- b) The Committee **recommends** adoption of the Travel and Subsistence Policy to Full Town Council.

272. REVIEW OF THE CIVIC LIST

The Committee had received a report outlining the various bodies and individuals included on the Civic List.

The Committee approved that the businesses currently included on the list should remain for a further year but be kept under annual review. A requirement to being an event sponsor was not considered relevant. It was requested that supermarket managers be added along with a media grouping of Bob FM, Axis Magazine, Hertfordshire Mercury and Hertfordshire Life.

The new Mayor would, in addition to the 15 friends and family be able to invite five Hertford based small business representatives to Mayor making.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the review of the Civic List.

273. SCHEDULE OF LEASES

The Committee had received a report with a schedule of the main Leases, Contracts and other agreements currently in force at Hertford Town Council.

The schedule was a useful reference document which enabled the Council to be clear of the various leases and contracts it held. It was requested that the document be updated and referred to the Committee annually, with additional detail added to include whether the lease was inward or outward, the month of expiry and notice periods where they exist.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the Schedule of Leases.

274. SWORD REFURBISHMENT

The Committee received a report outlining a proposed repair for the Sword which involved the replacement of the existing cross guard with a completely new one, using the original as a pattern to take a mould. The Council would then have two completely and easily interchangeable cross guards, and the integrity of the sword would be maintained. The rest of the sword was judged to be in good condition and could continue to be used for ceremonial purposes. In the light of the new information and acknowledging the support of the ergents at Mace, the Council was happy to approve the proposal and rescind its decision to retire the sword from ceremonial use.

Following a meeting with the Museum Curator, advice has been received that the vault which currently houses the Council's silverware was an acceptable storage space, in that the room did not feel damp and the temperature appeared to remain reasonably stable throughout the year. Damage to objects was usually caused by changes in temperatures and therefore the colder winter months could be the issue. Acid free storage boxes and lining paper could be used to store the objects over the winter months. The Committee was happy with the proposed solution, which would ensure the security of the objects in the vault.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.
- b) The Committee **approves** the proposed option for an interchangeable replica cross member for the sword at a cost of approximately £2,000, to be funded from the civic property budget.
- c) The Committee **rescinds** the decision made at the meeting of 16 March 15 to retire the sword from ceremonial use on the basis of the new information.

- d) The Committee **approves** the storage recommendation for the civic property at a cost of £500.

275. **NEW HOMES BONUS**

The Committee received a report on the proposed use of the New Homes Bonus and the level of New Homes Bonus income and expenditure to date.

Several projects were recommended for further investigation, including the development of a riverside walkway and for the possible refurbishment of the Ashley Webb Shelter in the Castle Grounds. A further proposed project was for the installation of a drinking fountain in the Town Centre, a proposal recommended by Transitions Hertford as a greener, more sustainable solution to the purchase of disposable plastic bottles. Additionally the Council would continue to match fund the taxi marshal scheme which was considered to be a very valuable service. The Committee was happy to approve further investigation take place for the projects detailed above.

Included within the report was a request for funding of £19,478 from the New Homes Bonus from a charity called Transitions rtc, to run a pilot project in Hertford for one year for young people aged 16-25 with drug/alcohol and other associated addictive behavioural issues. The young people would be from London and the Home Counties.

Whilst the Committee considered the project to be a very worthwhile charity, nevertheless it appeared to lack independent accreditation of the effectiveness of such residential treatments which had previously been seen not to work well at another Hertford based charity. Furthermore, the Committee was of the opinion that the purpose of the New Homes Bonus was to be Hertford focussed and for improvements to infrastructure and other amenities within the town and this project did not match that criteria. Additionally, the Committee was reluctant to favour a particular charity when it had not advertised or even considered whether it would set aside a proportion for charitable donation. The Committee was not supportive of setting aside funds in this way.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.
- b) The Committee **does not** approve the grant request from Transitions rtc for funding from the New Homes Bonus

276. **FINANCE**

(a) **Bank Reconciliations**

The Committee received the bank reconciliation summaries for June, July, August and September 2015.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the bank reconciliation summaries for June, July, August and September 2015.

(b) Payment Schedules

The Committee received the payment schedules for June, July, August and September 2015.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the payment schedules for June, July, August and September 2015.

(c) Past due debtors

The Committee noted that there were no debtors over 90 days up to the end of September, although a tenant debt had been in excess of 90 days during October. The debt had since been paid.

(d) First Half Income and Expenditure 2015/16

The Committee received a report detailing the first half year income and expenditure for 2015/16.

Concern was expressed at the excessive water use at the Seed Warehouse and the Finance Manager confirmed that he was continuing to investigate whether a leak was present or whether the work to the toilet cisterns had resolved the issue. The Finance Manager confirmed he would arrange for the meter to be replaced.

The Finance Manager advised members that an accrual of £20,000 had been set aside for by election expenses from July 2009, for which no invoice had been received. As this now fell outside the statute of limitations, the payment was no longer recoverable. It was requested that the funds be moved to reserves.

The kitchen on the ground floor of the Castle required refurbishment during the current financial year however only £6,000 remained in the maintenance budget. It was noted that quotations were currently being sought for the work which would need to be carried out in the quieter hiring months of January and February. It was agreed that the Chairman of the Development and Leisure Committee would review the proposals with the Town Clerk and seek approval of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Finance, Policy and Administration Committee for funding to be released from reserves.

The Committee noted that the accounts for the first half income and expenditure remained within budget.

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) The Committee **notes** the first half income and expenditure for 2015/16.
- b) The Committee approves that the £20,000 accrual from the July 2009 by election should be moved to the General Reserve
- c) The Committee delegates authority to the Interim Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman of the Development and Leisure Committee to review proposals for the refurbishment of the Castle kitchen and seek the approval of the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Finance Policy and Resources Committee for funding to be released from reserves.

(e) Financial Risk Assessment

The Committee received a copy of Financial Risk Assessment for 2015/16.

The Finance Manager advised that the Risk Assessment was unchanged from the previous year but that he had very recently discovered a control issue with the PDQ card terminals that could put the Council at risk of fraud. The Finance Manager advised that he was closely monitoring the use of the terminals to mitigate the risk and would add the risk and control to the Financial Risk Assessment.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the Financial Risk Assessment for 2015/16, subject to the additional risk in respect of card terminals.

(f) Treasury Management and Investment Strategy

The Committee received a report outlining a review of the Council's Treasury Management and Investment Strategy.

The Finance Manager advised that he had discovered that other Councils who had funds placed in long term investments had encountered audit issues as the investments were required to be treated as capital expenditure. Proceeds from the sale of such long term investments would be restricted to future items for capital expenditure only and the Finance Manager therefore recommended that the Council should not make any changes to its current low risk, low return strategy.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **continues** to exclude long term investments from the Investment Policy and review annually taking into consideration an changes to the required proper accounting practices.
- b) The Committee **recommends** to Full Town Council the Treasury Management and Investment Strategy 2015/16

(g) Procedures for the use of BACS payments

The Committee received a report outlining a proposed set of operating procedures for using BACS payments whilst retaining the two member signature principle originally required by Section 150 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **adopts** the proposed procedures for using BACS payments.

(h) Final External Audit report for 2014/15 and Interim Internal Audit Report for 2015/16

The Committee received copies of the final external audit report for 2014/15 and the Interim Internal Audit report for 2015/16 which identified no issues. The Committee commended the Finance Officer on the work which had gone into the YE accounts. The Committee noted that the Finance Manager would complete a Finance Procedures document by the end of the month. These procedures had been requested in previous internal audit reports.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee **notes** the final external audit report for 2014/15 and the Interim Internal Audit report for 2015/16.

(i) Draft Budget 2016/17

The Committee received a copy of the first draft of the budget for the Committees for 2016/17, which required further investigation and budget prices.

The Finance Manager advised that it was wholly feasible that the Council could again achieve a zero percent rise in the precept for 2016/17.

(a) The Committee **notes** the draft budget; and

(b) The Committee **notes** the proposed optional projects for inclusion in the budget to which the Committee will give final approval on 4 January 2016.

(c) The Committee **adopts** a balance of £160,000 as a prudent target general reserve for 31 March 2016 when considering the calculation of the Precept for 2016/17.

The meeting closed at 21:25