

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 15 OCTOBER 2012 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBIN
ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD

PRESENT: Councillor Miss C Geall, in the Chair

Councillors: Mrs B Mansfield, Ms P Moore, M McCormick, Dr L E Radford,
Miss J Sartin, Miss I Sigmac, A Stevenson

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr P Boyle
Cllr P Ruffles
Ms P Carpenter, Civic Administration Manager
Mr S Davies, Responsible Finance Officer
1 Member of the Press
1 Member of the Public

218. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors Mrs S Newton, (Unwell).

219. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Miss J Sartin	Prejudicial	Agenda item 13, Museum Lease	Trustee of Museum
Cllr P Ruffles	Prejudicial	Agenda item 13, Museum Lease	Trustee of Museum

220. **THE MINUTES**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee meeting held on Monday 25th June 2012 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

221. **ACTION SHEET**

Code of Conduct Training

It was requested that the dates of the Code of Conduct Training at East Herts Council be reissued and members were urged to attend the training, where diaries allowed.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The action sheet be received and noted.

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

Chief Inspector Gerry McDonald of Hertfordshire Police addressed the Committee briefly regarding a request for funding for Automatic Number Plate Recognition cameras (ANPR). It was stated that Hertford was the only town not to have such cameras and it was considered that such cameras would reduce vehicle crime in the area.

It was agreed that given the time restraints of the meeting, a separate meeting would be arranged with Chief Inspector McDonald, to allow a full presentation to all Members and discussion regarding the merits of the cameras.

223. **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**

The Committee had been circulated with a copy of the proposed Aims and Objectives of the Council for 2013/14.

The Committee considered the document page by page and provided the following initial feedback:

Town and Tourist Information Centre: Enhancement to the online services provision was required.

Carnival – HTC's current understanding is that Council support will not be required for next year's Carnival so references to this should be removed.

Support to Town Centre: Tweaks to HEN and Town Centre Co-ordinator initiatives.

Carnival/Olympics: References to these can be excluded for 2013/14.

Re-painting of Cast Iron town centre furniture: The bins had been repainted last year and therefore not required next year.

Graffiti – HTC is not responsible for this and reference should be removed.
Flyposting – The Council to work in partnership with East Herts Council to ensure that flyposting is identified and removed promptly.

Museum: Include on going partnership with the Museum, working in close collaboration to arrange events, refurbishment of Castle basement etc.

War Memorial: It was noted that details of the War Memorial were now included on the website so this item could be removed for 2013/14.

CCTV: ANPR cameras may be added to this.

Taxi Marshalling: The Council would continue to request funding be provided through a licensing levy.

Sele Road Community Allotment: To continue to work in partnership with Groundwork Trust to ensure the capital/infrastructure works are carried out and that members of the community wishing to assist the Council in operating the project are identified and trained.

Community Gardening – The dual initiatives of garden sharing and volunteer gardeners for the town flower beds required inclusion.

Newsletters: The provision of newsletters was considered unnecessary given the creation of the Go Hertford website, the proposals to enhance the town council's use of social media Twitter/Facebook etc and the plan to upgrade the town council's website.

The next draft of the Aims and Objectives for 2013/14, which would include the changes detailed above, would be issued to all members for consideration and adopted at a meeting of the Full Council in due course.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Council's Aims and Objectives for 2013/14 be redrafted to include any further changes members may wish to make and referred to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

224. **COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATIONS**

There was a budget of £15,000 for Community Grants in 2012/13 and an additional £3,955 rolled forward from 2011/12.

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:

East Herts Citizens Advice Service Ltd be awarded £1,200 for the provision of enhanced security software for laptops. The Committee was happy to accede to the request given the important role the Service continued to provide during the ongoing austerity measures.

Hertfordshire Constabulary: had applied for funding for the provision of a graffiti removal project. This application had been determined outside of the meeting and ratification was sought through the Committee. It had been noted that the funding had been provided by the County Councillor from the locality budget, so funding from the Council had not been necessary.

Hertfordshire Disability Support Group be awarded £200 towards insurance and hall hire. Whilst it was recognised that such funding was outside of the normal grant funding criteria, given the small amount requested and the excellent service provided by the Group, the Council was happy to approve the sum requested.

Courtyard Arts & Community Centre be awarded £574 for the provision of IT equipment. It was noted that the Centre had benefitted from funding from Rock at the Castle, however the community value of the Centre was recognised and appreciated by the Council and the Council was happy to accede to the request.

Hertford Carnival Committee. It was noted that this application had been withdrawn by the Committee Treasurer as funding was no longer required.

All Saints Church, Hertford be awarded £1,200 towards the repair of the east window of the Church and towards improvement to lighting in the Church. The wider role the Church played in the community was recognised when approval for the grant was awarded.

Magpas – The Emergency Medical Charity was deferred for receipt of further information and full accounts.

Hertford & Ware Sea Cadets be awarded £600 towards the cost of computer equipment. The Organisation had requested £1,200 but the Committee noted that the cadets had received significant grant funding from the Council in recent years and were also not proposing to match fund the cost of the IT equipment

The balance of the grant funding available after these applications were approved stands at £ 8,715.

225. **REQUEST FOR FUNDING – HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY**

Following the earlier attendance of Chief Inspector McDonald to the meeting, this matter was deferred for the arrangement of the further meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **defer** consideration of this matter until a meeting had been arranged with the police.

226. **PERSONNEL SUB COMMITTEE**

The Committee had been circulated with a copy of the minutes of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 1 October 2012 which have yet to be approved.

The Chairman of the Sub Committee advised that the Sub Committee had been working towards achieving improved clarity in personnel matters and that one particular improvement had been the inclusion of the attendance of the Chairman of the relevant Committee at the appraisals of senior staff.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report of the Personnel Sub Committee held on 1 October 2012.
- b) The Committee approves that a request from the Town Clerk for 37 hours of TOIL to be taken sometime in October/November.
- c) The Committee **approves** that the top of the salary scale of the TIC staff increases to SCP 22 to bring the staff into alignment with the Customer Service Assistants.
- d) The Committee **approves** that the Customer Service Assistant (Events) be advanced to SCP23 and that the post be re-banded to match that of the TIC Manager (SCP 21-28) with effect from 1 November 2012.

227. **CASTLE GROUNDS HANDOVER AND MOAT GARDEN UPDATE**

The Committee received a report which provided an update of the re-design of the Castle flower beds, the maintenance of the Castle Grounds, progress towards transfer of ownership of the Castle Moat Garden from Hertfordshire County Council to the Town Council and to request consideration of options for the future of the Ashley Webb Shelter.

It was confirmed that terms and conditions for the new contractor were currently being finalised and work was on track for the Council to assume maintenance responsibility for the Castle Grounds on 1 November 2012, pending the final approval of East Herts Council.

The Chairman confirmed that the Committee had previously approved that Mudlarks be provided with the opportunity to re-plant the flower beds at the front of the Castle with a mixture of both annual and perennial planting and final approval was required for this arrangement. Concern was expressed from one member that a lack of colour in the new designs would detract from the Castle setting and would disappoint the public who appreciated the colour in the annual planting schemes.

The Committee had been requested to consider the termination of the licence agreement for the Moat Garden. In late 2011 a decision had been taken by the relevant Cabinet Member at Hertfordshire County Council to gift the Moat Garden to this Council, however since that time there had been no progress towards the transfer of ownership. Whilst the Committee was disappointed at this lack of progress it was noted that delays had occurred because the ownership of the Moat Garden was tied in with a property on Castle Street and work was required by the County Council to unravel the arrangement. Accordingly the Council did not wish to terminate the licence agreement at this stage.

The Committee was asked to consider whether it would be prepared to support a proposal to demolish the Ashley Webb Shelter and replace it with a planted garden area with an attractive stone to commemorate the gift of the shelter. Whilst the Committee had noted that the shelter was

unsightly and no longer used for its original purpose, nevertheless it was reluctant at this stage for the Shelter to be demolished in recognition that it had been a gift to town from the Ashley Webb family to commemorate the coronation of King George VI in 1937. The Committee expressed a desire to explore, in partnership with East Herts Council, a way forward to ensure that the shelter was properly maintained and the area enhanced.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee does **not support** the proposal to serve notice and terminate the licence agreement for the Moat Garden.
- b) The Committee **approves** the proposal for the redesign of the flower beds.
Note: Cllr McCormick wished it to be recorded that he voted against the proposal.
- c) The Committee **notes** that, subject to finalising arrangements, the Council will commence maintenance of the Castle Grounds on 1 November 2012.
- d) The Committee **confirms** that the current majority view was that it did **not support** the demolition of the Ashley Webb Shelter but wished to see the surrounding area enhanced and the shelter properly maintained.

228. **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANS**

The Committee had received a report requesting consideration to engage Action for Market Towns to work with the Council to assist in whether it wished to pursue Neighbourhood Planning.

It was understood that East Herts Council had also intended to engage Action for Market Towns specifically for Hertford and it was noted that it may be beneficial for the two Councils to work together in this regard. It was also noted that other bodies such as the Civic Society had expressed an interest in the Neighbourhood Plans and should be engaged. It was noted that minimal spend was envisaged at this stage and that any HTC funding for the project would come from the New Homes Bonus reserve.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.
- b) The Committee **confirms with** East Herts Council their engagement with Action for Market Towns and then considers whether the Councils should work together with AMT on the research required for a Neighbourhood Plan for Hertford.

229. **SEED WAREHOUSE REPAIRS**

The Committee had received an independent surveyors report on the condition of the Seed Warehouse. It was noted that a not insignificant amount of work was required to improve the condition of the building and

that whilst the building reserve was available, further budgeted expenditure would be likely. It was intended that at this stage Officers would initially prioritise the work required ensure that the building was weatherproof.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **delegates** authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, to determine the level of expenditure required to make priority repairs to the Seed Warehouse

230. **MUSEUM LEASE AND SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT**

It was noted that the current lease for the Museum's use of the Seed Warehouse expired in the late 1980's and the Committee was asked to consider whether it wished to formalise arrangements with the Museum and enter into a new lease and service level agreement.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **delegates** authority to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman to enter into a new lease and service level agreement with the Museum for the continued use of the Seed Warehouse.

Note: Having previously declared prejudicial interests Cllrs Miss Sartin and Ruffles left the room during the discussion on this issue.

231. **SEED WAREHOUSE – LOAN OF ROOM TO CHURCHES TOGETHER**

The Committee had received a request from Cllr N Wilson to consider granting the use of a room at the Seed Warehouse for the provision of a food bank organised by Churches Together. Whilst the Committee noted its support for the food bank initiative it was noted that only one room was available for use at the Seed Warehouse and this was considered to be inappropriate for such a purpose, given that it was located on the first floor of the building. The Council however recognised the emerging need for a food bank and would be prepared to support the initiative in other ways.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee reluctantly **declines** the proposal for the use of the Seed Warehouse for the purpose of use as a food bank.

232. **CHRISTMAS OPENING HOURS**

The Committee received a report detailing proposed closure times during the Christmas and New Year period.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** the Christmas and New Year closure timetable with the exception of 31st December 2012, when the Castle and TTIC would be re-opened. The Council would grant one extra day's leave and officers would be required to take an additional days annual leave to cover 27th and 28th December 2012.

233. **FLYPOSTING AGREEMENT**

The Committee had been requested to consider extending the fly posting reporting arrangements to include incidents of graffiti. The Committee noted that East Herts Council was currently providing the graffiti removal service and therefore did not see the need to duplicate the arrangement.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee does **not support** the extension of the fly posting arrangement to include reporting incidents of graffiti.

Note: Cllr Moore abstained from the vote.

234. **FINANCE**

(a) **Bank Reconciliations**

The Finance Officer confirmed that the Internal Auditor had reviewed bank reconciliations during the quarter.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the bank reconciliation summaries for June - September 2012 inclusive.

(b) **Payment Schedules**

It was noted that some of the Cllr signatures on the payment schedules had not been dated and Officers were requested to ensure all signatures were dated on the day of signing.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the payment schedules for June – September 2012 inclusive.

(c) **Updated on overdue debts reported in June 2012**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** that all outstanding debts, as reported to the meeting in June 2012, had been received.

(d) Non Cheque Payments First Half Year 2012/13

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the Direct Debit and BAC's payments made from 1 April – 30 September 2012.

(e) First Half Income and Expenditure 2012/13

The Committee had received a report outlining the income and expenditure for the first half of 2012/13 and a report on the currently identified over and under spends.

It was **RESOLVED** that

- a) The Committee **notes** the income and expenditure to 30 September 2012.
- b) The Committee **approves** the creation of an earmarked reserve for the New Homes Bonus from 12 March 2012.
- c) The overspends identified on the FPA Committee were not entirely covered by the underspends within the Committee and it was requested that virements from other Committees would be recommended to the next meeting.

(f) Budget 2013/14

The Committee received a report outlining the first draft of the proposed budget for 2013/14 and to consider which projects it would wish to undertake in the forthcoming year. The Committee indicated that it would wish to work towards a target of a zero percent increase in the budget for the forthcoming year and although it was recognised that a marginal increase could be required, nevertheless it was expected that this would be as close to zero as possible.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the draft budget.
- b) The Committee **further considers** the list of optional projects and requests officer and member input into how the optional projects could be prioritised to reduce the list to achieve the desired target.
- c) The Committee **adopt** a balance of £160,000 as a prudent target general reserve for 31st March 2014 when considering the calculation of the precept for 2013/14.

(g) Internal Audit Report

The Committee received the results of the Internal Audit conducted in July and September 2012, along with the review of the adequacy and effectiveness of the Internal Audit and a financial risk assessment.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the findings of the Internal Auditor.
- b) The Committee **approves** the Review of the Internal Audit for 2012/13 as adequate and effective.
- c) The Committee **approves** the Finance Risk Assessment with the addition of the annual review of the salary scales by the Personnel Sub Committee.

(h) External Audit Report

The Committee received the External Audit Certificate and opinion for the accounts for 2011/12 and recognised that there were no significant issues arising from the Audit.

- a) The Committee **notes** the External Audit Certificate and opinion for the accounts for 2011/12.

(i) Financial Regulations

The Committee received a report with a suggested review of the financial Regulations which reflected changes in law, Council policy or best practice.

The Committee noted that the changes were to reflect modern payment methods in use, including BACS payments. Alterations to the thresholds had been recommended to comply with EU rules surrounding procurement arrangements. A further alteration regarding an overview of the Town Clerk's expenses by the Finance Manager had also been recommended.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** the proposed changes to the Financial Regulations.
- b) The Committee **recommends** the adoption of the amended Financial Regulations to the Full Town Council.

The meeting closed at 9.30pm