

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE
MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 25TH JUNE 2012 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBIN
ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD

PRESENT: Councillor David R Poole, in the Chair

Councillors: M McCormick, Dr L E Radford, Miss I Sigmac, Miss C Geall, Ms P Moore

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr P Ruffles
Cllr P Boyle (for part of the meeting)
Cllr Mrs B Haddock (for part of the meeting)
Cllr R Willis (for part of the meeting)
Cllr N Wilson (for part of the meeting)
Ms N Villa, Town Clerk
Mr S Davies, Responsible Finance Officer
1 Member of the Press

90. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Cllr Miss Chantal Geall be elected Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

Cllr Miss Geall took the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.

91. **ELECTION OF VICE CHAIRMAN**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Cllr A Stevenson be elected Vice Chairman of the Committee for the ensuing municipal year.

92. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors Mrs S Newton (family commitment), Mrs B Mansfield (unwell), A Stevenson (work commitment), Miss J Sartin (Mayoral engagement)

93. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

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|-------------------------------|-------------|--|---|
| Cllr Miss I Sigmac | Personal | Agenda item 9, Community Grants. Hertford Music Festival | Is the Council's representative for the group |
| Cllrs: P Ruffles and N Wilson | Prejudicial | Agenda item 9, Community Grants. St Andrew's | Cllr P Ruffles is a trustee and Cllr N Wilson was involved in the |

| | | | |
|------------------|----------|--|------------------------------|
| | | Community Trust | design |
| Cllr M McCormick | Personal | Agenda item 9, Community Grants. St Andrew's Community Trust | Member of St Andrew's Church |

94. **THE MINUTES**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Minutes of the Finance, Policy & Administration Committee meeting held on Monday 12th March 2012 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

95. **ACTION SHEET**

Treasury Deposit Account

The Finance Officer advised that the account was now open, although had not been used to date.

Seed Warehouse

It was noted that lease discussions continued with the current tenant at the Seed Warehouse, negotiations with a potential new tenant for the top floor were proceeding well and the new lease for the first floor of the Castle has been completed.

Castle – Licence

The Committee requested an update on the progress towards varying and updating the Castle licences. The Town Clerk to investigate and report back.

Neighbourhood Planning

The new National Planning Policy Framework had been published recently and was currently being reviewed by the Town Clerk.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The action sheet be received and noted.

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

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

97. **YEAR END ACCOUNTS**

The Chairman introduced the report of the Finance Officer and advised the Committee that both she and the Vice Chairman had discussed the accounts with the Finance Manager prior to the finalisation of the report. The Chairman explained the accounts and Annual Governance Statement to the Committee in detail and was pleased to report that all Committees finished in a surplus (less expenditure than budgeted) at the end of 2011/12 and that if all of the Finance Officer's recommendations were approved, the Council would have achieved healthy reserve balances as follows:

| | |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|
| General Reserve | £158,586 |
| Building Maintenance Reserve | £106,317 |
| CCTV Maintenance Reserve | £41,654 |
| Election Reserve | £2,113 |
| New Homes Bonus Reserve | £30,571 |
| TOTAL RESERVES | £339,241 |

In response to a query concerning CCTV reserves, the Chairman explained that the reserve was created to cover any capital costs which might arise from the Council's provision of CCTV cameras in the town. It was felt that if the recommendations of the Finance Officer were approved, the CCTV reserve would be sufficient and the Committee would not, at this stage, look to increase it further. It was queried whether this reserve could be used to fund new 'camera based' technologies such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems. The Chairman advised that the CCTV reserve was not created for this purpose and that the Committee would look to fund any new pieces of equipment such as ANPR with savings generated from technological advances in CCTV systems which should lower ongoing running costs.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** the end of year financial statements as a fair and accurate record of the Council's financial position at the 31st March 2012.
- b) The Committee **recommends** that the Town Council approves the Accounting Statement and the Annual Governance Statement in the Annual Return for 2011/12.
- c) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £27,026 should be transferred from the General Reserve to the Building Maintenance Reserve.
- d) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £5,000 should be transferred from the General Reserve to the Election Reserve.
- e) The Committee approve that a balance of £3,955 should be added to the Community Grants budget (code 7180) for 2012/13.

- f) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £204 should be added to the Mayor's Allowance budget (code 7109) for 2012/13.
- g) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £4,403 should be added to the current budget provision of £23,690 for the Christmas Light Displays (code 7080) in 2012/13.
- h) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £10,456 should be transferred from the General Reserve to the CCTV Maintenance Reserve.
- i) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £2,833 should be added to the current budget provision (code 5030) for the ongoing preparation of the new land at Sele Road.
- j) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £7,840 should be added to the current budget provision (code 5250) to allow for the pollarding work recommended for Holy Trinity Churchyard to be commissioned.
- k) The Committee **approves** that a balance of £3,997 should be added to the current budget provision (code 5346) for the ongoing preparation of Block J as the new Garden of Rest.

The Committee **adjourned** at 7.55 pm to allow the Full Town Council to meet to approve the end of year accounts and Annual Governance Statement.

Following the close of the Town Council meeting, the meeting resumed at 8.05pm. Cllrs Haddock, Willis, Wilson, Poole and Boyle left the meeting.

98. **COMMUNITY GRANT APPLICATIONS**

Cllr P Ruffles left the room.

There is a budget of £13,000 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:

The Friends of Mill Mead School be awarded £500 towards the cost of producing the initial run of a local services directory of clubs, activities and services for Primary school children in and around the town.

Hertfordshire Constabulary be awarded £1,196.00 to assist with crime prevention/reduction in Hertford Town centre.

Sele Farm Women's Club be awarded £250.00 towards various celebrations i.e. Diamond Jubilee, Olympics and Club birthday.

Hertford Music Festival be awarded £1,200.00 to help stage the musical the Magical Mystery Tour and the overall music month.

Hertford St Andrew Community Trust be awarded £1,200 towards developing a multipurpose venue for the community with a particular focus on wellbeing.

Hertford Horticultural Society be awarded £300 to assist with staging their annual autumn show.

The balance of the grant funding available after these applications were approved stands at £11,989.

Cllr P Ruffles returned to the room.

99. **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT**

The Committee received the interim report of the 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 Chairman noted that the report was of higher quality to ones received from the previous Internal Auditors and was pleased to note that no significant issues relating to internal controls had been identified.

On point R4 of the report, which related to the existent outdated legislation requiring the Council to make cheque payments only, it was noted that the Financial Regulations may need to be updated to reflect the suggestions around electronic payments.

On point R11 of the report, which suggested replacement of the existing allotment database, the Finance Officer felt that it would be difficult to justify expenditure on a new system, which could be in excess of £2,000, when the current system is adequate and the income from allotments is low. The Chairman of Community Services agreed with this view.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report from the Internal Auditor's interim visit for the accounts for 2011/12 and resulting officer actions.

100. **CASTLE GROUNDS**

The Chairman introduced the report and reminded members that the flowerbeds were currently maintained by East Herts Council (EHC) which recharged the associated costs to Hertford Town Council and that the existing flowerbeds were one of the most expensive areas of the grounds to maintain, costing in the region of £19,000 per annum. The discussion around redesigning the area had been brought about by concerns over

cost, the standard of maintenance and the existing display not necessarily being in keeping with the building.

It was noted that the flower beds are the best kept area in the Castle Grounds, providing the most colour and are an attractive back drop for weddings and events. Disappointment was expressed at the current standards of maintenance both in the grounds and in the town. Whilst some members were keen on the new design, others had reservations and it was broadly felt that the retention of as much colour as possible should be the key driver in any redesign of the beds. The arbour was considered a positive feature and that full use of perennials should be made in any redesign. The Chairman agreed to have a further discussion with the designer to highlight the Committee's concerns and progress the matter.

The Committee also considered the Core Specification for the maintenance of the Castle Grounds. The Town Clerk explained that due to concerns about the current standard of maintenance, the Town Council was seeking to take control of the area of grounds occupied by it under lease, however to do so would split the grounds in two, with the two halves potentially being maintained by different contractors. To avoid this happening, the Town and District Councils had agreed that the entire area could be maintained by the Town Council subject to the minimum standard currently required by East Herts Council being used as a basis for the appointment of any new contractor.

The Committee noted with disappointment that it appears that the existing Core Specification issued by East Herts Council is not being met by the current contractor and the grounds were clearly not of the standard that they should be. The Town Clerk explained that by taking over control of the maintenance of the grounds, the Town Council would be free to redesign and improve any areas it wished to over a period of time and the Chairman suggested that any savings generated from redesigning the flowerbeds could be reinvested to improve other areas in a phased program of improvement works.

It was noted that there were several references throughout the existing Core Specification to the contractor having to allow for works as part of the contract costs. All maintenance issues should be included in the overall contract cost and therefore this does not need to be repeated throughout the document.

A query was raised about the frequency and height of grass cutting and this will be clarified in the final agreement.

It was noted that existing references to weeding and general 'garden maintenance' was minimal and related mainly to the flowerbeds and the Committee was keen to see a higher standard required by the contract.

Subject to these amendments, it was acknowledged that the Core Specification was a reasonable starting point and would develop over time.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **delegate** authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman and Cllr McCormick, to finalise the redesign of the flowerbeds in the Castle Grounds
- b) The Committee **approve**, subject to the above amendments, the Core Specification for maintenance of the Castle Grounds and to progress discussions with East Herts Council to expedite the transfer of maintenance to Hertford Town Council.

Cllr Dr Radford left the meeting at 2035

101. **CODE OF CONDUCT**

The Committee received a report on the new Standards regime following the abolition of the Standards Board and the requirement for the Council to adopt a new Code of Conduct prior to 1st July 2012. Model codes from the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) were presented to the Committee for consideration.

It was felt that the NALC version provided far more clarity for members than the rather ambiguous LGA version. It was queried whether the Council had to adopt either of the two versions or whether it could create its own and the Town Clerk confirmed that the Council was free, subject to the statutory requirements, to adopt any code it wishes.

The Chairman queried whether the requirement for the Code to be adopted by Full Town Council by 1st July 2012 was an issue for the Council as the next Full Town Council meeting was not until 23rd July 2012. The Town Clerk confirmed that the finer details of the 'interests' had been issued in the few days preceding the meeting and it was therefore going to be extremely difficult for any Town Council to adopt its revised code in time and that as the Ctte had delegated authority and the Members will be adhering to the new code from the date of the this meeting onwards, the Town Council had done everything reasonably practicable to conform to the requirements.

It was noted that the Council's existing Standing Orders allowed for Members with prejudicial interests to address the Committee before being required to withdraw from the room whilst the item in which they have an interest is discussed. The Committee were asked to consider whether they wished to retain this requirement and thought that it was in the interests of all concerned for Members to continue to be required to leave the room provided the right to address the committee and the right to request dispensation in unusual circumstances was retained.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approve** the NALC Code of Conduct for **recommendation** to Full Town Council for adoption in to the Council's Constitution, and
- b) The Committee **recommend** to Full Town Council that the Council's Standing Orders retain the requirement for Members to leave the room for the duration of the item in which they have a prejudicial interest and that the right to address the committee and the right to request dispensation in unusual circumstances was retained.

102. **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT POLICY**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **defer** this item to the next meeting.

103. **LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT**

The Committee received a report on the proposed funding arrangements for the localisation of Council Tax support and was asked to consider responding to the government's current consultation. It was noted that this was an important issue for the Town Council as any changes to the existing system may impact on the tax base and therefore negatively affect the amount of tax paid by the average Band D property.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **delegates** authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, to respond to the consultation.

104. **FLY POSTING**

The Committee had received a report on the progress towards the Town Council being granted authority by East Herts Council to remove Fly-Posting in the town. An agreement, drafted by East Herts Council in consultation with the five Town Clerks in the district, was presented for consideration.

It was noted with regret that the agreement does not cover Bill Posting or removal of items which have been stuck on with any form of adhesive, as it is the responsibility of the landowner to remove any items illegally posted to their properties and removal of adhesives is problematic.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **approves** the draft working agreement and authorises the Town Clerk to sign the same.

105. **NEW HOMES BONUS**

The Chairman clarified the intentions with regards to the New Homes Bonus. It was noted that the Committee had allocated funding from the 2011/12 funds to support the Taxi Marshalling Scheme and that the 2012/13 funds would be allocated to the development of a Neighbourhood Plan.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the report.

106. **FINANCE**

(a) **Bank Reconciliations**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the bank reconciliation summaries for Jan – May 2012 inclusive

(b) **Payment Schedules**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the payment schedules for March, April and May 2012

(c) **Debt and Creditor Payment Times**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the debt and creditor payment times.

(d) **Non Cheque Payments 2011/12**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the Direct Debit and BAC's payments made from 1 October 2011 – 31 March 2012.

107. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) 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 item is discussed. This is in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as amended by the Local Government Act 1972.

108. **APPOINTMENT OF HR SERVICES PROVIDER**

The Chairman provided the Committee with an update on the work of the Vice Chairman and Town Clerk on reviewing the Council's current HR provision, which included meetings with several providers before issuing a request for quotations. The Vice Chairman had circulated his notes from these meetings and the formal quotations were attached for the Committee's consideration.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **delegate** authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, to appoint Ellis Whitham as the Town Council's HR provider for an initial period of 12 months.

109. **RENEWAL OF CONTRACT OF TOWN CENTRE COORDINATOR**

It was **RESOVLED** that:

- a) The Committee **approve** the transfer of the existing postholder to the permanent staff establishment.

110. **DEBTORS OVER 90 DAYS**

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The Committee **notes** the Debtors over 90 days and instructs the Finance Manager to actively pursue recovery of these debts and produce a follow up report for the next meeting, and
- b) The Committee **instructs** the Finance Manager to implement controls to identify unpaid debts and decline new bookings from companies with outstanding accounts, until those accounts are brought up to date.