

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE HELD ON MONDAY 8 DECEMBER 2008 AT 7.30 PM IN THE ROBIN ROOM, THE CASTLE, HERTFORD

PRESENT: Councillor Miss C J Geall, in the Chair

Councillors J F Cook, J C Hedley, P A Ruffles, Dr L E Radford and Miss J C S Sartin

IN ATTENDANCE: Cllr Mrs H P Durbin
Mrs N L Villa, Town Clerk
Mr S Davies, Finance and Administration Manager
Miss M Challis, Assistant to the Town Clerk

205. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies of absence were received from The Mayor (District Council commitment), Councillors Mrs S M Newton and Mrs B M Wrangles.

206. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors P A Ruffles and Miss J C S Sartin declared prejudicial interest in matters relating to Hertford Museum as Trustees of Hertford Museum.

Councillor Miss C J Geall declared a personal interest in any matters relating to Hertford Museum as a Patron of Hertford Museum.

207. THE MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Minutes of the Special Finance, Policy & Administration Committee held on Tuesday 4 November 2008 be approved as a correct record and the Chairman authorised to sign the same.

208. ACTION SHEET

Members asked for an update on the Ashley Webb shelter. The Town Clerk informed the Committee that EHC have drawn up a specification to remove the roof and arches of the Shelter, but have not issued a time scale. The possibility of adopting the structure as a listed building is to be considered at a future meeting, particularly as it was a gift to the Town.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The action sheet be received and noted.

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

There were no members of the public wishing to speak.

210. QUALITY STATUS UPDATE

The Committee received a report confirming that the application for Quality Status was successful, and a certificate is to be presented to the Council at the next Full Town Council meeting on 15 December 2008.

Members sought clarification of the implication of Quality Status and it was explained that it is a quality marker, which can be used to the Council's advantage in forming useful partnerships with local councils, principal authorities and community and voluntary sector organisations. Quality Status will also enable the Town Council to have a better standing in negotiations.

Members enquired as to whether the assessment panel had been asked for constructive criticism regarding the Council's portfolio in order that any weak areas can be addressed for future submissions. The Town Clerk confirmed that feedback had been sought but none has been received to date.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee note the report for Quality Status Update and thank the Town Clerk for her hard work and effort in obtaining the Quality Status award for the Council.

211. CASTLE FLOODLIGHTING

The Committee received a further report on the Castle Floodlighting. All existing columns need re-wiring, light units replaced and anti-vandal guards installed. However, while the guards will offer some protection to the "heads", the column wiring would still be vulnerable. The cost of refurbishing the current, ineffective lighting would be in the region of £10,000. The cost of a new system would be in the region of £15,000. The Facilities Manager proposes to source three quotes, taking into consideration the environmental implications and present them to the Committee at the next meeting

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee agreed to the replacement of the Castle floodlighting during the current financial year, utilising the unspent Grounds Maintenance Budget.

212. HERTFORD MUSEUM – ADOPT AND OBJECT

Cllrs Ruffles and Sartin left the room

The Town Council has previously agreed to adopt a former Hertford Mayor's Robe as part of the Museum's Adopt an Object scheme. Subsequently the Museum has requested funding from the Council for a conservation standard

mannequin to display the robe on. The cost of such a mannequin is £2000. The Museum originally requested £2,000; however this has now been reduced to £1,000.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Utilising its power to contribute to museums under s145(1)(d) of the Local Government act 1972, the Committee agreed to provide additional grant funding of £1,000 towards the purchase of a conservation mannequin.

Cllrs Ruffles and Sartin returned to the room.

213. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION POLICY

The Committee received a report outlining the advised requirements of the “Model Publication Scheme”, and a revised policy for inclusion in the Council’s Constitution.

The Council will make all non confidential records available to the public if requested; noting that some items may only be viewed in the Council’s offices and the making of copies will be prohibited; however as much information as possible will be made available on the Town Council’s website. Confidential information such as the individual valuations of the Council’s assets and individual salaries are not to be disclosed.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approve the adoption of the new Model Publication Scheme and the use of the proposed “Guide to Information”.

214. MATERNITY AND IRREGULAR ATTENDANCE POLICIES

These policies were presented to the Committee for approval for inclusion in the Council’s Constitution, in order that the information is easily accessible to staff and Councillors.

The proposed Maternity Leave Policy is the current NJC Maternity Leave Policy as outlined in the “Green Book”, which has been used in practice, but never formally adopted for inclusion in the Council’s Constitution.

The advice of the Council’s HR advisory service indicates that it is good employment practice to include a clear policy on managing Irregular Attendance in the Council’s Constitution. This is to ensure a clear and transparent procedure is in place to support staff who are experiencing long term sickness and to provide a mechanism for dealing with persistent absence.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

The Committee approve the new Maternity Leave and Irregular Attendance Policies.

215. EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Agenda item 12 and 13 be moved forward in order that the Committee's resolution relating to item 13 can be included in the discussions for agenda item 11.

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

216. STAFFING WORKLOAD

The Committee received a report and recommendation on the current staffing at the Council and **RESOLVED**:

To approve the appointment of an assistant to the Marketing and Promotions Manager, for a fixed term of two years.

217. FINANCE

The Responsible Finance Officer presented the Committee with the latest draft of the budget for 2009/2010.

A number of optional projects had been recommended by their respective Committees for final approval:

- a) Community Services – installation of concrete plinths for the cast iron benches at the cemetery – estimated cost: £3,000
- b) Community Services – installation of new cemetery railings along North Road and Bramfield Road – estimated cost: £60,000 split over two years.
- c) Community Services – repairs to memorials at the cemetery and closed churchyards – suggested provision £10,000
- d) Development & Leisure – establish a town fund for projects to be finalised, which may include some partnership working with EHC on economic development within the town – suggested provision £10,000.
- e) Development & Leisure – create a new post to give administrative support to the Marketing & Promotions Manager – estimated cost £11,000.

- f) There had been an additional request for an increase in the events budget of £3,900.

If all optional projects were undertaken, it would represent an 8.7% increase on the precept for the current year.

The Committee looked at ways in which this increase could be reduced.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- a) The optional project for concrete plinths for the cast iron benches at the cemetery should not be included in the draft budget for 2009/10.
- b) The installation of new cemetery railings along North Road and Bramfield Road be split over three years, with £20,000 available in 2009/10.
- c) The proposed budget of £10,000 to repair memorials at the cemetery and closed churchyards remain in the draft budget for 2009/10.
- d) The proposed increases in the events budget be reduced from £3,900 to £2,000.
- e) The proposed new post of administrative support to the Marketing & Promotions Manager, totalling £11,000 per annum is approved for inclusion in the draft budget for 2009/10.
- f) The Finance, Policy and Administration Committee **RECOMMENDS** a 2009/10 precept figure of £1,034, 029 to Full Town Council. This represents a 4.9% increase on the Band D Council Tax, however the revised tax base due to be released later this month will reduce this figure further.

The Committee also noted the Bank Reconciliation documents for September and October which were presented for inspection.