

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

held on Monday 12th December 2011

PRESENT Councillor Mrs C.M. Michael – Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	V.M. Abraham	Councillor	Mrs C. Littley
"	A.K. Bacon	"	M.W. Shaw
"	Ms J.E. Bramwell	"	F.S. Wilson
"	M. Fayyaz	"	P.W. Yerrell
"	T. Franks		

In attendance: Councillors Ms R.K. Bhatti, Mrs P.R. Cherrill, P.J. Hudson, Mrs A.M. Pirouet and C.H. Spruytenburg

Officers: Mr W. Richards, Town Clerk
Mr S. Pearson, Finance and Contracts Manager
Ms. K. Graves, Policy and Projects Officer

An apology for absence was received from Councillor D.J. Lacey.

51. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillors Mrs Littley, Shaw and Wilson declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as members of the Chesham Action Partnership. Councillor Mrs Michael declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as a member of the Chesham and District Transport Users' Group.

Councillor Shaw declared a personal interest in agenda item 6 as a member of Pond Park Community Association.

Councillor Mrs Littley declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 as a member of the Allotments Group. Councillor Spruytenburg declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 as an allotment holder.

52. MINUTES

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 31st October 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

53. **CHESHAM ACTION PARTNERSHIP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham Action Partnership AGM held on the 18th October 2011.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

54. **TRANSITION TOWN CHESHAM**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Transition Town Chesham group held on 6th October and 3rd November 2011.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

55. **CHESHAM AND DISTRICT TRANSPORT USERS' GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Chesham and District Transport Users' Group held on the 27th September and 8th November 2011.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

56. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2011/12 AND ESTIMATES 2012/13**

The Committee considered the revised estimates for 2011/12 and the proposed budget for 2012/13.

Before determining the budget for the next financial year, the Chairman, Councillor Mrs Michael, suggested that the Committee set out its position on whether it wished to contribute to the funding of the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in 2012/13 as this would have an impact upon the final figures for the next financial year.

The Clerk advised that the Council had been a funding partner among a number of local authorities five years ago when PCSOs were in their inception. The Council had been paying £2,850 per annum but this financial year had withdrawn from making a financial

contribution as part of the cuts agreed for 2011/12. Recent correspondence received from the Buckinghamshire County Council Safer Bucks Partnership Manager suggested that Chesham may lose at least one PCSO if the Council did not contribute next year.

There was general agreement that the PCSOs were a valuable resource within the town and there was no wish to see a reduction in the numbers. Some Members opined that allocation should be based on need rather than monies and that there was a danger of double taxation for Chesham residents. Moreover it was also suggested that, as important though they were, PCSOs were not something that the Council should be paying for. However the general consensus was that, for the amount the Council was contributing, the town was receiving an excellent enhanced service and a funding contribution should continue.

A query was raised as to what guarantees were there to ensure that PCSO provision for Chesham did not reduce following any Council contribution. It was agreed that, since Buckinghamshire County Council had given no assurances, any grant contribution should be conditional on the level of PCSOs for the town being maintained or increased.

After some debate, the Chairman called for a vote *‘on the principle of contributing again to the partnership funding arrangement for PCSOs on the understanding that this would add an extra £2,850 to the proposed 2012/13 precept.’*

This was **CARRIED** by 8 votes to 1 and therefore

RESOLVED

that the Council agrees to contribute again to the former partnership funding agreement for Police Community Support Officers on the understanding that any grant contribution should be conditional on the level of PCSOs for the town being maintained or increased.

The Finance and Contracts Manager then presented the budget to the Committee explaining that it had taken account of the recommendations of the Finance Working Party which had recently met and had proposed a 3% increase on the precept. Councillor Bacon stated that, being a member of it, he felt it important to inform the Committee that the working party would have preferred to set a nought per cent increase for the precept. However, having set a nought per cent increase last year and, unlike the principal authorities, having no government subsidy to underwrite a standstill budget, the working party believed an increase was essential if services were not to be badly affected. As it was, he opined, a 3% rise was still below the rate of inflation and the working party had proposed some challenging targets in income generation to keep the rise down to this figure as indicated within the Finance and Contracts Manager’s report. Councillor Shaw stated that, as a fellow member of the working party, he concurred with Councillor Bacon. He also asked that it be recorded that he was keen to state that his party had no wish to see the closing of the Elgiva or any other Council service and believed that a 3% rise next year was the best way to protect services.

It was then moved by Councillor Bacon and seconded by Councillor Shaw that *'the 2012/13 precept be set to represent a 3% increase on the 2011/12 precept and that the 2012/13 budgets as presented to the Recreation and Arts Committee at its meeting held on the 21st November 2011, be amended in accordance with the Finance Working Group recommendations and a contribution to the Police Community Support Officers Partnership'*.

Councillor Ms Bramwell then stated that she would like to propose an amendment to the motion. She opined that her conversations with residents had suggested that they would prefer to see the Council making savings or cutting services than increasing the precept in what were difficult economic times. She therefore put forward an amendment, seconded by Councillor Fayyaz that *'the 2012/13 precept be set to represent a 0% increase on the 2011/12 precept'*.

The amendment was **LOST** by 3 votes to 6.

The Chairman then called for a vote on the original proposal and this was **CARRIED** by 7 votes to 1 and therefore

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the 2012/13 precept be set to represent a 3% increase on the 2011/12 precept and that the 2012/13 budgets, as presented to the Recreation and Arts Committee at its meeting held on the 21st November 2011, be amended in accordance with the Finance Working Group recommendations and a contribution to the Police Community Support Officers Partnership and officers present a report reflecting this to full Council on the 9th January 2012.

Note: Councillor Ms Bramwell left the meeting at 8.55pm

Following this vote, Councillor Hudson opined that this proposed rise could have been perhaps avoided had the finances been better managed in previous years. Councillor Yerrell responded by saying that he had been on the Council for several years and it had handled its financial management very well and at no time had put its finances at risk. Councillor Abraham also suggested that Councillor Hudson may wish to consider recommending closing some of the Council's community facilities if he was of this view.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet stated that she felt it important that, if the Council confirmed this increase in January, it explained to the public that it did not receive central government financial support to freeze a Council Tax increase unlike the principal authorities and, similarly, Councillor Spruytenburg said that the fact that the rise was below the rate of inflation should be emphasised to residents.

Note: Councillors Mrs Cherrill and Mrs Pirouet left the meeting at 9.05pm

57. **ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY REVIEW**

Members received an update on the Council's environmental progress to date and were asked to consider a review of the Environmental Policy

The Committee congratulated officers and Friends' groups on their efforts and noted that the recycling of waste in Lowndes Park and the installation of solar power panels could be added to the list of achievements.

It was

RESOLVED

that the revised Environmental Policy be adopted and an update be received annually.

58. **ANNUAL REVIEW OF RISK ASSESSMENTS**

The Committee considered the Policy and Project Officer's annual report on risk assessments.

Councillor Mrs Michael stated that she was aware that a huge amount of work was required to keep risk assessments up to date and congratulated the Policy and Projects Officer in achieving this. Councillor Bacon concurred with this view and stated that the Council had been very deficient in this area a few years ago.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

59. **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY POLICY REVIEW**

The updated Information Technology Policy was presented to the Committee. Councillor Wilson commented that it was refreshing to read such a policy written in plain English.

It was

RESOLVED

that the updated IT Policy be adopted.

60. **FIRST AND SECOND QUARTER PERFORMANCE INDICATORS**

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Michael, reminded Members that these Performance Indicators were now submitted to this Committee rather than the Performance Review Committee which no longer existed.

Members raised no apparent areas for concern on the figures but a brief discussion ensued as to the merits of including a brief commentary on the indicators. In the end it was decided that it would be wrong to put a further workload on officers and it was for Members to seek explanations on disparity in figures either before or during the meeting.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

Note: Councillor Miss Bhatti left the meeting at 9.15pm

61. **THAMES VALLEY POLICE FRONT COUNTER PROVISION CONSULTATION**

Members were advised that Thames Valley Police was reassessing its front counter provision at Police Stations and Chesham was now listed as a Tier 2 Neighbourhood Station and proposed to open three days a week (Tuesday - Thursday 10.00 - 14.00) as opposed to five days currently.

The Committee questioned why Chesham Station was being bracketed with much smaller towns with an average population under 10,000. The Clerk reported that he had spoken to the Police Area Commander who had stated this was because of the very low average footfall per week and low measurable tasks at Chesham Station. Members suggested that the low figure was probably self-perpetuating because there was the perception among many residents that the Station was almost permanently closed. Moreover, the Committee felt that such a reduction in hours could not be justified, due to the comparative inaccessibility of the nearest 8-14 hour station, namely High Wycombe or Aylesbury.

There was agreement that Chesham Station should be open at least as often as the one in Amersham and, preferably, much longer, particularly at night when there appeared to be many examples of residents trying to report incidents at the Station but unable to gain access.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Clerk be requested to respond to the consultation in the terms expressed at the meeting.

62. **ALLOTMENTS WAITING LIST**

The Committee considered the officers' and Chesham Allotments Group's recommendation that the waiting list be closed to new applicants from outside the town.

It was

RESOLVED

that the allotments waiting list be closed to new applicants from outside the town.

63. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.27pm.

CHAIRMAN