

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the **POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE**

held on Monday 13th June 2011

PRESENT

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

Officers: Mr W. Richards, Town Clerk
Mr S. Pearson, Finance and Contracts Manager

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

1. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN FOR ADMINISTRATIVE YEAR 2011/12**

The Deputy Mayor opened the meeting and called for nominations for Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee.

It was

RESOLVED

that Councillor Mrs C.M. Michael be elected Chairman for the remainder of the Council year.

Note: Councillor Mrs Michael took the chair.

Councillor Mrs Michael called for nominations for Vice-Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee.

It was

RESOLVED

that Councillor A.K. Bacon be elected Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the Council year.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Wilson declared a personal interest in agenda item 5 as Vice-Chairman of the Chesham Action Partnership.

Councillors Bacon and Ms Bramwell declared a personal interest in agenda item 11 as regular users of the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

Councillors Bacon and Wilson declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 15 as Members of Chiltern District Council and left the Chamber during its discussion thereof.

3. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 21st March 2011 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

4. **CHESHAM ACTION PARTNERSHIP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham Action Partnership held on the 29th March 2011.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Councillor Ms. Bramwell queried the purpose and effectiveness of the partnership and asked what it had actually achieved and was proposing to achieve. The Town Clerk explained that it had been set up originally as part of a procedure to develop a 'Market Town Health check' which, in turn, was a conduit to unlocking funds from the (now defunct) Regional Development Agency. Councillor Yerrell, as a former member of the partnership, opined that it was a good forum for a number of organisations to raise issues that were relevant to Chesham and to get assistance with funding. Councillor Wilson stated that it might be helpful to provide Councillor Ms Bramwell with a list of organisations and community groups and projects that the partnership had assisted.

5. **TRANSITION TOWN CHESHAM**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of Transition Town Chesham held on 7th April and 5th May 2011.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted

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

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham and District Transport Users' Group held on the 12th April 2011.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising out of Minute No. 11/21, Councillor Bacon proposed that the Council invite representatives of London Underground Limited to address a Development Control Committee to explain its decision to make all Chesham off-peak trains stop at every intermediate station from December 2011. This was agreed by the Committee.

7. **DEVOLVED SERVICES UPDATE**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

8. **AMENDMENT TO STANDING ORDERS**

The Finance and Contracts Manager advised that some alterations were required to bring the Financial Regulations in line with the Standing Orders in view of the recent changes to legislation in respect of annual accounts. He also recommended a change in the Standing Orders so that annual subscriptions did not have to be brought to the Annual Council Meeting each year which is a largely ceremonial affair. This was agreed by Committee.

It was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

1. That the Financial Regulation 4.2. be amended to read '*The RFO shall be responsible for completing the annual accounts of the Council as soon as practicable after the end of the financial year and shall submit them, and report thereon, to the Council by the*

30th June in accordance with the timescale required by the Accounts and Audit Regulations' .

2. That Standing Order 9 (a) (vii) be deleted and a new Financial Regulation be created to read *'the payment of annual subscriptions will be considered as part of the annual budgetary process'*.

9. **FINANCIAL REPORT – OUT-TURN 2010/11**

The Chairman, Councillor Mrs Michael, expressed her appreciation for the work undertaken by the Finance and Contracts Manager and invited him to add any additional comments to his written report on the financial out-turn for the financial year 2010/11.

The Finance and Contracts Manager drew Members' attention particularly to the actual budget of £706,398, which compared to the revised budget of £768,049, and the proposed works to be carried over for this financial year, most notably planned tree works. He opined that 2011/12 was likely to be difficult in light of the current economic climate and the potential effect on income at the Elgiva and Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

The Chairman then sought observations and queries from Members on the report and the Finance and Contracts Manager's comments.

Councillor Wilson enquired as to what, if any, financial risk assessments had taken place in recent years since this was commonplace in the financial sector where he previously worked. Officers advised that there had been no specialist commercial risk assessments per se but Friends' groups did monitor the particular relevant budgets and the Elgiva Board of Management had previously produced a contingency plan based on difficult financial scenarios.

Councillor Ms Bramwell stated that she believed that the Council was drifting towards having to levy a minimum 3% increase in the Council Tax which she believed was unacceptable. Councillor Bacon reiterated that the Council had already made significant cuts to facilitate a 0% increase for this financial year which would undoubtedly have an effect on services and opined that the Council needed to think carefully on balancing the needs for a high quality service for the people of Chesham against the wish to set a low tax precept. Councillor Shaw concurred with this assessment but believed it was important to start looking at the finances again as soon as possible so as to avoid any long-term crises.

Councillor Fayyaz enquired whether there had been any progress on sharing services with Amersham Town Council. The Town Clerk advised that the elections had temporarily stalled discussions but it was intended to re-visit this idea shortly.

It was

RESOLVED

that the report be noted and that the works not completed in 2010/2011 be carried over to 2011/2012.

10. **ANNUAL RETURN 2010/11**

The Finance and Contracts Manager reminded the Committee that, due to the recent changes in the banding levels regarding the type of published accounts, the Council decided at its meeting held on the 18th April 2011 to publish an Annual Return rather than the Statement of Accounts as it had done previously, thereby saving around £12,000 on external audit fees. The Council also decided to produce a set of new Financial Statements similar to the previous accounts for management information but which were not to be audited.

Part of the Audit Regulations required the Council as a body to agree and sign off the Annual Return by the 30th June each year and to consider and answer the questions set by the Audit Commission as part of the Council's Annual Governance statement. The Finance and Contracts Manager advised that he was proposing that this Committee considers the annual accounting and governance statements so that these could be formally ratified at a special Council meeting to be convened on the 27th June, after the Development Control Committee.

Councillor Wilson stated that he had reservations in regard to question five, namely that the Council had carried out an assessment of the risks facing the Council and had taken appropriate steps to manage these risks. He stated that he had no wish to delay the signing off of the Annual Return but would like assurances that the Committee will look further at the commercial risks facing the Council. Councillor Ms Bramwell similarly suggested that other public authorities she was involved with did appear to have the sort of robust risk assessments in regard to finance that appeared lacking in this Council.

Officers replied the Council did have a rigorous independent Internal Audit which was requested to highlight areas of risk as and when appropriate and The Elgiva Board of Management had carried out some risk scenarios but nevertheless agreed that a further report will be made to the next meeting of this Committee on a more structured assessment and would welcome any professional support in this area that Members could offer.

The Finance and Contracts Manager also advised there were some minor amendments required before full adoption of the Financial Statements, which was noted and agreed by the Committee.*

In respect of the Annual Report, Councillor Bacon raised that it made reference to a financial working party that, in fact, had not met within the last year. He proposed that it

be re-formed to look again at budgets, now that there was a new Council in operation and in light of concerns raised by Members on the Council being able to deliver a balanced budget each year. This was agreed and it was proposed that Councillors Abraham, Bacon and Wilson plus two other Members, to be nominated and approved at full Council, be nominated as working party members.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the Annual Return Accounting Statements for the year ended 31st March 2011, as presented, be amended to take account of the pool float figures included within the pool stock figures and the amended Return be recommended for approval to the special Council meeting to be convened on the 27th June 2011.
2. That the special Council meeting, to be convened on the 27th June 2011, considers the Annual Governance Statement on page 3 of the Annual Return and be recommended to answer the questions in the affirmative on the understanding that the Council will be strengthening its commercial financial risk assessments in the near future.
3. That the Financial Statements (subject to the amendments detailed below) and Annual Report (subject to the deletion of the reference to the working party) be recommended for approval to the special Council meeting to be convened on the 27th June 2011.
4. That the Finance Working Party be re-formed and to comprise of Councillors Abraham, Bacon and Wilson plus two further Members to be nominated at full Council.

** These are now detailed hereunder for information:*

- *add Ms to Cllr. R.K Bhatti title on page 3*
 - *Cllr Mrs C. Littley be deleted from the list of Councillors on page 3 as she is already shown as the Deputy Town Mayor*
 - *the dates on page 14 that are shown as 2009 be amended to 2010*
 - *delete CCTV Reserve and Pool Fund on page 22 as both are shown as nil*
 - *the name of the Chairman shown on page 9 be changed to the Chairman presiding the special Council meeting to be called on the 27th June 2011*
 - *that the figures be amended to take account of the fact that the pool float had been included within the pool stock figures-£411.60 (2011) and £250 (2010).*
- (Note the annual return will require this adjustment as well).*

11. **INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT**

The Committee considered the latest Internal Auditor's report.

Having been advised that there were no major issues raised, it was

RESOLVED

that the report be noted.

12. **DEBIT AND CREDIT CARD FACILITIES**

The Committee considered whether the installation of card payment facilities at the Town Hall and the Chesham Moor Swim and Gym Centre was desirable.

Members noted the cost implications per transaction and weighed this against the benefits to customers. It was agreed there ought to be a minimum level for their use and this was suggested and agreed as not less than £10.

A debate then took place as to whether a transaction fee should be charged. It was noted that a 'booking fee' was applied at the Elgiva for debit and credit card ticket purchases but it was felt that this was in line with most other theatres' and arts facilities' policy. However there was a general view that applying such a transaction fee particularly to the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre may be counter-productive and a hindrance to getting more customers through the door.

Accordingly it was

RESOLVED

1. That credit and debit card payment facilities be provided at the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and Town Hall for payments above £10 and above for a trial period of 18 months.
2. That no transaction fee be applied at either of the two venues.

13. **REDUNDANCY POLICY**

Officers presented the draft Redundancy Policy prepared professionally by South East Employees as requested by the previous Committee. The Town Clerk advised that, subject to any amendments Members may wish to make, the policy would be put out to consultation to staff again, and any comments thereof would be brought back to this Committee in September for possible further amendments and adoption.

The Committee had no comments to raise on the draft policy and it was

RESOLVED

that the policy, as presented, be duly circulated for further consultation.

14. **ADHERENCE TO THE EQUALITY ACT 2010**

The Committee was advised that the ‘Equality Duty’ in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 (known as the ‘general equality duty’) came into force on the 5th April 2011. It is a duty on public bodies and others carrying out public functions and therefore applies to town and parish councils. Specifically it obliges councils to have due regard to the need to: remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics; take steps to meet the needs of people from protected groups where these are different from the needs of other people and encourage people from protected groups to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.

Members were made aware that, whilst there are ‘specific duties’ for the public sector that prescribe steps for preparing and publishing equality objectives and publishing information on how the duties are being met, town and parish councils are exempt from these specific duties. In light of this it was

RESOLVED

that future reports to Committees and Council include an Equality Implications section, to ensure that equality issues are considered during the Council’s decision-making processes.

15. **HS2 CONSULTATION**

The Committee was asked whether it wished to respond to the consultation on High Speed 2 train proposals even though the proposed line between London and the West Midlands was not scheduled to come through the town.

It was overwhelmingly agreed the Council should respond to the consultation, rejecting the plan on environmental and economic grounds and loss of nearby AONB land. Councillor Franks also highlighted the fact that the town may be directly affected by large construction vehicles coming through Chesham.

Accordingly it was agreed to nominate some Members to liaise with the Town Clerk to allow him to respond on the Council’s behalf to this effect.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Town Clerk be authorised to respond to the HS2 consultation following liaison with Councillors Abraham, Franks and Shaw.

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

It was moved by the Chairman and

RESOLVED

that the public and the Press be excluded from the following item in accordance with the Public Bodies (Access to Meetings) Act 1960, as matters which are considered to be confidential are about to be discussed.

Note: Councillors Bacon and Wilson left the Chamber before the next agenda item was discussed.

17. **CHESHAM MARKET**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Clerk be authorised to proceed in connection with this matter in the terms expressed at the meeting.

Note: Councillor Ms Bramwell left the meeting at 9.15pm

18. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.20pm.

CHAIRMAN