

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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

held on Monday 6th December 2010

PRESENT Councillor V.M. Abraham, Chairman (Presiding)

Councillor	A.K. Bacon	Councillor	Mrs J.C. Fulford
"	Ms J.E. Bramwell	"	F.G. Holly
"	M.E. Brand	"	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	N.L. Brown	"	P.W. Yerrell

In Attendance

Councillors Mrs M. Molesworth and C.H. Spruytenburg

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

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M. Fayyaz and M.W. Shaw.

43. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest that were brought to the Chairman's notice.

44. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 25th October 2010 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

45. **TOWN CENTRE WORKING GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meetings of the Town Centre Working Group held on the 23rd September 2010.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising out of Minute 2 (iii), Councillor Bacon remarked upon the presentation recently given by the Environment Agency on the state of the culvert. He stated that the presentation was interesting but it was clear that the exact line of the culvert needed to be determined before remedial works could be considered. Councillor Ms Bramwell opined that the Culvert Monitoring Group, when meeting, should consider writing to the Environment Agency to try and ascertain what level of maintenance Chiltern District Council undertook during its period of being the responsible body for the culvert and whether this may have had an impact on its current condition. Councillor Brown opined that Chiltern District Council had less powers than the Environment Agency does in undertaking repairs and the latter should be encouraged to undertake these as soon as practicably possible.

Arising out of Minute 5, Members welcomed the news that Chiltern District Council was engaging consultants to look at the state of the wall in St Mary's Way since the ownership appeared to continue to remain unclear.

Arising out of Minute 6 (i), the Committee expressed its support for the clearance of pigeon excrement by Chiltern District Council but some Members voiced an opinion that the current condition was still far from satisfactory.

46. **CHESHAM ACTION PARTNERSHIP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham Action Partnership AGM held on 19th October 2010.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

47. **TRANSITION TOWN CHESHAM**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Transition Town Chesham meeting held on 4th November 2010.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

48. **DEVOLVED SERVICES UPDATE**

The Committee considered the current position on the devolved services initiative emanating from Buckinghamshire County Council.

The Clerk gave an update on winter maintenance. He explained that, thanks to funding from Buckinghamshire County Council, the Parks and Premises team now had a mechanised gritter making salting on both our facilities and the High Street much easier and quicker. Members stated there had been a noticeable improvement in High Street salting but Councillor Mrs Fulford stated that some residents had complained that the side walkways in the High Street were still slippery. The Clerk responded by saying this was disappointing news since his staff's efforts had been considerable and pointed out that it was logistically difficult to get a spreading vehicle too close to shop frontages.

Other Members asked whether such salting could be done in other parts of town but the Clerk responded by saying it would be difficult due to both financial and staffing restraints together with the risk assessments required for working on a non-pedestrianised highway.

49. **REDUNDANCY POLICY**

The Committee received a report from officers on proposals and timetables in respect of devising a redundancy policy.

Members agreed it was important such a policy existed and it was

RESOLVED

that the report be noted.

50. **CARD PAYMENT FACILITIES**

The Committee considered a report in respect of the possible installation of card payment facilities at the Town Hall and the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre.

As there was nothing in the budget to facilitate such a purchase for the current financial year and there was no evidence that costs could be recouped, the Committee did not feel it was able to accede to such a request immediately. However Members were keen to support the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre Manager in his initiatives so he was invited to put forward a cost/benefit analysis. Other Members asked whether the current

Elgiva system/agreement could be utilised but the Finance and Contracts Manager advised that a separate charge per card reader would still be made.

It was

RESOLVED

that a cost/benefit analysis on the advantages of implementing card payment facilities be undertaken for the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre and Town Hall and brought back to this Committee in three months time.

51. **THE MOOR PAVILION**

The current proposals for the renovation of the Moor Pavilion emanating from Chesham Athletic FC was put before the Committee.

The Committee was broadly supportive in principle of the idea put forward by the club that it pay for the bulk of the repairs in return for some security of tenure but felt it important to check that planning permission was not required first. Councillor Brown offered to make informal approaches to Chiltern District Council on this matter. One Member also questioned whether the proposals were suitably anti-vandal proof and suggested that the proposed repairs be endorsed by the original surveyors. The football club was also asked to convey its proposal in the form of a letter to be more formally considered by Members.

It was

RESOLVED

that Chesham Athletic be invited to put forward a formal proposal on sharing costs once the matter of planning permission had been determined and the proposed works had been approved by the Council's surveyors.

52. **PROPOSED FEES AND CHARGES FOR TOWN HALL**

Following instructions from the Recreation and the Arts Committee, officers presented a further report on proposed fees and charges for the Town Hall.

Certain Members opined that the 50% block booking discount for current users was too high but accepted it should remain for next year with the increase of V.A.T. taking place in January. However it was suggested that notice be served on these hirers that the Council intended to review this and possibly reduce it in future years. The Committee also noted that some all day, one off bookings could not be accommodated because of regular block bookings. Therefore it was further suggested officers look at some block session pricing system which would incur higher costs for hirers if they prevented other bookings taking place in both morning and afternoon for example.

The Committee also looked at weddings prices again. The Clerk informed the Committee that the Registrars' Office at Wycombe had informed his officers that its prices for the Registrar coming to Chesham were fixed and it would not be reviewing them. Members expressed their views that they believed this to be unfair and discriminatory and the Clerk was requested to write to Buckinghamshire County Council who liaised with the Registrars' Office when agreeing fees. It was also proposed and agreed to investigate whether legally the service had to be performed by a Buckinghamshire Registrar or whether there were cheaper, legal alternatives from neighbouring counties. Moreover it was suggested that a list of other persons, both religious and secular, legally qualified to perform marriage and civil partnerships be drawn up to ascertain whether they could perform a service at a cheaper price.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the proposed scale of charges from 4th January 2011 is agreed and that the 50% block booking discount policy is reduced to 25% apart for those hirers currently in receipt of it.
2. That the charge for each marriage ceremony be set at 2 hours at the Council Chamber rate.
3. That the officers write to Buckinghamshire County Council expressing the Council's objections to the Registrars' Office's current fees for Chesham and alternative legal wedding ceremony conductors be investigated.
4. That the Town Clerk continues to be delegated the determination of any ad hoc charges.

53. **REVISED ESTIMATES 2010/11 AND ESTIMATES 2011/12**

The Committee considered the revised estimates for 2010/11 and the proposed budget for 2011/12.

The Finance and Contracts Manager presented the budget to the Committee explaining that it was reflecting the wishes of the Recreation and the Arts Committee, namely working towards producing a balanced budget in two years, which would not require the use of the General Reserve. The budget for 2011/12 therefore reflected some £74,535 of savings. Councillor Brand argued that such savings, while difficult to achieve, were important as the Council could not keep drawing upon its General Reserve indefinitely and, moreover, it was likely that the Council's income, particularly through attendance at the Elgiva Theatre and the Chesham Moor Gym and Swim Centre, was likely to decrease for the foreseeable future.

There was a general acceptance that such savings were required, particularly as the

Council had little option but to have a nought per cent increase on the precept in line with the principal authorities. However Councillor Bacon highlighted the fact that, while the approved budgets had resulted in monies being earmarked from the General Reserve, during the last five years over £105,000 had actually been added to it due to careful controls on spending. He accepted that the next, and following, years would be difficult financially but opined that it is difficult to predict how necessary these proposed cuts would be.

There was a brief discussion on the question on staffing, particularly in relation to the Town Hall. Councillor Bacon stated that he believed that it is difficult not to draw the conclusion that such savings could only be made through loss of staffing hours and this was something he strongly opposed. He requested therefore that the Committee confirm that it was resolving not to have redundancies within the Town Hall. Other Members disagreed with this, arguing that the savings proposed for the service area made no reference to staff re-structuring but staffing issues were ultimately a matter for the Executive Committee and it would be wrong at this juncture to restrict the options for the Council in implementing these savings. Councillor Mrs Michael opined that she, and other Members, were hopeful that the necessary savings could be found within the Town Hall through reductions on general expenditure without impacting upon staff.

After some debate, the Chairman put the proposed budget to the Committee for approval and resolution at Council and it was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

that the precept of £806,390 be levied on Chiltern District Council for the financial year 2011/12 and the proposed budgets be adjusted to take account of the Category A savings as listed within the report.

Note: Councillor Bacon requested that his vote against this recommendation be recorded.

54. **FINANCIAL REPORT FOR SEVEN MONTHS TO 31ST OCTOBER 2010**

The Financial Report for seven months to 31st October 2010 was presented.

Councillor Abraham suggested that the figures to seven months looked promising and could be viewed as good news.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

55. **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.

56. **CEMETERY LODGES**

The Committee was reminded that its lease with Paradigm Housing for the renting of the two Cemetery lodges expired in November 2011 and therefore it was suggested by officers that this would be an opportune time to consider their respective futures. The Finance and Contracts Manager advised that, while it was not permissible to use any sale receipts for general budgetary purposes, it was possible that it could be used to pay off the two outstanding Public Works Board's loans.

Most of the Members had reservations about trying to sell such important properties particularly in a generally depressed time for the housing market. However there was a general consensus that the Council's income generating capacity for the lodges needed to be re-assessed and to see whether more income could be gained renting through the private sector. Accordingly therefore it was suggested that a rental agency within Chesham be approached to ascertain what realistic annual rental could be obtained and what repairs and upgrading the Council may be required to undertake to obtain such a figure.

It was

RESOLVED

that a further report be brought to this Committee in respect to increasing rental for one or both of the Cemetery lodge properties.

57. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.47pm.

CHAIRMAN