

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

held on Monday 19th October 2009

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	"	M.W. Shaw
"	N.L. Brown	"	C.H. Spruytenburg
"	M. Fayyaz	"	P.W. Yerrell

In Attendance

Councillors E. L. Bamford, M.Z. Bhatti, Mrs C.M. Michael, Mrs M. Molesworth, Mrs A.M. Pirouet and Mrs G. Walker.

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

Mr M. Barber – Buckinghamshire County Council Area Technician

30. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs Walker declared a personal interest in agenda item 4 as a representative of the ‘Chesham in Transition’ Group.

31. **MINUTES**

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 14th September 2009 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

32. **‘CHESHAM IN TRANSITION’ GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the ‘Chesham in Transition’ Group held on the 17th July 2009.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising from Minute 4, Councillor Mrs Walker advised that the proposed Green Fair would now take place after Christmas. She further advised the group now had its own bank account and constitution.

33. **TOWN CENTRE WORKING GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Town Centre Working Group held on 10th September 2009.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

Arising from Minute No 3 (iv), Councillor Yerrell reminded the Committee that there was an alcohol restricted zone in Meades Water Gardens and not an alcohol prohibition zone as recorded in the minutes.

Arising from Minute No 4 (i), Councillor Mrs Fulford raised her concerns about the proposed parking bays in East Street which she believed would have a detrimental effect on cyclists. Members briefly discussed the merits of such a proposal but it was agreed that the Council should determine its position when the matter was formally out to consultation.

Arising from Minute No 6 (i), Councillor Spruytenburg advised the Committee that he and officers from Chiltern District Council had been looking at the possibility of planting trees in Berkhamstead Road to absorb CO₂ gases in an area listed as an area of high air pollution. Councillor Bamford opined that the Council may wish to consider seeking to have tree preservation orders put on the trees that already exist in the road.

Arising from Minute No 6 (ii), Councillor Bamford expressed her view that the planters in St Mary's Way were unsightly and should be removed.

34. **BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S COMMUNITY GANG**

The Chairman welcomed Mr Mike Barber from Buckinghamshire County Council who is the Area Technician.

Mr Barber explained the role of the Buckinghamshire County Council's Community Gang and the tasks it undertook in the maintenance in and around highways. He advised that these tasks included: Vegetation affecting signs and sight lines on the highway; graffiti on road signs and apparatus; siding back carriageways and footpaths; hand weeding in minor localised areas; release & realigning signs/posts; cleaning signs; painting signs and guard rails; cutting back overhanging highway vegetation; clearing excessive silts from junctions and channels; clearing silts from gully grating and recesses; clearing grips; minor verge repairs; controlled weed treatment; removing obstructions from the highway and minor kerbing works.

He further advised that the Community Gang came to Chesham every four weeks and for the jobs to be allocated, he required the information at least a week before the gang arrived in town.

The Chairman thanked Mr Barber for his presentation and sought questions and comments from the Committee. Councillor Spruytenburg asked whether Mr Barber felt the new re-organisation at Buckinghamshire County Council had improved the system. Mr Barber replied by saying it was probably too early to judge but he believed that improvements would become evident in the next financial year as the system would have 'bedded down'.

Councillor Yerrell asked four questions. In response, Mr Barber advised that graffiti would be cleared from footpaths; guardrails would only be repaired by the gang if it was a small job taking less than two hours; the gang does report back on gully clearing and kerbside weeds were only treated by spraying rather than being picked out by hand.

Councillor Bamford enquired as to whether Mr Barber accepted job requests from individuals. He responded by saying requests had to be made to Highways on Call or to the Town Clerk for him to put onto the tasking sheets for the gang.

Councillor Brand opined that while the community gang was a positive step forward, there was still a lack of a joined up approach between services at the County Council and gave an example of a drain that had been blocked in his ward for three months. Councillors Mrs Molesworth and Mrs Walker also cited examples of problems they had had trying to get in touch with Mr Barber. Mr Barber conceded that these were justified complaints but he and his team were working hard to resolve them. Councillor Brown suggested that communication could be improved if the local County Councillors were involved.

The Chairman thanked Mr Barber for his attendance and his very useful presentation.

35. **MARKETS UPDATE**

The Committee considered proposals from the Markets Working Party to set up a local Farmers/local Producers market in town.

Members enthusiastically welcomed the initiative though Councillor Mrs Michael opined that she did not think it desirable that the location be determined by the current market contractors.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Committee endorses the idea of a trial local Producers' Market to be held in Spring 2010 with a view to running such events in the future.

36. **BULLYING AND HARASSMENT POLICY**

The Committee considered the Council's Bullying and Harassment Policy which has been revised in light of the newly-adopted Grievance Policy and Procedure.

Councillor Mrs Pirouet sought assurances that use of texts and the internet were included in 'written communication'. Councillor Ms Bramwell also suggested that it was made clear that this policy was applicable to staff only 'during the course of their employment'. Councillor Bacon recommended that, for reasons of consistency, the phrase 'employees and Councillors' be used in paragraphs 3 and 4 of the 'Statement of Commitment'.

Councillor Ms Bramwell also suggested that it would be difficult to implement without a policy on internet usage and the Clerk was asked to seek clarification on this matter. The Clerk was also asked to investigate what had been previously agreed in respect to banning Councillors and the right of appeal.

The Committee agreed it would also be advantageous for training to be arranged on tackling bullying for members of staff, Members and representatives of the Youth Council.

It was

RESOLVED

that the revised Bullying and Harassment Policy be adopted at full Council following clarification on the points raised by Members at the meeting.

Note: Appropriate use of the internet is covered in the Council's Information Technology policy adopted 17th September 2007.

The procedure for admonishing or banning Members from Committees and Outside Bodies was determined at the Policy and Resources Committee of the 2nd April 2007. The matter of a right of appeal was not discussed.

37. **COMPLETION OF EXTERNAL AUDIT 2008/09**

The Finance and Contracts Manager advised the Committee that this year saw a change in the appointed auditors with a seemingly more thorough audit carried out by the Audit Commission. He reported that discussions with the auditors seem to have thrown up two main areas of concern, namely that the pension accounting/disclosure does not meet the Accounts and Audit Regulations Financial Reporting Standard 17 (FRS 17) requirements for Councils whose income or expenditure (whichever is the higher) exceeds £1m and that the land and property values may be significantly overstated due to the unusual economic turndown. Members were advised that the Council normally re-values every five years with the last review having been undertaken in 2007.

In respect of the first area of concern, the Finance and Contracts Manager stated that, currently, the pension fund meets the cost of providing the information to enable FRS17 to be complied with. He reported that the actual cost of altering the Council's accounts is around £350 but there are other alterations which can be carried out at the same time and he recommended that this is carried out to comply with the Accounts and Audit Regulations.

With regard to the revaluing land and properties, enquiries with the Valuation Office have estimated the cost of this at £3,000. The Finance and Contracts Manager opined that he did not believe this would represent the best use of tax-payers' money and officers had suggested instead to the auditors that they simply add a note in the accounts to highlight that the land and property values have not been adjusted to take into account the current economic downturn. However he reported that this may not be accepted by the auditor and a qualified report may well be issued.

The Committee, while expressing its desire for the Council to usually have an unqualified report, fully supported the Finance and Contracts Manager's recommendations and it was

RESOLVED

1. That accounts for the year ended 31st March 2009 be adjusted to meet the FRS17.
2. That no land and property revaluations be carried out at this time but a note be added within the accounts that the 2007 values have not been adjusted to reflect the current economic downturn.

38. **EMERGENCY PLANNING**

The Clerk advised Members that Chiltern District Council now no longer has an emergency planning officer but uses the services of an officer from Aylesbury Vale District Council one day a week and that this officer confirmed it was not usual practice to directly involve town and parish councils on potential emergencies unless temporary shelter was required at venues such as the Town Hall. The Clerk further advised that much

of the role for emergency community planning appears to have been picked up by Buckinghamshire County Council and that its new Resilience team is keen to work closely with town and parish councils. This team was encouraging town and parish councils to devise and supply it with a 'Community Self-Help' plan.

The Committee agreed it would be desirable to have some sort of plan but accepted that a town the size of Chesham could not supply a comprehensive list of key contacts to Buckinghamshire County Council as suggested in the template supplied to parishes. Accordingly it was

RESOLVED

that the Council draw up a bespoke 'Community Self Help' plan to be forwarded to the Buckinghamshire County Council Resilience team in due course.

39. **FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FOUR MONTHS TO 31st JULY 2009**

The Financial Report for four months to 31st July 2009 was presented.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

40. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.40pm.

CHAIRMAN