

CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting of the POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

held on Monday 30th March 2015

PRESENT Councillor V.M. Abraham– Chairman (presiding)

Councillor	A.K. Bacon	Councillor	Mrs R. Juett
"	Mrs P.R. Cherrill	"	Mrs C.M. Michael
"	M. Fayyaz	"	F.S. Wilson
"	T. Franks	"	P.W. Yerrell
"	P.J. Hudson		

In attendance: Councillors R.C. McCulloch and C.H. Spruytenburg.

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

Sgt James Ellis – Chesham Neighbourhood Police

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Mrs C.I. Boxer and M.W. Shaw.

55. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

56. MINUTES

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on the 16th February 2015 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

57. PRESENTATION FROM NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICE SERGEANT

The Chairman welcomed local Chesham Police Sergeant, Sgt James Ellis, to the meeting. Sgt Ellis explained that, following meetings with the Mayor, he was firmly of the view that it was important the local police had a direct liaison with the Council and was proposing therefore he attend periodically at this Committee to update Members on policing matters and answer any queries Members may have. He opined that, in fact, answering queries was more productive than producing a long list of statistics and therefore it was not his intention to give a long presentation.

Sgt Ellis then briefly updated the Committee on matters pertaining to crime and anti-social behaviour. He firstly commented on the exceptional statistic that there had been just one

reported burglary in Chesham in March which was very welcome news. This follows the downward trend in burglary numbers since the beginning of this year and an overall reduction of 9% in a twelve month period. In respect to burglaries of non-dwellings, Sgt Ellis reported that there have been two attempts and eight full offences in Chesham for March. Burglary non-dwelling numbers have reduced by 35% in Chesham over the last year. He further reported that theft from motor vehicle offences had reduced by 30% in Chesham over a similar period. He concluded his brief report by saying that, currently, there were no planned changes to staffing levels in Chesham and that the neighbourhood team would be moving out of Chesham Police Station by 2019 but he was confident that a police presence would remain in town after that date.

The Chairman thanked him for his update and then asked whether Members had any questions or comments for Sgt Ellis.

Councillor Hudson advised that a lot of the burglaries of the non-dwellings appeared to be concentrated in the Waterside area and enquired why this might be. Sgt Ellis replied that it was usual for inquisitive crime to focus on one area as it was often undertaken by gangs with local knowledge. However he stated that he hoped that recent arrests and on-going surveillance would see a significant drop in crime levels in this respect.

Councillor Mrs Juett asked whether there had been a rise in any sort of hate crime locally. Sgt Ellis advised that numbers of reported crime in this area remained reassuringly extremely low.

Councillor Spruytenburg enquired whether dog-fighting had recommenced in town. Sgt Ellis replied that this perception appeared to have come about through a total misunderstanding and hearsay and there was absolutely no evidence to suggest it was re-occurring.

Councillor Mrs Cherrill questioned whether there was evidence that drug-dealing and drug-taking in the town's outer wards, particularly on footpaths, was increasing. Sgt Ellis responded by saying that, while curtailing the supply and use of drugs remained a priority for his team, he did not feel the problem in Chesham had increased in any way in recent times. Moreover he was hopeful that an arrest made following dealing and supply in the Shelley Road area would reduce drug criminality further. He reminded Members that the police relied significantly on tip-offs in respect to dealing, so requested that any suspected activity be reported to his officers.

Councillor Fayyaz commended Sgt Ellis for being so proactive in engaging with both him, as Mayor, and the Council. He raised the alleged problem of criminals coming into the town from other parts of the country and asked Sgt Ellis to comment upon this. Sgt Ellis replied that 'cross-border criminality' had always occurred, but he opined that better surveillance and liaison between forces across the country and, particularly, across borders was helping to tackle this more effectively.

Councillor Mrs Michael praised officers for their swiftness in responding to an attempted burglary in her ward recently but enquired as to whether such rapidity of response would still be there once the neighbourhood team has vacated the police station in Broad Street. Sgt Ellis opined that he believed all 999 emergency calls would still get a quick response, regardless of location but, he added, he believed there was a strong business case to keep the neighbourhood policing team in Chesham after 2019.

Councillor Wilson praised Sgt Ellis for his candour and asked how he would feel about Members contacting him directly about local crime and disorder matters. Sgt Ellis responded by saying that he would be happy to facilitate this but could not guarantee a swift reply due to work patterns and other priorities. Councillor Hudson then reminded the Committee that issues could also be fed through to the Community Safety Partnership at Chiltern District Council.

Finally, Councillor Mrs Juett asked that her thanks be passed onto Sgt Ellis' officers who had responded admirably to a recent issue in her ward. Sgt Ellis replied he would be pleased to do so and stated he welcomed all feedback, whether it was positive or negative.

There being no further questions, the Chairman thanked Sgt Ellis for his attendance and stated that he looked forward to his future presentations to this Committee.

58. **CESHAM AND DISTRICT TRANSPORT USERS' GROUP**

Members received the Minutes of the meeting of the Chesham and District Transport Users' Group held on the 17th February 2015.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Minutes be noted.

59. **DEVOLVED SERVICES UPDATE**

The Committee received an update on the current Devolved Services activities.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted.

Councillor Mrs Michael enquired as to whether potholes reported by Council officers to the County Council speeded up the process of repair. The Town Clerk replied that, regrettably, it did not appear so.

60. **CALENDAR OF MEETINGS**

The Committee received a proposed calendar of meetings for the administrative year 2015/16 along with the proposal to move the Annual Meeting of the Council from the original proposed date of the 11th May to the 18th May 2015 to allow greater time for necessary administration after the election on the 7th May.

These proposals were agreed and it was

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND

1. That the calendar of meetings for 2015/16 be noted and adopted.
2. That the 2015/16 Annual Meeting of the Council be rescheduled for Monday 18th May 2015.
3. That the Clerk be delegated to submit any planning comments from ward Members directly to Chiltern District Council in May and these be agreed as the comments of the Council.

61. **SUPPORT FOR TOWN PARTNERS**

The Committee discussed the report, instigated by the Town Mayor, in respect to how the Council could assist the Town Partners tackle falling membership.

Councillor Wilson suggested that, in his capacity as a member of the Chesham Action Partnership, many town partners had informed him that it was more important to have active members than financial support in many cases. Councillor Spruytenburg concurred with this view in his capacity as a Trustee at the Chesham Museum.

Councillor Mrs Juett noted that Chiltern District Council was offering rewards for young people to become involved with volunteering and suggesting this may be an approach the Council could follow. However Councillor Yerrell argued that such an incentive was unlikely to result in a long-term commitment and would not necessarily result in greater sustainability for local groups in town. It was accepted that the Council could not do a great deal more than it was currently doing through the Town Partners' Scheme, save for greater publicity of volunteer groups on a periodic basis. Councillor Wilson added that he was aware that other town and parish councils had expressed admiration for Chesham's volunteer structure and the town had a proud record in this respect. He opined that it was often the case that, rather than people not wanting to help organisations in their spare time, it was more that they did not know how to go about this. In which case, he suggested, the Council should look at a mechanism at informing both new residents and those in retirement of volunteering opportunities.

Councillor Mrs Cherrill said that it was important Members should show support for community groups and, as a member of the Chesham Town Twinning Association, reported that the Association's Chairman had expressed disappointment that so few Members had taken the time to reply to the Association's previous invitations to attend twinning events. She asked specifically if Members could respond to the latest invitation, if only to send apologies.

It was

RESOLVED

that the Report be noted and the Council continue to offer support and publicity to local community groups where possible.

62. **PRESS AND PUBLIC ATTENDANCE AT COUNCIL AND COMMITTEE MEETINGS**

The Committee considered the implications of the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 for the Council's meetings and, particularly, the implications of these new

regulations increasing the right of the public to film, record and report on proceedings of council meetings.

Members expressed reservations about some of the new regulations but accepted that the Council was required to adhere to the legislation. In respect to the right to film and record meetings without a member of public being present, it was agreed that the proposed draft policy be amended to stress that Council officers had the right to turn off or remove unattended recording equipment during the times when the public and press had been excluded, without liability.

As this was new legislation, the Committee also agreed with Councillor Mrs Michael's suggestion that the policy be also amended to state that it will be reviewed in one year as opposed to four years.

It was

RESOLVED

that the draft 'Filming, Recording and Reporting on Council Meetings' Policy be adopted subject to the amendments agreed at the meeting being incorporated and the policy being within the framework of the legislation.

63. **LOCAL COUNCIL TRANSPARENCY CODE AND THE OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014**

Further recent government legislation and codes of practice emanating from the Department of Communities and Local Government was discussed by the Committee.

Members firstly considered the Local Transparency Code 2014. It was noted that this was a 'Code of Recommended Practice' only and is not enforceable by regulation. The Finance and Contracts Manager explained that, while it would provide the public with a lot of detail, its implementation would be extremely time-consuming for officers. Moreover, recommendations for disclosure of much of the suggested information, such as publication of expenditure over £500 and general information on assets and salaries is already published by the Council, albeit not to the detailed level mentioned in the 'Code'. Additionally the Finance and Contracts Manager highlighted that the Council also has its own robust Standing Orders and Financial Regulations governing contracts for goods and materials.

Accordingly the Committee agreed that the Council should not currently adopt the code but that the position be considered in 12 months' time as part of the annual policy review.

Members then discussed the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014. It was explained that the new rules require the recording of certain decisions taken by officers acting under powers delegated to them by the Council. This would particularly affect the Town Clerk, who has delegated authority under the Council's Standing Orders. The requirement to record, covers decisions taken by officers whilst acting under a specific, express authorisation and also under a general authorisation when taking decisions in respect to: granting a permission or licence; decisions that affect the rights of an individual and awarding a contract or incur expenditure which, in either case, 'materially affects the Council's financial position'.

In respect to the latter, officers emphasised that the value that is deemed to materially affect the Council had not been specified, and government guidance stated that 'the values will vary according to the relevant Council'. Accordingly the Finance and Contracts Manager proposed that a value of £8,000 would be appropriate for this Council, being around 1% of the Council's precept.

Members agreed that this appeared a reasonable figure and it was therefore

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee does not currently adopt The Local Government Transparency Code, but that the position be reconsidered in 12 months' time.
2. That a value of £8,000 be set as the disclosure limit under The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014.

64. **ANNUAL REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

Members considered the report on the annual review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations.

In light of the previous agenda item in respect to The Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014 pertaining to Council meetings, it was

RESOLVED

that the Council's Standing Orders be amended to remove Standing Order 38 (c) which currently forbids the recording or photographing of a Council meeting without the express approval of the Council.

65. **FINANCIAL REPORT TO 28TH FEBRUARY 2015**

The Financial Report for eleven months to 28th February 2015 was presented.

The Finance and Contracts Manager reported that the revised year end deficit was forecast to show an improvement against the original budget of around £30,000. Members asked for their appreciation to be passed onto staff for achieving savings in a difficult climate for local authorities.

It was also noted emergency works had been required to replace the Skottowes Pond pump and it was agreed that this cost be charged to the Renewals and Repairs budget.

It was

RESOLVED

1. That the Financial Report be noted.
2. That action to replace the pump in Skottowes Pond be ratified and charged to the Renewals and Repairs budget.

66. **INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT**

The Committee considered the latest Internal Auditor's report.

Having noted no major issues had been identified which warranted formal comment, it was

RESOLVED

that the Internal Audit report be noted.

67. **ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY**

The Finance and Contracts Manager presented his report on the Investment Strategy and reminded the Committee that this was required to be undertaken annually.

No major issues were raised and it was

RESOLVED

that the current Investment Strategy be continued and the Finance Working Group be delegated to deal with any future reviews and investment issues, including the receiving of any company presentations.

68. **EXCLUSION OF THE 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.

69. **RENEWAL OF COUNCIL'S INSURANCE POLICIES**

Members were referred to a detailed copy of the Council's current insurance cover included within the report. The Finance and Contracts Manager advised the Committee that the Council's currently contracted insurance company had advised that it could not honour its existing five year policy due to the Council's claims history and therefore a new policy was required to cover this authority from the 1st April 2015.

The Finance and Contracts Manager presented three separate quotations to the Committee in accordance with the Council's Financial Regulations. He highlighted that if Members were prepared to separate the general insurance policy from the motor vehicle insurance policy, its annual premium would actually be less than it was currently paying.

Following confirmation that all three insurance companies who had submitted quotations were reputable and well-known in the town and parish council sector, it was

RESOLVED

that, subject to any further necessary negotiation undertaken by the Town Clerk in liaison with the Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee with the insurance companies, it be agreed to enter into a three year contract with AON Ltd for general insurance cover and WPS Ltd for motor vehicle insurance at the cost presented to this Committee.

70. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 9.50pm.

CHAIRMAN