

## CHESHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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

held on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> September 2006

**PRESENT** Councillor V.M. Abraham, Vice Chairman (presiding)

|            |                   |            |                        |
|------------|-------------------|------------|------------------------|
| Councillor | M. Bignell        | Councillor | C.H. Spruytenburg      |
| "          | M. Fayyaz         | "          | Mrs P.R. Wilkinson MBE |
| "          | Mrs J.E. Franks   | "          | P. Woodburn            |
| "          | Mrs P.R. Lindsley | "          | P.W. Yerrell           |
| "          | Mrs M. Molesworth |            |                        |

#### In Attendance

Councillors A.K. Bacon, E.L. Bamford, M.Z. Bhatti, Mrs J.C. Fulford and Mrs A.M. Pirouet.

Mr J. Collings, Auditor, RSM Robson Rhodes

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

An apology for absence was received from Councillor N.L. Brown

#### 12. CHAIRMAN'S WELCOME

Councillor Abraham formally welcomed Councillor Mrs Franks to her first meeting following the recent by-election held to fill the St Mary's ward vacancy.

#### 13. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Yerrell declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 4 as a Trustee of the Little Theatre by the Park.

Councillors Mrs Lindsley and Mrs Wilkinson declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 8 in respect of conferences.

Councillor Bacon declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 9 – Superannuation, in light of his wife's employment with Buckinghamshire County Council. (*Councillor Bacon advised that his interest referred only to the second part of the report's recommendations*).

Councillor Bignell declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 9 – Superannuation, in light of his employment with Buckinghamshire County Council.

Councillor Abraham declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 – Cemetery Lodge, as a £1 shareholder in Paradigm Housing.

Councillor Mrs Molesworth declared a personal interest in Agenda Item 10 – Cemetery Lodge, as a member of the Friends of Chesham Cemetery.

14. **MINUTES**

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2006 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a true record.

*Councillor M.Z. Bhatti arrived at the meeting at 7.37pm*

*Councillor M. Fayyaz arrived at the meeting at 7.40pm*

15. **REPORT BY EXTERNAL AUDITORS**

Mr Justin Collings, auditor at RSM Robson Rhodes, presented to the Committee the draft audit of accounts 2005/06 and communication of audit matters with those charged with governance. He explained that the change in government legislation meant that auditors were now obliged both to undertake corporate governance reviews and to explain their findings directly to Councils.

In respect to this Council, he advised that the audit was not yet finalised but as there were no unqualified risks found among the Council's operations, he fully expected it to be signed off by the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2006, along with the auditor's letter of representation, as required by law.

The auditor's report alluded to a budget underspend of £181,000 but Mr Collings informed the Committee that he had been subsequently informed by officers that this included schemes in the Renewals and Repairs programme that were not completed in 2005/06 and had slipped to 2006/07. He therefore accepted that the net underspend of £62,000 (excluding the Renewals and Repairs Programme and other carry over items) for 2005/06 had been correctly reported to the Policy and Resources Committee of the 8<sup>th</sup> May 2006.

Members raised a slight concern as to the time it had taken for the report to be received and the consequential short period for consultation. However it was accepted that this was the first year of the new requirements and acknowledged that the system was likely to be less slow in subsequent years.

It was agreed that Members would reflect on the report and raise any issues that required clarification at a later date. The Chairman thanked Mr Collings for his attendance and it was

**RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

that the report be noted and that the auditor's letter of representation be approved

16. **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN**

In accordance with Standing Order No. 27, it was proposed by Councillor Spruytenburg, seconded by Councillor Mrs Lindsley and agreed that the Vice-Chairman, Councillor Abraham, be elected Chairman for the remainder of the administrative year.

It was further proposed by Councillor Mrs Lindsley, seconded by Councillor Mrs Molesworth and agreed that Councillor Spruytenburg be elected as Vice-Chairman for the remainder of the administrative year.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that Councillor V.M. Abraham serve as Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee and Councillor C.H. Spruytenburg serve as Vice-Chairman of the Policy and Resources Committee until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.

17. **INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF MEMBERS' ALLOWANCE PANEL**

The Committee considered its position on the matter of allowances for 2007/08 and whether it wished to make any recommendations to the District Council's Members' Allowances Panel.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Council do not recommend claiming allowances or travel allowances to Council Meetings, save for the reclaiming of parking fees on authorised business.

18. **LITTLE CHALFONT RAIL SERVICE**

The Committee was asked to consider whether it wished to make representations to Chiltern Railways on the decision to terminate the 7.39am weekday service

from Little Chalfont to London. It was noted that Amersham Town Council was of the view that this termination would encourage commuters from Chesham to drive to Amersham to catch the 7.52am service thus having a detrimental effect upon the traffic between the two towns.

Members agreed that any cancellation of peak train times in the immediate environs should be opposed due to the negative effect upon road traffic and consequential effect on the environment and it was

**RESOLVED**

that the Committee make representation to Chiltern Railways requesting the restoration of the 7.39am service from Little Chalfont to London.

19. **AUTUMN CONFERENCES AND COURSES**

The Committee agreed upon the importance of both officers and Members attending conferences and courses to increase their knowledge on changes in first tier government and to hear examples of good practice.

After being apprised of the respective agendas, it was

**RESOLVED**

1. That Councillor Mrs. Lindsley and the Town Clerk be authorised to attend the National Association of Local Councils conference on the 22-24 September 2006.
2. That the Policy and Projects Officer be authorised to attend the Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC) conference on 20-22 October 2006.
3. That the Town Clerk and Policy and Projects Officer be authorised to attend the Berkshire and Buckinghamshire SLCC one-day conference on the 28<sup>th</sup> September 2006.

20. **SUPERANNUATION**

Members were requested to consider the Council's current contributions to the Local Government Pension Scheme and to consider whether they wished to respond to the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation paper.

The Committee was advised by the Finance and Contracts Manager that the Council can elect not to offer the Local Government Pension Scheme to any current or future employee but noted that, if the Committee took this decision, it would need to offer some alternative scheme. It was further noted that the recent

and future reviews mean the Local Government Pension Scheme should become more affordable to local councils with lower employers' contribution rates. The Finance and Contracts manager reported that currently the employees contribute 6% to the scheme.

While agreeing that the employers' contributions needed to be re-assessed on a regular basis, the Committee did not feel it appropriate to recommend any changes at the current time.

It was

**RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND**

1. That the Council continue to offer all employees the opportunity of joining the Local Government Pension Scheme.
2. Do not respond to the superannuation consultation paper produced by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

*Councillor Abraham vacated the Chair for the following agenda item.*

21. **CEMETERY LODGE**

The Committee considered correspondence received from Paradigm Housing in respect of 185 Bellingdon Road, one of the two Cemetery Lodges owned by the Council but on lease to Paradigm Housing to rent out. The correspondence highlighted the fact that a number of expensive repairs were required to be undertaken before the property could be re-let. The necessity of the repairs was confirmed by Councillor Bamford who advised that she had visited the property and opined that, in her professional view, the estimates were on the conservative side.

Paradigm Housing expressed its intention to facilitate these repairs but, in order to ensure a reasonable pay-back time on these through rental received, was requesting that the Committee agree to extend its leasing contracts from six months to five years. In light of this request, officers were seeking Members' views on whether it wished now either to sell the Lodges or consider converting them for community use.

The Committee was of the view that it did not want to either sell or convert the properties and that, in light of the cost of the repairs, Paradigm Housing's request was reasonable.

Accordingly it was

**RESOLVED**

that the contracts with Paradigm Housing for the leasing of the Cemetery Lodges be extended from six months to five years.  
*Councillor Abraham returned to the Chair for the remainder of the meeting.*

22. **FINANCIAL REPORT FOR FIVE MONTHS TO 31<sup>ST</sup> AUGUST 2006**

The Financial Report for five months to 31<sup>st</sup> August 2006 was presented.

It was

**RESOLVED**

that the Report be noted.

23. **CHRISTMAS DAY PARTY FOR OLDER PEOPLE**

The current position in regard to the annual Christmas Day party was discussed by Members. It was noted that a cook had been confirmed but the Mayor had received very few offers of help, save for one volunteer. The need for a rapid decision on this year's party was emphasised since it was usually around the end of September that invitations were despatched.

The Committee was of the view that the party should continue. It was accepted that the Town Hall staff should not be burdened with responsibility of the administration of the event except for receiving phone-calls from interested parties. It was agreed that the best way forward would be for a small group of Members to co-ordinate the administration of the event and

**RESOLVED**

that Councillors Bacon, Fayyaz, Mrs Pirouet and Spruytenburg be delegated to undertake the co-ordination of the 2006 Christmas Day Party for older people.

24. **INFORMATION ITEMS**

The item presented on Information Sheet No. 9 was received and noted.

A brief discussion upon the Code of Conduct ensued and it was agreed that the recommendation that Council Members receive further training on this matter be progressed.

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

It was

**RESOLVED**

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

26. **OUTSTANDING DEBTS**

The Committee was advised of the outstanding debts owed to the Council. It was noted that, while the few outstanding debts were mostly insignificant in financial terms, the football pitch hire fees owed by one football club was of concern. Members accepted that it was difficult to get sports clubs to pay all fees in advance but felt that this debt was unacceptably large. When advised by the Finance and Contracts Manager that the club appeared to have erected the Council's goalposts without permission for three pre-season friendlies, it was agreed that remedial action was urgently required

Accordingly, it was

**RESOLVED**

that the locks be changed at Codmore Pavilion and the named club be prevented from using the Council's pitches unless payment was forthcoming immediately for the three pre-season friendlies and in advance for future home matches.

27. **CEMETERY CHAPEL**

Members considered the current position in regard to the Cemetery Chapel repairs. It was noted that, due to the unforeseen poor state of the wooden floor in the vestry, the whole floor had to be replaced.

It was

**RESOLVED**

1. That the report be noted with the additional costs to be funded from the Renewal and Repairs Fund.
2. To earmark the stage two repairs within the 2008/9 Renewal and Repairs programme subject to there being sufficient funds available.

28. **CLOSE OF MEETING**

The meeting closed at 8.50pm.

CHAIRMAN

*Publication date: 22.9. 2006*