

OPEN SESSION: There was one member of the public present who did not wish to speak.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Wednesday 25th October 2006 at 7.00pm

PRESENT: Cllr D E Cracknell (Town Mayor)
Cllr N J Chard
Cllr P Chambers
Cllr N R G Clarke
Cllr D R Cole
Cllr N W Light
Cllr W S Rippon-Swaine
Cllr Colonel T Scriven
Cllr B H Terry
Cllr M H Thierry

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T R Simpson, Town Clerk
Mrs J L Stannard, Deputy Town Clerk

C/4606

ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Mrs Charlton, Cllr M F Daly and Cllr L C Ford and Cllr Mrs V A Sullivan.

C/4607

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Cracknell and Thierry declared personal interests as members of the District Council's Town Centre Steering Group.

C/4608

BRITISH LIVER TRUST

Members received a presentation from Caroline Dufall of the British Liver Trust, a national charity with its head office based in Ringwood, employing 14 staff.

She explained that there were over 100 forms of liver disease and that only three of these were related to alcohol. However, people suffering from the disease also suffered from the stigma attached to the disease relating to alcohol. There are two million people in the UK who have been diagnosed with the disease and it is recognised by the British Medical Council as being one of the five most serious problems facing the UK's health.

The British Liver Trust is the only charity in the country to support all forms of liver disease. It funds information and research programmes throughout the UK, produces a variety of publications, offers a medical helpline and operates a website, which attracted 750,000 visitors last year. It also has an important role to play in lobbying government about the disease.

The charity currently raises money through companies, charitable trusts and foundations, the Department of Health and individuals. However, Ms Dufall explained that it is now looking to launch a community fundraising programme in the local area to try to get people behind the charity. They hope to raise awareness of the charity's existence by establish fundraising groups, encouraging volunteers to help in the office and getting local organisations involved.

The Mayor thanked Ms Dufall for the very helpful and informative presentation, which he was sure had enlightened members about the Trust's work.

C/4609

MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Meeting held on 27th September 2006, having been circulated, were approved and signed as a correct record.

C/4610

COMMUNICATIONS TO BE RECEIVED

The Mayor reported the following:

- 1) Letter from Tenovus thanking the Town Council and the Festival Committee for its donation of £1000 enabling the charity to continue with valuable research programmes.
- 2) Letter from Ringwood Youth Cancer Trust thanking the Town Council and Festival Committee for its donation of £1000 enabling the charity to welcome more cancer patients for a break away from treatments.
- 3) Letter from New Forest Disability Information Service thanking the Council for its grant of £100 enabling the continuation of the service.
- 4) Newspaper article about the success of Ringwood Bowls Club in retaining the New Forest League title.

C/4611

COUNCIL MINUTES

Cllr Thierry referred to a recent exchange of emails between a member and the Town Clerk, which sought the inclusion of additional material in the minutes of a meeting. He felt that it was totally unacceptable for a member to seek to compromise the judgement of the Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk in such a way and that this action brought into question their impartiality and put them in a difficult position. He said that the situation was compounded by an attempt to involve another member and have that member's comments included in the minutes.

Cllr Thierry reminded members that they were all governed by the Code of Conduct for local authorities and stated that the first general obligation was that members must not do anything which compromises, or is likely to compromise, the impartiality of those who work for or on behalf of the local authority. He believed that this action could be a breach of the Code of Conduct.

He said that it was an established practice that any necessary alterations be made when the minutes are presented at Full Council. He therefore made the following proposals:

Proposal One – That statements issued or read by a councillor as part of a Full Council meeting or Committee meeting not be included in the minutes of that meeting either as an appendix or in full transcript. And that any statement made, issued or read be only included as part of the normal reporting procedure in a brief and precise form.

Proposal Two – That all draft minutes of the Full Council, Committees and Working Parties be submitted to the chairman only for matters of accuracy and detail.

Cllr Thierry explained that this proposal would ensure that minutes were not altered before being presented at Full Council for acceptance. Cllr Colonel Scriven felt that minutes should not be placed on the Council's website before they had been accepted by Full Council. Cllr

Chambers said that all members have their own recollections of meetings and therefore all members should be supplied with draft minutes prior to Full Council.

Proposal Three – That this Council fully supports the impartiality and high integrity of the Clerk to the Council and the Deputy Clerk to the Council, and deplore the action of any person to bring that impartiality and high integrity into question.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That statements issued or read by a councillor as part of a Full Council meeting or Committee meeting not be included in the minutes of that meeting either as an appendix or in full transcript. And that any statement made, issued or read be only included as part of the normal reporting procedure in a brief and precise form.
- 2) That all draft minutes of the Full Council, Committees and Working Parties be submitted to the chairman only for matters of accuracy and detail.
- 3) That this Council fully supports the impartiality and high integrity of the Clerk to the Council and the Deputy Clerk to the Council, and deplore the action of any person to bring that impartiality and high integrity into question.

C/4612

QUESTIONS OF THE MAYOR

Cllr Colonel Scriven said that he had been on a steep learning curve in his 15 weeks as a Councillor, particularly as he had received no induction. He therefore asked the Mayor to request the Town Clerk to design an induction programme for any new Councillors that are elected in May.

The Mayor replied that, after the last elections, members were offered induction training and training that was required was given. As the Council had agreed to apply for Quality Council status, it would need to show that training was provided for members and the Town Clerk had previously indicated that there would be a need to increase the members' training budget. The Mayor asked the Town Clerk to report on member training to Policy & Finance Committee in December.

Cllr Colonel Scriven asked the Mayor if he would consider requesting the relevant Committee to provide some form of shelter for people waiting at the taxi rank in Meeting House Lane.

The Mayor agreed that some form of shelter should be provided and hoped that this could be achieved through a funding partnership with taxi proprietors. He said that he would arrange for this issue to be considered at a meeting the next day with the District and County Councils, when transportation issues would be discussed. He added that this issue had also been raised though the Love it, Hate it, I Wish questionnaires and would therefore be discussed by the Transport and Accessibility Focus Group at its next meeting

Cllr Colonel Scriven asked if the Mayor would convene a working group to study the soon to be published Government White Paper on Local Government and the Lyon Report, as these reports were likely to change the balance of power between District and Town and Parish Councils.

The Mayor replied that reports would be presented to the Policy and Finance Committee for comment at the appropriate time and reminded members that, irrespective of whether or not they were on a particular committee, they had the right to attend and, with the Chairman's consent, take part in any debate. He also informed members that two national conferences on reorganisation would be held in London in November and February and asked if any members wished to attend. Cllr Clarke expressed an interest and it was agreed to include an item on the agenda for the next Policy and Finance Committee to approve his attendance.

Cllr Colonel Scriven asked if the Mayor would join him in condemning the District Council's process over the last few years as scandalous in respect of the delay in refurbishment of the toilets.

The Mayor replied that he felt every person in the room would wish to see an improvement in the toilet facilities without further delay. He said that he had initially welcomed the planned refurbishment but was now concerned that, if they were refurbished, the town may never get new toilet facilities. He therefore felt that the District Council should look at the possibility of constructing brand new toilets on a new site close to the location of the existing toilets using a design already approved by the District Council for rolling out across the District. Because the design was in place, the issue could be dealt with very quickly and he would be writing to the District Council to make this suggestion.

Cllr Colonel Scriven was concerned about the cost of the Healthcheck to Council Tax payers. He asked 1) why the Council had not bid for a grant when it first embarked on the project, 2) why residents had not been consulted regarding this expenditure, 3) why a private firm had been employed to distribute the questionnaires leading to a litigation process, 4) how many questionnaires had been completed, 5) when an interim report would be produced, 6) when the project would cease and how much it would cost and 7) what projects would not be funded if a Town Plan was not produced.

The Mayor replied:

- 1) The government had never intended to give grant aid to towns of Ringwood's size, but that a grant of £2,000 had been obtained from the District Council towards printing and distribution costs.
- 2) He said that councillors were democratically elected to make decisions for the benefit of the town and could not take every decision by referendum.
- 3) There were not enough volunteers to ensure delivery of 10,000 leaflets and, in addition, the cost of organising any volunteers would need to be taken into account. He reported that the cost of litigation balanced against the staff costs did not make it worthwhile to pursue this avenue.
- 4) The Mayor did not have the figures available but would ensure that the information was sent to all members for information.
- 5) The Focus Groups and the Town Plan Partnership Steering Group were moving the project forward. A great deal of progress had been made and copies of information and data which had been submitted to the Partnership Steering Group earlier in the week would be circulated to all members.
- 6) The project was always expected to last about two years and costs were within budgets approved by the Council. The final budget would depend on the extent of the consultation, but total expenditure by the end of the financial year was expected to be well within target at approximately £30,000.
- 7) One of the criteria for Quality Council accreditation is to have prepared a Town Plan. The Town Clerk had attended a conference last week when the general view expounded was that Councils that had achieved Quality Status and produced a Town Plan would be more likely to receive additional functions and funding than those who had not.

Cllr Colonel Scriven asked why the Council was spending money on obtaining planning permission for an extension of Greenways and forecasting a budget of £50,000 to achieve this, whilst there was a possibility that new Council offices may be incorporated in the proposals for the south west corner of the Furlong.

The Mayor explained that there was no certainty that the Council would move from Greenways and the District Council was in no position to force a move or to offer any alternative at present. He said that, unlike other councils, the Council had no real source of income other than charges for services and rental of the first floor offices at Greenways.

There was an opportunity to increase that revenue, and also increase the capital value of the building by constructing an additional rear extension, which would create two separate office suites. Initial estimates suggested that additional income from letting would exceed the cost of servicing any loans. Providing the planning application was successful, the Council would be able to undertake a detailed costs analysis to be considered by Policy & Finance Committee and works would only proceed if there was a clear financial benefit to the Council. Even if the work was not carried out, the value of Greenways with the planning consent would increase by rather more than the costs incurred in obtaining planning permission.

Cllr Colonel Scriven said that he had been approached by a gentleman that morning who informed him that children had been running riot in a town centre shop and had been giving shop assistants abuse. He had also spoken to the Furlong Centre Manager who confirmed that there were many such problems in the town, including under age drinking and antisocial behaviour. The Furlong Centre Manager had volunteered to share her office with the Police, so that a central police presence could be provided, as discussed at the previous Council meeting with Chief Superintendent Wakefield. He asked for some indication of the process to be followed by the Council to achieve this and an indication of a time projection for its opening.

The Mayor agreed that there would be benefits in the public being able to report police issues to a building in the town centre and asked that this information be forwarded to Chief Superintendent Wakefield for consideration.

Cllr Colonel Scriven asked about details of criminal damage incidents against council property that had been released by the District Council under a confidential caveat. He asked 1) why there was a caveat on such statistics, 2) whether the Town Council reported such incidents to the Police and 3) what the Town Council intended to do about reducing such statistics in the future.

The Mayor replied:

- 1) The District Council had asked for the information to be confidential as it had not obtained permission from all parishes for the information to be released.
- 2) Every incident of vandalism or antisocial behaviour reported by the public or the Council's employees is reported to the Police, and it was not unusual for a relatively straight forward report of an incident to take 20 minutes for the oral report to be filed. A logging system had been introduced by the Town Clerk for all incidents and these reports were sent electronically to the County Council's Community Support Officers and Ringwood Police Station.
- 3) The Council aims to prevent damage before it occurs and action has been taken to remove "hiding places" from all open spaces that could conceal unwanted behaviour. A system had also been set up to identify the exact cost of vandalism to the Council and this would help produce more accurate information for members and, where appropriate, allow the Council to take action to minimise its costs. The Mayor was also aware that Cllr Colonel Scriven had agreed to lead a project group to look at this issue so that the Town Plan could include some data and proposals to mitigate the effects of crime after further consultation with the public.

Cllr Colonel Scriven referred to the Mayor's recent letter to the Forest Journal and asked if the Mayor would agree that he would wish councillors to bring motions before the Council without fear of abuse.

The Mayor agreed that individual members had every right to bring motions before the Council and said that he intended to enforce Standing Orders more rigidly in future.

Cllr Colonel Scriven was concerned that recommendations relating to the south west corner of the Furlong from the Planning, Town and Environment Committee had been rescinded by the Policy and Finance Committee. He asked 1) why the elected councillors on the Town Plan

and Environment Committee should not be involved in the project and 2) why residents were not being asked what they would prefer. He also asked the Mayor to accept his resignation with immediate effect from the Planning, Town and Environment Committee.

The Mayor replied that the District Council owns the land and is the planning authority and the Town Council has no authority over how the District Council makes decisions. He added that the Town Centre Steering Group was appointed by the District Council as an advisory body and had no decision making powers. In response to Cllr Colonel Scriven's questions, he replied:

- 1) The Town Council had been specifically invited to appoint one member to attend meetings of the Steering Group and speak at those meeting. However, the District Council's policy on public participation allowed for any members of the public or indeed Town Councillors, to attend and speak at these meetings, which would in future be held in Ringwood. He said that the Policy and Finance Committee was being pragmatic as it was clear that it would not be possible to persuade the District Council's majority party to change its decision – it was therefore better to take what was on offer and take advantage of the public participation policy.
- 2) The Town Clerk had attended the last meeting of the Steering Group and had made it clear that the Town Council reserved the absolute right to carry out such consultations as it felt appropriate when the Consultants' reports were available. In doing that consultation the Town Council would make sure that the people of Ringwood were provided with the advantages and disadvantages of every option investigated. This meant that the public would be able to comment not only on the three options investigated by the District Council but also any additional options the Town Council may decide to add.

The Mayor concluded by hoping that Cllr Colonel Scriven would reconsider his resignation from the Planning, Town and Environment Committee and work with him and other members for the benefit of the people of the town.

C/4613

REPORTS FROM COUNTY AND DISTRICT COUNCILLORS

County Councillor N Clarke submitted a report (*Annex 'A'*), which was circulated to members.

District Councillor C Treleaven submitted a report (*Annex 'B'*), which was circulated to members.

C/4614

RECREATION, LEISURE & OPEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Cllr Light presented the Minutes of the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee held on 4th October 2006.

OS/48014 – it was noted that this should read Police Community Support Officers, not Safety Officers.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee held on 4th October 2006, with the amendment to OS/48014, be received.

C/4615

PLANNING, TOWN & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Cllr Clarke presented the minutes of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee held on 13th October 2006.

P/4378 – Cllr Light said that the Council had been informed by Chief Superintendent Wakefield that there would be 30 PCSOs in the New Forest area. However, Cllr Colonel Scriven had told the Planning, Town & Environment Committee that there would be 50. He asked if there would be any additional cost to the Council and was informed that this would not affect the cost to the Council.

P/4386 – Cllr Thierry believed that Annex E should not now be attached as a result of the resolution made at C/4611. However, the Town Clerk explained that these minutes would be approved at the next meeting of the Committee and a decision could be taken on this matter at that meeting.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Planning, Town & Environment Committee held on 13th October 2006 be received.

C/4616 POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Cllr Rippon-Swaine presented the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee held on 18th October 2006.

F/3999 – Cllr Thierry was concerned about escalating costs of consultation and said that, including monies being spent by the District Council, an estimated £83,000 would be spent on consultants and collecting information over a two year period. His main concern was that nothing new would be learnt as a result. He asked for an interim report to be produced on the Town Plan so that members could see what was being achieved and the Council could be accountable for this project.

Cllr Terry, Chairman of the Town Plan Coordinating Committee said that progress was being made. He reported that the first nine months had been taken up with the essential collection of information for the Healthcheck. However members would now begin to see the results of work carried out by the Focus Groups and there would be further consultation with the public. A meeting of the Town Plan Coordinating Committee would take place on 6th November and the papers would be circulated to all members.

The Town Clerk added that the Partnership Steering Group had that week agreed a programme of work, which included two or three additional consultation exercises. It was also hoped to use a vacant shop in the town in order to obtain views of residents regarding employment issues affecting the town.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee held on 18th October 2006 be received and the recommendations at F/3995 be adopted.

C/4617 FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

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| Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces | 7.00 p.m. | Wednesday 1 st November |
| Town Plan Coordinating | 4.00 p.m. | Monday 6 th November |
| Planning, Town & Environment | 2.05 p.m. | Friday 10 th November |
| Policy & Finance | 7.00 p.m. | Wednesday 22 nd November |
| FULL COUNCIL | 7.00 p.m. | Wednesday 29 th November |

There being no further business, the Mayor closed the meeting at 8.52pm.