

OPEN SESSION: There were no members of the public present.

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF RINGWOOD TOWN COUNCIL

Held on Wednesday 6th September 2006 at 6.30pm

PRESENT: Cllr D E Cracknell (Town Mayor)
Cllr N J Chard
Cllr P Chambers
Cllr D R Cole
Cllr M F Daly
Cllr L C Ford
Cllr N W Light
Cllr W S Rippon-Swaine
Cllr T G Scriven
Cllr Mrs V A Sullivan
Cllr B H Terry
Cllr M H Thierry

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr T R Simpson, Town Clerk
Mrs J Stannard, Deputy Town Clerk
Mrs L A Wickens, P A to the Town Clerk

C/4590 ABSENCE

Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Mrs B Charlton and Cllr N R G Clarke.

C/4591 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Ford and Cllr Cracknell declared personal interests, in that they were members of New Forest District Council, members of the Ringwood Town Centre Steering Group and Town Council representatives on the Board of the Forest Forge Theatre Company.

Cllr Thierry declared a personal interest as a member of New Forest District Council and Portfolio Holder for the Environment.

Cllr Mrs Sullivan declared a personal interest as a voluntary worker at the Health Centre and having a dentist in the family.

C/4592 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Meeting held on 26th July 2006, having been circulated, were approved and signed as a correct record.

C/4593 MOTIONS PROPOSED BY CLLR SCRIVEN

Cllr Scriven addressed the meeting and explained that the motions should not be seen as criticism of what has been achieved by the Council over the past years, but as a way of moving forward with changing times to meet the community's needs.

The Mayor called the motions out by number, but received no seconder for any of the motions.

Cllr Chambers arrived at 6.42pm.

On recognising that the motions should have been read out in full, it was agreed to re-put the motions to the meeting.

MOTION ONE

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That the Ringwood Town Council reaffirm its commitment to become a Quality Council.

Cllr Scriven explained that the quality parish and town council scheme is central to ensuring such councils are at the heart of local community democracy and, if councils do not embrace this change, modernise and develop, they may find themselves losing out to other bodies in a fast changing world.

Cllr Light said that the Council had already agreed that a process be put in place in order for the Council to apply for Quality Council accreditation immediately after the 2007 elections, and therefore this motion was not necessary.

Cllr Thierry said that the motion presupposed that the Council was not already a quality council. He believed that, although the Council did not have quality status, it was a top quality council with quality members and officers.

Cllr Thierry, seconded by Cllr Rippon-Swaine moved an amendment to the motion:

That Ringwood Town Council reaffirm its commitment to continue being a Quality Council, recognises the excellent, quality service given to the Town of Ringwood by Officers and Councillors, both current and past.

That at the appropriate time Ringwood Town Council seeks confirmation of that quality service through the Quality Council Status Scheme.

On being put to the meeting, the amendment was declared carried and became the substantive motion, which replaced the original motion.

Cllr Thierry, seconded by Cllr Rippon-Swaine, then moved the substantive motion:

That Ringwood Town Council reaffirm its commitment to continue being a Quality Council, recognises the excellent, quality service given to the Town of Ringwood by Officers and Councillors, both current and past.

That at the appropriate time Ringwood Town Council seeks confirmation of that quality service through the Quality Council Status Scheme.

On being put to the meeting, the substantive motion was declared carried.

MOTION TWO

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

The Council having reaffirmed its commitment to becoming a quality council should now task the Policy and Finance Committee with formulating a plan of action with clear time lines and provision of suitable recommendations to the Council to achieve quality council status.

Cllr Scriven explained that there was a need to produce a mechanism to achieve Quality Council status between now and the elections in May 2007, so that the Council would be ready to apply for accreditation immediately after the elections.

Cllr Thierry said that a mechanism was already in place, which had been agreed by the Council and was included in the 2006/07 work programme. He said that, as the Council did not meet the full electoral mandate as required by the Quality Council rules, it could not apply for accreditation at this stage.

Cllr Scriven maintained that the Policy & Finance Committee needed to look at the checklist and work towards achieving Quality Council status.

Moved by Cllr Scriven, seconded by Cllr Chambers that:

The Council having reaffirmed its commitment to becoming a quality council should now task the Policy and Finance Committee with formulating a plan of action with clear time lines and provision of suitable recommendations to the Council to achieve quality council status.

On being put to the meeting, the motion was declared lost.

MOTION THREE

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That Ringwood Town Council in pursuance of its aspiration to become a quality town council and as a result of the specific and immediate concerns of the community elect a Town Councillor to be specifically responsible for all issues concerning crime and disorder and one Town Councillor to be specifically responsible for all issues concerning health with immediate effect. Such persons on being elected should produce draft Terms of Reference to the Policy and Finance Committee for agreement and subsequent approval by the full Council.

Cllr Scriven explained that his survey of the community in the North Ward had identified significant concerns in respect of crime and the fear of crime and in respect of some elements of health provision, particularly in relation to the provision of dentistry.

He said that the number of reported crimes bears no relation to the number of actual crimes. There were less police on the street and the town was suffering from crime displacement from elsewhere. He was also concerned that the District Council's Crime and Disorder Panel had discussed 20 initiatives in the past year, only a handful of which had been reported to the Town Council. This, in turn, meant that the community was unaware of crime reduction initiatives.

It was noted by other members that the Council had discussed issues relating to crime and disorder in the past and that the local police, including Inspector Hutchings, had attended several meetings. Also, the Portfolio Holder for Crime and Disorder at the District Council had attended meetings to discuss various issues.

Cllr Chard said that members should not be complacent and felt that crime and disorder issues needed to be given further investigation and cost implications considered.

Cllr Chambers was concerned about the diluted police presence in the town. He felt that levels were dangerously close to the minimum, if not below. He said that a more visible police presence would deter crime.

Cllr Thierry said that the Council was being asked to make an appointment with no supportive evidence to enable members to evaluate the value of such an appointment. He said that a detailed breakdown of crime figures for the town was required from the police in order to determine the reality of the situation. He said that the town had not been able to maintain Neighbourhood Watch schemes as there was nothing to report, and he could not recall anyone attending one of his surgeries in the last 6 years to speak about a matter relating to crime and disorder. He was concerned that, if the Council appointed a member to take on the responsibility of crime and disorder, this could suggest that Ringwood is a high crime area and put fear into the hearts and minds of vulnerable people.

Cllr Thierry also said that the motion focussed on only two areas of concern – crime and disorder and health. He asked why it was not proposed to appoint members to be responsible for other areas, such as the environment and sport and leisure.

In summing up, Cllr Scriven said that the reality of his survey was that people do have a fear of crime. There was also a need to ensure improved communication from the District Council in matters relating to crime and disorder. He said that he was offering to take on the role of member responsible for crime and disorder as he had 35 years experience in this area.

Moved by Cllr Scriven, seconded by Cllr Chambers that:

That Ringwood Town Council in pursuance of its aspiration to become a quality town council and as a result of the specific and immediate concerns of the community elect a Town Councillor to be specifically responsible for all issues concerning crime and disorder and one Town Councillor to be specifically responsible for all issues concerning health with immediate effect. Such persons on being elected should produce draft Terms of Reference to the Policy and Finance Committee for agreement and subsequent approval by the full Council.

On being put to the meeting, the motion was declared lost.

MOTION FOUR

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That the Policy and Finance Committee be requested to review all Town Council external representation and make recommendations to the full Council on which representative posts should be continued and to prepare appropriate terms of reference for consideration and agreement taking into account length of tenure.

Cllr Thierry said that representation on outside bodies was reviewed annually and terms of reference were often laid down by the organisations. Members reported back when appropriate and necessary and changes took place as required. He could therefore see no reason for this motion.

Members felt that they needed to fulfil their commitment to outside bodies and, by being appointed for a period, this gave confidence to the organisations and allowed for consistency.

Cllr Scriven said that his research had shown that there had been no official feedback from councillors appointed to outside bodies, with the exception of Cllr Clarke. He was also concerned that, in May 2006, members had been appointed to the Twinning Association, which was actually disbanded in May 2005.

Cllr Cracknell replied that members had been appointed to the Twinning Association in the hope that it could be reformed. Cllr Cole added that he and Cllr Daly had visited Pont Audemer on two occasions, at their own expense, to try and generate interest from the French

side.

Cllr Mrs Sullivan and Cllr Ford had both given regular verbal reports to committee. Indeed, Cllr Mrs Ford said that, due to pressure put on the Forest Forge Theatre Company Board by herself and Cllr Cracknell, the Company was now more involved in Ringwood than ever before.

Moved by Cllr Scriven, seconded by Cllr Chambers that:

That the Policy and Finance Committee be requested to review all Town Council external representation and make recommendations to the full Council on which representative posts should be continued and to prepare appropriate terms of reference for consideration and agreement taking into account length of tenure.

On being put to the meeting, the motion was declared lost.

MOTION FIVE

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That the Council:

- (i) *In view of the commitments given by the District Council in its Statement of Partnership and the County Council in its commitments to work with the Town and Parish Councils, both Principal Councils be asked to clarify their arrangements for involving the Town Council in matters that have an effect on the residents of the Town and identify the mechanisms that are in place to ensure that the Town Council and residents have ample opportunities to influence decisions of those Councils.*
- (ii) *Task the Finance and Policy Committee with opening up dialogue with the two primary authorities with a view to producing a first draft Charter for consideration by the Council.*

Cllr Scriven was concerned that the Town Council relied on receiving information from the District and County Councils through councillors representing the town on those authorities. He said that the County Councillor had attended all Full Council meetings since he had been elected and had prepared a report for information. However, reports from district councillors were more sporadic and he felt that these councillors, especially those not on the Town Council, should be encouraged to attend more often.

Cllrs Cracknell and Ford, both district councillors, said that they always ensure the Town Council is kept informed of any matters relating to Ringwood. Cllr Thierry said that the fact there is not a written report from district council members does not mean they have failed to communicate adequately. He said that Cllr Scriven's statement was a personal attack on members of the council who also serve on the District Council and asked him to withdraw it.

It was further noted that items in the District Council's forward plan relating to Ringwood were regularly reported in the Weekly Bulletin.

Cllr Scriven agreed to withdraw his statement about district councillors. He said that the motion was about ensuring that the community is kept well informed.

Moved by Cllr Scriven, seconded by Cllr Chambers that:

That the Council:

- (i) *In view of the commitments given by the District Council in its Statement of Partnership and the County Council in its commitments to work with the Town and Parish Councils, both Principal Councils be asked to clarify their arrangements for involving the Town Council in matters that have an effect on the residents of the Town and identify the mechanisms that are in place to ensure that the Town Council and residents have ample opportunities to influence decisions of those Councils.*
- (ii) *Task the Finance and Policy Committee with opening up dialogue with the two primary authorities with a view to producing a first draft Charter for consideration by the Council.*

On being put to the meeting, the motion was declared lost.

MOTION SIX

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That a working group be established of volunteers from the full Council to review and update Council standing orders for eventual ratification by the full Council.

The Mayor enquired whether it was legal for members to draft Standing Orders. The Town Clerk explained that the Council had given a commitment in response to the 2005/06 Internal Audit Report that Standing Orders would be reviewed by December 2006. This task was therefore already in the work programme for 2006/07. Whilst members could prepare Standing Orders, the Town Clerk would need to check them to ensure that any proposals were within the Council's powers.

Cllr Rippon-Swaine said that this showed the Council was aware of its responsibilities and was dealing with them. This motion was therefore not necessary.

Cllr Thierry, seconded by Cllr Daly, moved an amendment to the motion:

That the revision of Ringwood Town Council Standing Orders be undertaken solely by officers of the Council. That any proposed changes to Ringwood Town Council Standing Orders be approved and confirmed by Councillors at the Full Council.

Cllr Chard said that a sub-committee of councillors had previously been formed to look at Standing Orders. However, Cllr Thierry said that the function of this sub-committee was to ensure that the work was in progress, and not for members to carry out the drafting themselves.

On being put to the meeting, the amendment was declared carried and became the substantive motion, which replaced the original motion.

Cllr Thierry, seconded by Cllr Daly, then moved the substantive motion:

That the revision of Ringwood Town Council Standing Orders be undertaken solely by officers of the Council. That any proposed changes to Ringwood Town Council Standing Orders be approved and confirmed by Councillors at the Full Council.

On being put to the meeting, the substantive motion was declared carried.

MOTION SEVEN

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That the Town Council write to the NFDC with a specific request to be involved in the production of the various options for the redevelopment of the site on the South West corner of the Furlong car park and that the District Council be advised that the community should be informed at an early stage of the options the Town Council are considering with NFDC in due course.

Cllr Scriven explained that members of the public were confused about plans for the south-west corner of the Furlong. In 2004, it had been reported that the toilets would be replaced and that the Portfolio Holder for the Environment would endeavour to bring them forward in the District Council's programme of works. In September 2005, it was reported that his vision for a new municipal building and community hall could become a reality by Easter 2007. More recently, it had been reported in the press that a working group of district councillors was looking at options for the area, which included retail use. He was concerned that the Town Council had not been involved with these discussions.

Cllr Thierry felt that, once again, he was being made the subject of a personal attack. He said that Cllr Scriven did not have all the background information and some of what he said was untrue. He felt that he was being criticised for trying to do the best for the town.

He said that the replacement of the toilets was included in the District Council's programme of capital works. However, the Council had the opportunity to look at the whole area and, as a member of the Ringwood Town Centre Steering Group that had been formed for this purpose, he would ensure that the interests of the people of the town were represented.

He said that three options were being put forward for consideration, as follows:

- 1) A purely retail scheme;
- 2) A mixed retail, municipal and social scheme, and
- 3) A municipal and social scheme.

and that a meeting had been arranged with the Town Council to discuss these in further detail.

Moved by Cllr Scriven, seconded by Cllr Chambers that:

That the Town Council write to the NFDC with a specific request to be involved in the production of the various options for the redevelopment of the site on the South West corner of the Furlong car park and that the District Council be advised that the community should be informed at an early stage of the options the Town Council are considering with NFDC in due course.

On being put to the meeting, the motion was declared lost.

MOTION EIGHT

Cllr Scriven proposed, with Cllr Chambers seconding:

That a detailed study be carried out by the Town, Planning and Environment Committee of other sites for the options that are looked at for the redevelopment of the South West corner of the Furlong car park. These should be costed and recommendations made to the full Council.

Cllr Scriven explained that the people of the town had the right to have all options investigated and costed, and should not just be given three options, selected by the District Council, to choose from.

Cllr Thierry said that the land was owned by the District Council and it was therefore its responsibility. He reported that this area had been looked at by numerous consultants over the years at great cost. The District Council would make use of this information, together with the recent town centre strategy study and work carried out by the Town Council in the preparation of the Town Plan. He said there was no need for another survey. In addition, there would be cost implications if the Town Council was to carry out a study as proposed in the motion.

Cllr Scriven said that there was a need to look holistically at the whole of Ringwood, rather than just one small area.

Moved by Cllr Scriven, seconded by Cllr Chambers that:

That a detailed study be carried out by the Town, Planning and Environment Committee of other sites for the options that are looked at for the redevelopment of the South West corner of the Furlong car park. These should be costed and recommendations made to the full Council.

On being put to the meeting, the motion was declared lost.

There being no further business, the Mayor closed the meeting at 8.30pm.