

**OPEN SESSION:** There were several members of the public present, who gave notice that they wished to speak on an item on the agenda.

## **MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Held on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> December 2007 at 7.00pm

### Apologies

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Town Clerk reported that apologies for absence had been received from Cllr N R G Clarke, Cllr D E Cracknell, Cllr M F J Daly, Cllr L C Ford and Cllr W S Rippon-Swaine.

### Declarations of Interest

There were none.

**PRESENT:** Cllr J D Heron (Chairman)  
Cllr N J Chard  
Cllr B H Terry

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Terry Simpson, Town Clerk  
Jo Stannard, Deputy Town Clerk  
Martin Townsend, Finance Manager  
Cllr Mrs A Wiseman  
Rachel Giles, Student Adviser  
James Fullick, Student Adviser

## **F/4198**

### **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**

**RESOLVED:** That the minutes of the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2007 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

*For the benefit of members of public present, agenda item 7 was taken next.*

## **F/4199**

### **LOCAL BUS SERVICES**

Members considered the Deputy Town Clerk's report (Annex 'J') on the decision by Wilts & Dorset Bus Company to terminate its contract with Hampshire County Council for subsidised bus services in the New Forest. As a result, it had been proposed to cut Services 136/137 (Ringwood – Poulner – Ringwood) and introduce a reduced timetable for Service X35 (Southampton – Ringwood – Bournemouth). Following negotiations with the County Council, it was now proposed to continue Services 136/137 from 7<sup>th</sup> January 2008 between the hours of 0915 and 1415. This was intended to be an interim solution to allow the County Council time to seek the best possible level of service within existing budgets by re-tendering services.

Members of the public were concerned about the reduction in service and the effect this would have on the many residents that made use of Services 136/137, particularly the elderly. The reduced service would not allow people to use the service to get to and from work or school. The government was encouraging the use of public transport by issuing bus passes for the over 60s, but these would become useless if there were no buses to use them on. It was noted that almost 300 people had signed a petition against the withdrawal of Services 136/137.

The Town Clerk explained that the Town Council had not been notified of the proposals before details had appeared in the local press. Information on subsidies and loading figures had been requested from the County Council and some information had now been received. It was noted that the total subsidy for Services 136/137 was £37,142 per annum. However, this would fall to £29,101 from January 2008 as a

result of the reduced timetable. The annual patronage of the Service was 80,952. Although the passenger numbers appeared low at some times, it was noted that if the service was run on an hourly basis, some buses could be full to capacity. He therefore suggested that the County Council should be encouraged to liaise with Dorset County Council so that consideration could be given to a service, perhaps hourly, that took in Ringwood, Poulner and possibly Verwood or Ferndown.

The Town Clerk also referred to the Town Council's response to the New Forest District Local Development Framework Core Strategy, which encouraged a greater investment in public transport and increased use.

The Town Mayor was disappointed with the poor communication by Hampshire County Council and Wilts & Dorset with both customers and the Town Council. He felt that they owed the customers an apology for the uncertainty created by termination of the contract.

Cllr Heron said that the cost of owning a private vehicle was being increased by central government, however, no viable alternative was being offered. He referred to the District Council's Sustainable Community Strategy, currently out for consultation, and said that the section on transport was completely inadequate. He recommended that representation be made to both the District and County Councils and central government.

Although not present at the meeting, Cllr Ford had asked that her objection to any cuts in bus services be noted.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That representation be made to New Forest District Council, Hampshire County Council, Hampshire Association of Local Councils, central government and MP Desmond Swayne regarding the impact a reduction in public transport would have on the local community.
- 2) That Hampshire County Council be encouraged as a matter of urgency to explore every avenue to provide the best service for residents of the town, including discussing with Dorset County Council the possibility of establishing an hourly service that takes in Ringwood, Poulner and Verwood or Ferndown.

**F/4200**

**MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORTS**

Members considered the Monthly Financial Reports attached to these minutes as *Annex 'A'*.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the list of cheque payments on the Imprest account be authorised. Cllrs Heron and Chard signed the report.
- 2) That the list of Petty Cash payments be authorised. Cllrs Heron and Chard signed the report.
- 3) That the Statement of Town Council Balances be received and noted.
- 4) That the Inter Account Transfer be authorised. Cllrs Heron and Chard signed the report.

**F/4201**

**SHOPWATCH**

The Town Clerk reported that only 12 shops had committed to the Shopwatch scheme and there was no longer a requirement to purchase a radio mast. However, PCSO Tracey Cooper was looking into running the scheme using either a back-to-back radio scheme or with a beat mobile phone. She had therefore asked if the Council would be willing to contribute to the cost of purchasing a radio or mobile. It was noted that £2,000 had been included in the Committee's new budget proposals for 2008/09, but that this could now be reduced to £250.

**RESOLVED:** That a contribution of £250 be made towards the purchase of a back-to-back radio or beat mobile phone to facilitate the setting up of a Shopwatch scheme in the town.

**F/4202**  
**COMMITTEE BUDGET 2008/09**

Members considered a Report and Appendices in respect of

- 1) New Budget Proposals for 2008/09 as prioritised by the Committee at its last meeting on 21 November 2007;
- 2) Revised Budget for 2007/08 and Original Budget for 2008/09 for the Policy and Finance Committee.

It was noted that an item had not been included to allow for the possibility of a parish poll, as had been suggested by some members of the public in response to the District Council's consultation on the south-west corner of the Furlong Car Park. However, if a poll was held, the Town Council would be liable for the cost, which would be in the region of £4,000 to £5,000.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the Committee's prioritised Budget Proposals for 2008/09 (*Annex 'B'*) be approved.
- 2) That the revised Budget 2007/08 and Original Budget 2008/09 for the Policy & Finance Committee (*Annex 'C'*) be approved.

**F/4203**  
**COUNCIL BUDGET AND PRECEPT 2008/09**

Members considered a Report and Appendices on the Council's budget and precept for 2008/09.

It was noted that the £40,000 capital scheme to extend the road at the Cemetery would result in an increase in the precept of £7.39 in the Council Tax level at Band D for 2008/09, without taking into account any proposals for new projects. Members therefore agreed to meet this cost by a transfer from the General Reserve.

The Town Clerk reported that he was looking into the issue of double taxation with regard to the Cemetery. He explained that many of the other cemeteries in the district were operated by the District Council and, as the Town Council contributed to District Council expenditure across the district, it was in effect subsidising other cemeteries, as well as its own.

Members agreed to recommend the budget unaltered and it was noted that this would result in an increase in the Council Tax level at Band D of £5.34 per annum, or 45p per month.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- 1) That the provisional base budget for Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee, as set out in *Annex 'D'* be approved.
- 2) That the provisional new budget proposals in *Annex 'E'* for Recreation, Leisure & Open Spaces Committee, be accepted and included in the Council's overall budget for 2008/09.
- 3) That the provisional base budget for Planning, Town & Environment Committee, as set out in *Annex 'F'*, be approved.
- 4) That the provisional new budget proposals in *Annex 'G'* for Planning, Town & Environment Committee, be accepted and included in the Council's overall budget for 2008/09.
- 5) That the provisional base budget for Policy & Finance Committee, as set out in *Annex 'C'* be approved.
- 6) That the provisional new budget proposals in *Annex 'B'* for Policy & Finance Committee be accepted and included in the Council's overall budget for 2008/09.
- 7) That the Council's overall net budget of £393.750 for 2008/09 be approved (*Annex 'H'*)
- 8) That the Council approve a transfer of £43,670 from the general reserve for 2008/09.
- 9) That the Council approve a precept of £350,080 for 2008/09.

**F/4204**  
**SKILLS CENTRE**

The Town Mayor reported on a meeting held to discuss proposals by Ringwood School and Brockenhurst College to establish a Skills Centre in the town. It was noted that funding was available from the Learning and Skills Council until 2010 and that it was essential to identify a suitable location in the next few months in order to progress the scheme. There were currently no employment sites available in the town. However, the District Council was prepared to look at releasing land on a reserve site if agreement could be reached with the landowner to use only one hectare of land. The School had also been encouraged to contact Carr & Neave to discuss availability in the town.

**RESOLVED:** That the report be noted.

#### **F/4205**

#### **PLANNING CONSULTATION**

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the District Council was currently consulting Town and Parish Councils on its aim to make more planning information available electronically and to reduce the amount of paper currently used under existing consultation arrangements. It was intended that all Town and Parish Councils would conduct Planning meetings with the use of a laptop and projector. In order to achieve this, the District Council would give support, both in terms of providing equipment and offering training.

As the Town Council was already operating its Planning, Town & Environment Committees in this manner, it already had the necessary equipment in place. In addition, blackout blinds had been purchased and it was intended to install a drop-down screen in the Committee Room. The system was working fairly well, but there were several shortcomings which were being reported to the District Council. There were problems downloading some of the larger plans and it was possible that the Town Council's computer hardware may need to be upgraded.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the District Council's aim to supply planning information to Town and Parish Councils by electronic means be supported.
- 2) That, if the Town Council incurs substantial costs to upgrade its hardware, the District Council be requested to contribute to those costs.

#### **F/4206**

#### **SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGIES**

The Town Clerk reported that consultation documents had been received for the Sustainable Community Strategies for New Forest 2008-2012 and Hampshire 2007-2017. He suggested that draft responses be prepared by the Town Clerk with the Town Mayor and Chairmen of the Policy and Finance and Planning, Town and Environment Committees for consideration by this Committee in January. He invited comments from other Members and Student Advisers, so that these could be incorporated in the draft responses.

**RESOLVED:** That the Town Clerk, with the Town Mayor and Chairmen of the Policy and Finance and Planning, Town and Environment Committees prepare draft responses to the Sustainable Community Strategies for New Forest and Hampshire, for consideration by the Policy and Finance Committee and Council in January 2008.

#### **F/4207**

#### **EDITORIAL PANEL**

The Town Clerk suggested that the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Policy and Finance Committee should be members of the Editorial Panel.

**RESOLVED:** That the Chairman and Vice Chairman of Policy & Finance Committee be added to the membership of the Editorial Panel.

#### **F/4208**

#### **RINGWOOD FESTIVAL**

Members considered the minutes of Ringwood Festival Steering Committee meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2007 (*Annex '1'*), and considered nominating a charity or charities to benefit from any surplus funds.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the minutes of the Festival Steering Committee meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> November 2007 be received and the proposals therein be approved.
- 2) That the British Liver Trust and Young Firefighters Association be nominated as the two charities to benefit from any surplus funds from the Ringwood Festival 2008, subject to them being prepared to work with the Steering Committee to promote the Festival.

**F/4209**

**1724 VIEW OF RINGWOOD**

The Town Clerk reported that the Council had been invited to purchase an original hand-coloured print entitled "Prospect of Ringwood – 14 June 1974" at a cost of £100.

**RESOLVED:**

- 1) That the print be purchased at a cost of £100 and displayed in the Town Council offices.
- 2) That the print be made available to other organisations to display at appropriate times, in order to benefit a wider audience.

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.30pm.