

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

MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Held on 15th April 2009 at 7.00pm

Apologies

Prior to the commencement of the meeting, the Deputy Town Clerk reported that apologies for absence had been received from James Fullick, Student Advisor.

Declarations of Interest

There were no Declarations of Interest.

PRESENT: Cllr J D Heron (Chairman)
Cllr W S Rippon-Swaine (Vice Chairman)
Cllr N J Chard
Cllr N R G Clarke
Cllr L C Ford
Cllr B H Terry
Cllr M J Urwin
Cllr B Woodfield

IN ATTENDANCE: Jo Stannard, Deputy Town Clerk
Martin Townsend, Finance Manager
Alyson Greenfield, Finance Officer
Claire Perrens, Meetings Administrator
Cllr A C Wiseman

F/4382

MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 18th March 2009, having been circulated, be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

F/4383

MONTHLY FINANCIAL REPORTS

Members considered the Monthly Financial Reports attached to these minutes as *Annex 'A'*. The Finance Manager drew attention to the Estimated Use of Provisions for 2008/09 in Appendix 3; under Town Plan there is a sum of £8,654 which was allocated for development of the Town Plan, but not utilised. This could be re-allocated, possibly for implementation of the Town Plan. Cllr Clarke offered congratulations to Finance staff for good management and this was seconded by the Chairman and other Members.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the list of cheque payments on the Imprest account be authorised. Cllrs Heron and Ford signed the report;
- 2) That the list of Petty Cash payments be authorised. Cllrs Heron and Ford 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 Ford signed the report;
- 5) That the Finance Manager's report and Budgetary Control Reports on the Probable Actuals be received and noted; and
- 6) That a detailed report be prepared for consideration at the Committee's meeting in June 2009 regarding the use of Provisions and suggested additional transfers to Provisions for 2008/09.

ACTION Martin Townsend

F/4384
RINGWOOD FESTIVAL

Members considered the minutes of the meeting of the Ringwood Festival Steering Committee held on 6th April 2009, attached as *Annex 'B'*.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Ringwood Festival Steering Committee held on 6th April 2009, and the proposals therein, be approved.

ACTION Sue Godwin

F/4385
GRANT AID

Members considered the applications for grant aid. Due to the commitment made last year to Greyfriars of £3,000 towards the Ebenezer Hall Appeal, there is only £2,239 available for grant aid April 2009-March 2010. Having reviewed a list of the good causes usually supported by the Town Council, Cllr Clarke commented that there may well not be enough funds available. The Chairman suggested that this year, if anything, more help should be provided to charities due to the difficult financial climate. Members should consider applications for grant aid on individual merit and if necessary the Committee could request further funds from reserves to increase the grant aid budget.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, a grant of £50 be awarded to Vitalise, to benefit disabled people in Ringwood;
- 2) That under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, a grant of £50 be awarded to The Royal British Legion, Ringwood & District Branch, towards the cost of the Ringwood Pipe Band attending Remembrance Day Parade;
- 3) That a decision on the application made by Turn Up For Fun (Hampshire Children and Families Forum) be deferred until the Committee meeting in May, in order to obtain clarification on whether the project is dependent on the full amount of £1,350 being raised; and
- 4) That under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, a grant of £200 be awarded to U-nite Club, for people with special needs, held at Greyfriars.

ACTION Alyson Greenfield
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F/4386
MEMBERS' ALLOWANCES

Members discussed the Town Clerk's Report (*attached as Annex 'C'*). The Chairman commented that, as the Town Clerk suggested, it would make sense to follow the recommendation of the Independent Remuneration Panel to increase Members' basic annual allowance by 4%, rather than to freeze allowances at 2008/09 levels, as recommended by New Forest District Council. The Chairman felt that no Member should be made to feel they were not entitled to claim the allowances available for their contribution as Town Councillors. Members agreed there was no need to publish information about individuals' claims for allowances on the website; this information may be requested, in any case, under Freedom of Information legislation. All Members should be urged to consider deciding not to accept the increase, due to the difficult economic climate.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1) That the annual basic Members' allowance be increased from £666 to £693 with effect from 1st April 2009; and

- 2) That Members be urged, if circumstances allow, not to accept the increase; and
- 3) That no details of the claims for allowances made by Members be published on the website.

ACTION Terry Simpson

F/4387

EXAMINATION OF THE NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL CORE STRATEGY

An independent inspector had been appointed to examine the New Forest District Council's Core Strategy. Members considered whether the Town Council wished to appoint one Member to attend the Pre-Hearing Meeting on 23rd April at 10am in Lyndhurst.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the appointment of an independent inspector be noted; and
- 2) That no Member be appointed to attend the Pre-Hearing Meeting on 23rd April.

ACTION Jo Stannard

F/4388

ECONOMIC DOWNTURN

Members discussed ways in which the Town Council can support other authorities/agencies to help local residents and businesses. Useful links have already been included on the Town Council's website. Whilst the Town Council does not have the expertise or resources to offer advice, Members were keen to see further links that may become available signposted from the Town's website.

RESOLVED: That the Deputy Town Clerk be advised of further possible useful website links to offer residents and businesses advice and help during the recession.

ACTION Councillors / Jo Stannard

F/4389

BUSINESS RATES

It was feared that the end of business rate relief from 1st April would see tens of thousands of small companies' rates increasing by up to 1000%. Members considered what, if any, action the Town Council could take to push for further relief.

The Chairman commented that the Government are now offering a deferment of payment of the increase in rates for a 12 month period. The Town Mayor was concerned there is still a huge burden on small traders in Ringwood, despite this measure.

Cllr Woodifield said that the last time she had attended a Chamber of Trade and Commerce meeting the mood was buoyant among members and noted Jim Stride's excellent work to promote the Town's discount scheme. She also commented that the shop rents in town are often set too high and are unrealistic. Cllr Rippon-Swaine said that leaseholders have the right to request an independent fair rent assessment.

Cllr Woodifield commented on a scheme to put craft or artwork in empty shops to improve the atmosphere in the High Street. The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the Ringwood Society is already working with Ringwood School on this possibility. The Chairman suggested the Town Council may be able to help fund this project. Cllr Ford suggested that other schools, such as Moyles Court School, could also contribute art. It was suggested that the Chamber of Trade and Commerce could contact landlords of empty shops with a view to holding a competition between schools in the area to design panels for shop windows.

Cllr Clarke suggested that information could be provided on the website about how to cope with increased business rates in future (once the 12 month deferment expires) and Cllr Woodfield commented that local businesses rely on the Town Council website for information.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the Town Clerk liaise with The Chamber of Trade and Commerce and the Ringwood Society on the possibility of contacting landlords of empty shops and initiating a competition for schools to design panels for empty windows;
- 2) That consideration be given to providing further advice on the website for local businesses on the future impact of business rates.

ACTION 1) Terry Simpson 2) Cllr Clarke, Cllr Rippon-Swaine

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 7.57pm.

Note: The text in the Action Boxes above does not form part of these minutes.

RECEIVED & ADOPTED
29th April 2009

TOWN MAYOR

COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN