

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the

FINANCE & POLICY COMMITTEE

Held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Berkhamsted on

Monday 29 July 2019 at 7.30 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors G Stevens (Chair)
R Freedman (Vice Chair)
P de Hoest
J Jones
N Taylor
P White
N Woolner

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor G Corry
Officer Mrs J Mason, Town Clerk
3 members of the public.

OPENING MATTERS

FP 46/19 To receive **apologies for absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

FP 47/19 To receive **declarations of interest** regarding items on the agenda

It was **noted** that Mr G Yearwood, who would be speaking under item FP 51/19 (i), was a former town councillor.

FP 48/19 To approve the **minutes of the previous meeting** held on 28 May 2019

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 28 May 2019 were approved as a correct record and were duly signed as such by the Chair.

FP 49/19 **Chair's Communications**

- (i) NALC Chief Executive's Bulletin
- (ii) BDCC June Bulletin

Various concerns expressed by the Chamber of Commerce about the impact of the building of the Multi Story Car Park on businesses were noted.

FP 50/19 To suspend Standing Orders to allow public participation

It was **agreed** that Standing Orders should be suspended during the course of the meeting to allow members of the public to speak.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

FP 51/19 Grant Application

The following grant applications were considered:

- (i) Application for £500 from the West Herts 21c Hospital group who are fighting for a new, accessible state of the art hospital for West Herts. The group is funding a firm of hospital architects to draw up costed plans for the hospital and it is a contribution to these costs that is sought.

The Town Mayor suspended standing orders to enable Mr G Yearwood to speak.

Thanking the committee for the opportunity to speak Mr Yearwood outlined the group's vision for a new hospital for the people of Berkhamsted and West Herts, designed and equipped for the 21st century. Current facilities were inadequate and the NHS were planning to carry out repair, refurbishment and part redevelopment at a capped cost of £350m. The group's view is that this was an inadequate response and what is needed is a brand new hospital which would be fully compliant with NHS modern standards and centrally located for ease of access. There would be adequate and free parking, three times more diagnostic equipment and more beds with increased use of single rooms. The design would be future proofed for both population growth and clinical best practice developments. To this end BDP, a major architectural practice who are leaders in the field of hospital design, had been appointed to draw up the plans. In conclusion he was confident that the building of a new hospital, designed and equipped for the 21st century, would enable our hospital service to move to an outstanding rating.

In response to questions from councillors. Mr Yearwood confirmed that although the £350m project was being progressed by the Trust it would be several years before work on site would start because Department of Health approval was required as the West Herts NHS Trust is not a foundation trust. He anticipated that the design currently being drawn up by the group/BDP would cost in the region of £500m. He advised that the last time a completely new hospital had been considered had been over 12 years ago and those proposals, which at that time had been estimated at a cost of £700m, had been rejected. The new proposals that would be put forward by the group to the Department of Health, hopefully in the autumn, would provide 50% more capacity than the £350m proposals and would be well served by both public transport and car. The hospital would be designed to achieve maximum clinical efficiency combined with

excellent patient flow, achieved through calculated clinical efficiency and output. This would be illustrated in detail on a floor by floor basis on BDP's high impact plans.

To date £22k had been collected towards the project, mainly through personal donations, and another £10k was needed. The cost of acquiring the site was raised and it was confirmed that three acres would be required with the new facilities releasing around 12 acres from valuable town centre sites.

It was noted that other groups that had been campaigning for a new hospital were all behind the proposals and that other councils (eg Chorleywood and hopefully DBC) would be supporting the group's work. The next step, as had been said, would be to take the proposals to the Department of Health later in the year. This would by-pass the local Trust and enable the Department of Health to reflect on the inadequacies of the £350m proposal compared with those of the group.

In response to questions about the group's governance and payment authorisation, Mr Yearwood confirmed that it was a not for profit company and that although he was the sole director, the accountant acted as company secretary. Furthermore, two signatories were required to authorise payments.

Thanking Mr Yearwood for his contribution the Chair reinstated standing orders.

Councillors variously expressed support for the group's objectives and hoped that other councils would be encouraged so to do. It was agreed that the request for funding from the group fell within the scope of the Town Council's grant policy and it was **agreed unanimously that the £500 requested** should be paid to the group subject to confirmation of the governance arrangements outlined above. **Action Town Clerk**

Furthermore, it was agreed that the Chair and the Town Clerk should prepare a press release about this grant award. **Action Chair/Town Clerk**

- (ii) Grant application from the Open Door Berkhamsted project for £860 towards outbuilding refurbishment costs.

The Town Clerk confirmed that Open Door representatives had recently confirmed that quotes had been received for the work required and that if the application was granted £500 would be put towards roof repairs and £360 for security fencing at the bottom of the garden.

Following a discussion Cllr P White proposed and Cllr N Woolner seconded that the application for £860 be granted. This was agreed unanimously. **Action Town Clerk**

- (iii) Grant application from Berkhamsted and Hemel Hempstead Hockey Club for £500 towards the procurement of a community public access defibrillator for the Lockhart Field site at Cow Roast, Berkhamsted.

Following a discussion Cllr P White proposed and Cllr N Woolner seconded that the application for £500 be awarded. This was agreed unanimously.

Action Town Clerk

FP 52/19 Income and Expenditure including Receipts and Payments Schedule

- (i) Following a discussion the Income and Expenditure and Variance Analysis at 30 June 19 was **approved**.
- (ii) **The Payments and receipts schedules for the period 1 May 2019 – 30 June 2019** had been sent to Cllr G Stevens for scrutiny and he reported that he had no issues to raise.

POLICY MATTERS

FP 53/19 Health and Safety Policy

The draft Town Council Health and Safety Policy prepared by the Deputy Town Clerk was **considered and approved** subject to the following amendments:

1. The insertion of the word “obligatory” at 3.3 before the word statutory;
2. The replacement of the word “management” by “Town Clerk, or in her absence the Deputy Town Clerk”;

There was also a discussion about whether an individual should be named as having responsibility for the implementation of the policy rather than the Council as a corporate body. It was **agreed** to leave the current wording although it was acknowledged that the Town Clerk had delegated responsibility on day-to day matters. It was **agreed** to review the policy and its implementation on a regular basis.

FP 54/19 Communications Strategy

- (i) To **receive, consider** and, as appropriate, **agree** the draft communications strategy prepared by Cllr P de Hoest

Introducing his paper, which had been circulated with the agenda, Cllr de Hoest referred to the challenges facing the Town Council in today’s world of multi-channel communication. In his view it was now opportune to think about the Council’s engagement strategy and how to connect with a wider audience whilst not excluding those familiar with more traditional methods of communication. He summarised the principles behind the strategy and examined the tools that might be utilised to achieve the desired outcomes. Such tools could include the council’s website (which could merit a review); the creation of an on-line community centre via the website or a newly created Facebook page; Councillor blogs; newsletters; wider exhibitions at the Annual Town Meeting. Regular consultation could be via local interest groups; working parties; surveys; set piece consultations; a confidential feedback portal; surgeries, perhaps at the market; effective handling of correspondence and improved local media (press and radio). It would of course be necessary to measure success, for example, via a “before and after” survey and provide appropriate training.

Councillors thanked Cllr de Hoest for his work in preparing the paper and were generally very supportive of the strategy proposed. During discussion, it was acknowledged that to influence people's perceptions and understanding of the Town Council and its activities it would be necessary to sustain the stream of information through the various initiatives put forward and also be mindful of how to deal with frivolous and vexatious communications. The time, cost and skills required to achieve the required output also required careful consideration.

(ii) To **consider and agree** the next steps

It was **agreed** that Cllr de Hoest should prepare a one page summary for consideration at the next Full Council meeting with a view to seeking agreement to the strategy and the proposals suggested. The necessary research and planning that would be required to implement the strategy would also be included in the paper.

Reference was also made by Cllr R Freedman to a councillor "gagging clause" in the Town Council's Standing Orders. He should refer this concern to a future meeting.

FP 55/19 Plastic Free Berko

To **appoint** a Councillor to attend meetings of Plastic Free Berko

It was **agreed** that Cllr P de Hoest be appointed to this role and the Town Clerk will advise the organisation. **Action Town Clerk**

FP 56/19 Festival of Light Committee

To **receive** an update following the meeting held on 23 July 2019

The notes had been circulated and Cllr G Stevens, Chair of that Committee, outlined the main points arising. The notes were then **received**.

There followed a discussion about membership of the Committee. All councillors were welcome should they wish to attend although Cllr M Hardinge and Cllr G Stevens had been formally appointed as members at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council on 13 May 2019. It was clarified that a meeting of the group appointed to review the revised festive lighting arrangements at Full Council on 10 June had still to be arranged and that the licence application was now due at HCC by the end of August following the decision by HCC to extend the deadline.

Reference was made by Cllr P White to the budget agreed for the Festival of Light and his understanding of discussions on 10 June. The Town Clerk advised that, although she did not have the minutes to hand, the original £14,000 budget had been increased by an additional £5,000 should it be required. Cllr White said this was not correct and queried the validity of the 10 June minutes. He said some things he was prepared to let go but not this. It was pointed out that these minutes had been circulated to all councillors and that they would be put to the next Full Council meeting for approval. The Town Clerk commented that it was inappropriate to start discussing the perceived accuracy of those minutes at this

meeting. It was then confirmed that the content of the minutes was as stated by the Town Clerk.

FP 57/19 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC

It was **RESOLVED** that under Section 1 of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 the public and press be excluded for the remainder of the meeting, because it is likely that publicity would prejudice the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business or for other special reasons stated in the resolution, arising from the nature of the business or proceedings.

FP 58/19 Finance and Allotment Officer Vacancy

To **discuss** prior to a Support Services Group meeting scheduled for August.

The Town Clerk advised that the meeting of the Support Services Group would be on Friday 9 August 2019 at 2 pm. She would be revising the job description and might also suggest that the extension of hours mooted should now be included as the new Finance software would be installed in August (see FP 61/19 below) and she hoped that the new members of staff would be responsible for the inputting of financial data. She would also contact Cllr Freedman for the contact details for the Association of Accounting Technicians on whose website it might be possible to advertise the post. It would be the intention to place advertisements in September.

FP 59/19 Recurring flooding and work required on drains at Lagley Meadow.

- (i) The Committee **received** a report and details of remedial action required following a recent inspection by Village Environmental Services. This had been commissioned following years of flooding inside the Youth Centre building from DBC's external storm drains.
- (ii) It was agreed that the **Town Clerk** should initiate discussions with DBC with a view to their undertaking the remedial work described to their drains/conduits and so avoid future damage. They would be allowed admission to the site in accordance with clause 5 ACCESS, in particular 5.3, of the lease.
- (iii) The Town Clerk would copy any correspondence arising to DBC councillors serving on the Town Council and contact Cllr Woolner if additional assistance was required.

FP 60/19 Windows 7 PC replacement & upgrade

- (i) It was **noted** that on 14 January 2020, Microsoft will stop supporting Windows, and that
- (ii) The Deputy Town Clerk's and the Town Warden's desk top computers operate on Windows 7.
- (iii) Following a discussion the Committee **approved** the replacement of the Town Warden's desk top computer and the upgrade of the Deputy Town Clerk's from Windows 7 to Windows 10. The Town Warden will also

require a new Office licence. The Town Warden's current computer is almost nine years old.

- (iv) The Committee also **approved** the purchase of a new monitor for the Deputy Town Clerk's desk top computer.
- (v) Costs for all of the above, including installation, are as set out in iQuDa's quotation numbers 003865 and 004790. These are unbudgeted items of expenditure because the advice regarding Windows 10 was received after the 2019 -20 budget discussions.

FP 61/19 Accounting software

To **receive** an update on the arrangements for the transfer of the accounting software from SAGE to RBS Omega Financial Director during August.

Although the decision to transfer to the RBS Omega system had been made during budget discussions, as the transition was being planned for the following month, the Town Clerk felt that it would be useful to update new councillors on the reasons for the change. Not only was the Omega system significantly cheaper than the current Sage software it was also tailor made for Town and Parish Councils with the ability to produce the AGAR figures at a push of a button. It had provision for budget preparation and monitoring and was supported by excellent staff on the help desk. The above points were **noted**.

FP 62/19 Close of Meeting

The meeting closed at 9.58 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....