

BERKHAMSTED TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the

FINANCE & POLICY COMMITTEE

Held in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre, Berkhamsted on

Monday 9 December 2019 at 7.30 pm

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Councillors G Stevens (Chair)
P de Hoest
J Jones
N Woolner

ALSO PRESENT

Councillor G Corry

Officer Mrs J Mason, Town Clerk

1 member of the public (for part of meeting).

OPENING MATTERS

FP 78/19 To receive apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs N Taylor, R Freedman and P White.

FP 79/19 To receive declarations of interest regarding items on the agenda

None.

FP 80/19 To approve the minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 September 2019

The minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2019 were agreed as a correct record and were duly signed as such by the Chair.

FP 81/19 Chair's Communications

- (i) HAPTC bulletin 8 November 2019
- (ii) Thank you letter from Keech Hospice Trusts and Grants Officer thanking the Town Council for the £500 awarded at F&P on 23 September.
- (iii) NALC Chief Executive's Bulletin 15 November 2019
- (iv) DBC Polling Place Review 2019

Cllr G Corry requested that DBC be advised that parking near the Lagley Meadow polling station can be problematic for disabled residents.

- (v) 2020 Herts Year of Culture activity form and fundraising factsheet.

It was **noted** that Cllr W Conian and Cllr G Stevens had met earlier in the day with one of the Dacorum area coordinators. Cllr Stevens advised that there were two coordinators; one dealing with cultural projects and the other with health and wellbeing. There will be an item to discuss Herts Year of Culture on the 16 December T & E agenda.

- (vi) NALC Chief Executive's Bulletin 22 November 2019 (22-11-19)*
- (vii) BDCC Christmas lunch reminder (19 December 2019)
- (viii) HAPTC bulletin 25 November 2019
- (ix) Sunnyside Rural Trust 26 November bulletin about volunteering opportunities
- (x) NALC Tree Charter newsletter 29 November 2019.

FP 82/19 To suspend Standing Orders to allow public participation

Dr James Moir, Rectory Lane Cemetery Project Manager (Friends of St Peter's) made a short presentation in support of the grant application under item FP 83/19 below. It is planned to install 11 benches as part of the wider restoration project and funding is being sought for one bench in particular; a unique, architect designed, circular reading seat with integrated bookshelf. This theme for the seat reflected the Project's involvement with Berkhamsted's first book festival earlier in the year. Additionally, work to date and future plans for the Project support the objectives of the Town Council's Habitats Working Party. As part of the National Lottery Funding Big Give Christmas challenge, any donations received towards the seat will be doubled. He advised that contributions were also being sought through crowd funding, the total cost being £11,800. In conclusion, Dr Moir was pleased to advise that the planned Garden of Remembrance would have its official opening on 8 May 2020. This would provide a valuable, centrally located service to Berkhamsted residents as well as being a source of income to help sustain the work of the Project in the future.

Thanking Dr Moir for his contribution the Chair reinstated standing orders.

FINANCIAL MATTERS

FP 83/19 Grant Application

It was **Resolved** unanimously to agree the grant application for £1,000 made by The Rectory Lane Cemetery Project for the installation of a "read in peace" seat as part of the Big Give Christmas Challenge. Item FP82/19 above also refers.

FP 84/19 Income and Expenditure including Receipts and Payments Schedule

- (i) Following a discussion, during which councillors asked a number of questions, the Committee **noted and approved** the Income and Expenditure and Variance Analysis at 31 October 2019.

- (ii) The payments and receipts schedules for the period 1 September – 31 October 2019 had been sent to Cllr G Stevens for scrutiny and he reported back that all were in order.
- (iii) Bank reconciliations and bank statements: It was **noted** that in accordance with Financial Regulation 2.2, Cllr J Jones had verified the bank reconciliations and supporting statements for all accounts at the quarters ending 30 June 2019 and 30 September 2019. She had countersigned the reconciliations and statements as evidence of such verification. Cllr Jones was thanked for continuing to undertake this task which forms an important part of the Town Council's system of internal control.

FP 85/19 Update on budget discussions

- (i) It was **noted** that Cllrs G Stevens, W Conian, N Taylor and the Town Clerk met on Friday 29 November and discussed budget proposals put forward arising from discussions at the Climate Emergency Steering Group and the Energy, Habitats and Travel Working Groups. The projects put forward in this respect were discussed briefly. The Town Clerk would continue to work on the budget preparation in advance on the next F & P Committee meeting on 6 January 2020. **Action Town Clerk**
- (ii) PCSO funding – It was **agreed** that following discussions at Full Council on 11 November 2019, the Town Clerk should ask Inspector J Scott to seek approval from Hertfordshire constabulary for the recruitment of a PCSO, to be part funded by the Town Council, with an anticipated start date, if possible, of January 2019. The Committee acknowledged that this would require a commitment to part fund the PCSO for a period of two further financial years ie until 31 March 2022. There would be, however, a six month notice period on either side. **Action Town Clerk**
- (iii) DBC funding and tax base 2020-21

It was **noted** that in an e-mail dated 27 November 2019 DBC's Team Leader- Financial and Regulatory Accounting, advised of the following:

The Town Council's grant allocation for 2020/21, subject to approval by DBC in February 2020 as part of the 2020/21 budget approval process is:

- . Wardens Grant £16,155.33
- . Council Tax Support Grant £2,681.68
- . Concurrent Services Grant £3,869.60

The Warden Grant has been inflated by 2.5% from 2019/20 levels. The level of Council Tax Support and Concurrent Services Grant are the same as the 2019/20 allocation. These grants will be reviewed for 2021/22. The tax base for 2020/21 will be agreed by Cabinet on 10 December 2019. After this meeting, the Town Council will be notified of the Taxbase for the parish and sent the precept form.

FP 86/19**Interim internal Audit Report**

- (i) The Committee **received** the report arising from the audit visit made by Mrs S King of Auditing Solutions on 15 November 2019. Her overall conclusions were:
“.....on the basis of the programme of work undertaken this year, the Council has maintained more than adequate and effective internal control arrangements. We thank the Clerk her assistance, which has ensured the smooth progress of our review.”
- (ii) To **consider** as necessary any matters arising from the report

No matters arising to discuss other than to note that the report will be reviewed at Full Council on 13 January 2020.

POLICY MATTERS**FP 87/19****Luton Airport Consultation**

The Committee **reviewed and agreed** the consultation response prepared on behalf of the Town Council by Cllr G Stevens and Cllr N Taylor who were thanked for their work. The Town Clerk would now send the finalised response before the closing date which is 16 December 2019.

Action Town Clerk

FP 88/19**Town Council Communications**

- (i) Living Magazine – It was **agreed**, following an approach from the editorial team, that a quarterly Mayor’s column should be published in the magazine. The deadline for the March edition is 22 January 2020.
Action Town Clerk and Cllr G Stevens
- (ii) Annual Town Meeting on 19 March 2020 - It was **noted** that the Town Clerk will be finalising the programme of speakers early in the New Year. It was agreed that the event should be more interactive and each Climate Change Working Group should have a stand with display panels so the work could be discussed with residents. The Civic Awards would of course open proceedings and the Youth Town Council would be asked to contribute as usual. Other speakers might include a police representative and someone with literary links as 2020 is Hertfordshire Year of Culture.
Action Town Clerk
- (iii) Council Surgery/Market Stall 2020 – It was **agreed** that a stall should be booked for Saturday 16 May 2020. A rota of councillors also needs to be organised.
Action Town Clerk

FP 89/19**Festival of Light Committee**

To **receive** a verbal report and feedback from the event on 24 November 2019

The Town Clerk was pleased to report that the charity stalls in the High Street had raised over £11,000. The Elves Posting House footfall had increased by 145 over 2018 and had raised £945. A cheque for this amount had been presented to the charity Hector’s House by the Westfield School PTA during a recent

assembly. The new lights and tree decorations had been very well received by members of the public. Thanks were given to all councillors who had helped serve refreshments to volunteers and formal letters of thanks from the Town Mayor to all involved in the organisation would be sent nearer to Christmas. Cllr Stevens gave his thanks to the Town Clerk, Ms L Cecil of Community Action Dacorum, Town Council staff and all members of the Festival of Light Committee who had worked so hard throughout the year, and especially on the day, to make the event the success it had been.

Plans for 2020 and greater involvement of businesses were briefly discussed and the following points were noted for the “wash up” meeting in February:

- Concern expressed by a parent about the plastic, battery operated toys and sticks on sale which are then thrown away;
 - Need for clearer signage regarding access to disabled spaces during the event.
- Action Town Clerk**

FP 90/19 EXCLUSION OF PRESS & PUBLIC

To **RESOLVE** 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 91/19 Update on staff vacancies

- (i) Town Clerk & RFO – The post would be readvertised shortly. It was **agreed** that the same panel (Town Clerk, Cllrs G Stevens, A Armytage and P de Hoest) should conduct interviews in late January 2020. In the meantime, the Town Clerk has posted an invitation on the website for anyone who might be interested in applying to contact her if they wish to find out more about the role. **Action Town Clerk**
- (ii) Finance & Allotment Officer – Due to a change in circumstances the post remained vacant. The Town Clerk will draw up a list of options for discussion with the Support Services Group. **Action Town Clerk**

FP 92/19 DCK Accounting Solutions

It was **noted and agreed** that in view of the above the services of DCK Accounting Solutions, provided one day a month, will continue together with assistance if necessary during budget preparation. **Action Town Clerk**

FP 93/19 Close of meeting

The meeting closed at 8.58 pm.

Signed.....

Date.....