

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 20 February 2003 in the Parish Room, Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor Mrs M Anderson
Councillor A Bailey (in the Chair)
Councillor B Kerr
Councillor CW Eyton
Councillor RA Storrar
Councillor A Warrington

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor R Shukla.

14 CODE OF CONDUCT – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were received.

15 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 16 January 2003 be confirmed as a correct record.

16 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Minute No 12 – Elected Regional Assemblies

The Chairman and Councillor B Kerr had attended a Chester Area meeting on 11 February 2003 at County Hall to debate the proposed Elected Regional Assemblies. Mr Paul Durham, Chief Executive of Chester City Council, had made an excellent presentation and had accepted that within 20 years there would be a system of unitary authorities across the County and the two tier system would be at an end.

Of concern was the fact that there had been no publicity that the Government was seeking views. The only way to obtain this information was by accessing the website. If people did not respond it would be interpreted as they were not objecting.

No clear decision had come out of the meeting but the discussions had proved useful.

17 URGENT BUSINESS – VANDALISM

At the consent of the Chairman, Councillor B Kerr raised an item of urgent business – recent vandalism to the new bus shelters and telephone box by the bus terminus.

There had been at least four acts of vandalism during which glass panes were smashed. The bus shelters had cost £10,000 to erect and another two were planned for 2003/2004. It was estimated that the damage so far ran to £2,000.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to inform Superintendent Steve Ingram of the vandalism which is occurring and ask him to take the matter seriously and take urgent steps to try to catch those responsible.

18 GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK

There had been serious communication problems in respect of the planning application submitted by the Parish Council for change of use and removal of the hedgerow. This had culminated in the Clerk contacting Mr Paul Durham, the Chief Executive of Chester City Council, for assistance in an attempt to move things along. Mr Durham had intervened and consequently a number of his officers would attend a meeting scheduled for 6:00pm on 19 March 2003 with the Chairman, Councillor B Kerr and the Clerk to determine the way forward.

Councillor RA Storrar informed that he was disappointed and had grave reservations over the way the situation had been handled and if he had known what was happening he would have used his influence as a City Councillor to remedy the situation as quickly as possible.

The Chairman informed that the approach adopted had been with the best of intentions. The Parish Council had not wanted the local Ward Members to intervene on its behalf but had tried to force the City Council Officer to respond to the Clerk using official channels. It had worked and Mr Durham had stepped in to ensure that City Council Officers do what was after all their jobs.

It was accepted that with hindsight perhaps the Ward Members should have been informed of the problem but asked to take no action.

RESOLVED:

That the situation be noted.

19 THE CLERK'S CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT

The Clerk's Contract had been reviewed revised and redrafted using the Model provided by the Cheshire Association of Town and Parish Councils.

Members considered the draft Contract supplied and noted that it was proposed to increase the Clerk's hours of work per week from 16 to 20 and that she wanted to continue to be paid by cheque.

The Committee turned its attention to the Clerk's Job Description and agreed that point 11 should be revised to read:

"To act as a representative of the Council in carrying out its instructions."

RESOLVED:

That subject to including the amendments set out above the Clerk's amended Contract and Job Description be **RECOMMENDED** to the Council for adoption from 1 April 2003.

20 BANKING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman reported that he had looked at the current banking package the Council had with HSBC and considered the package on offer from the Co-operative Bank. His opinion was that it would not be beneficial to the Council to change banks.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted and no further action be taken.

21 PROMOTING BROADBAND ACCESS

The Clerk reported that she had been contacted by Mr Vince Pleasant, a resident of Saughall, who wishes to start a campaign so that the telephone exchange servicing Saughall was upgraded and broadband accessible in Saughall. He had indicated that he would like to attend the next Council meeting and make a presentation.

Information regarding the campaign had been put on the Council's website with a link to British Telecom so residents of Saughall could register their interest in subscribing to broadband.

RESOLVED:

That the report be received and Mr Pleasant be invited to attend the next meeting of the Council scheduled for 3 March 2003 and address the Council under the Public Speaking Time item.

22 VERNON INSTITUTE

Councillor B Kerr reported that he had received an invoice addressed to the Parish Council from Mr Brian Ebbrell for work completed on the Vernon Institute's roof. It had later transpired that this was a mistake and had been passed to Mr Harry Dobson, the Vernon Institute Management Committee's Treasurer.

Councillor RA Storrar reported that at a recent meeting of the Vernon Institute Management Committee it had been reported that a preliminary survey had been carried out on the roof. The findings were that there was no structural damage but it was recommended that a full survey should be commissioned.

The Chairman reminded the Committee that the Council would be willing to pay for this survey but would like some estimates in the first instance. However, Councillor RA Storrar informed that the Management Committee had considered the matter urgent and "just wanted to get on with it".

The external decoration of the Vernon Institute had been estimated to cost £14,000. This amount was excessive and consequently all of the work could not be done at the

same time. It had been agreed therefore, not to paint the Hermitage Road face because it was in best structural condition. When the Hermitage Road face was decorated, it would mean a road closure over a weekend.

Councillor B Kerr reminded Members that the Vernon Institute Management Committee had capital which was tied up. He had spoken to Mr Ray Dodd, Cheshire Community Council's Village Halls Advisor. It was Mr Dodd's opinion that if the Chairman of the Vernon Institute Management Committee, Mr Brian Huxley, was to write to the Charities Commission he may be given permission to release some capital to assist improvements.

A meeting had been arranged for 7:30pm on Thursday, 27 February 2003 with representatives of the Vernon Institute Management Committee and the Parish Council to consider the fabric and refurbishment work required and this advice would be passed on to Mr Huxley at this time and he would be requested to get in touch with Mr Dodd.

RESOLVED:

That the reports be received.

23 SAUGHALL PLAYGROUP

Councillor RA Storrar had been asked by the Playgroup – a non-profit making business – to approach the Parish Council on its behalf to see if it would be willing to make a grant towards the capital costs of a new mobile unit. The Council had referred this matter to this Committee for discussion.

Before a decision could be made on whether or not to provide a funding contribution the Council needed to know the total cost of the mobile unit project, what funds had been raised towards its cost and how much capital the Playgroup had in its bank account.

RESOLVED:

That this matter be further considered by the Committee at its next meeting when the information requested would be available.

24 CHESTER CITY COUNCIL

The Committee considered, in the light of recent events, its working relationships with Chester City Council and its officials and looked at actions that could be taken to bring about improvement. It was noted that problems experienced were not confined to the City Council's Planning Department but went much wider.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to contact Mr Paul Durham and invite him to meet with the Committee at a mutually convenient time to informally explore how the two authorities can work together better and improve relationships in general terms.

25 NEWSLETTER

The Committee noted the costs of printing its newsletter using Chester City Council's Printing Unit. It was considered appropriate to compare the prices provided with those of another organisation that could undertake similar work.

The Chairman suggested that an e-mail distribution list be built up so that those on it could receive the newsletter by e-mail as well as a hardcopy. However, such a move would mean the Council would have to seek registration under the Data Protection Act and get residents on e-mail to elect to receive the newsletter in this way.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to obtain a corresponding printing quotation from Warrington Borough Council and that comparisons be made at the next meeting of the Committee.

26 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

RECOMMENDED

That the Council considers the date and time of the next meeting and reschedule it as it will be unlikely to be a quorate if it goes ahead on the date currently scheduled.