

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 12 February 2004 in the Parish Room, 2 Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor A Bailey (in the Chair)
Councillor RA Storrar
Councillor A Warrington
Councillor C Wynne-Eyton
Councillor Ms M Wynne-Eyton
Councillor Mrs J Young

Invitees: Mrs A Amesbury – Chester City Council
Mr P Simpson - Chester City Council
Ms E Marsh – Chester and District Housing Trust

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

2 CODE OF CONDUCT – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were received.

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 20 November 2003 and 11 December 2003 be confirmed as a correct record.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

There were no matters arising from the Minutes not covered elsewhere on the agenda.

5 CHESTER CITY COUNCIL'S HOUSING REGISTER POLICY

The Committee had invited officers of Chester City Council and Chester and District Housing Trust to the meeting to discuss how the Council might influence the allocation of social housing in the village.

Mrs Amesbury informed that the allocation of affordable housing to meet local need would be handled in a different way. Negotiations would be carried out and built into the planning consent to ensure people in housing need but with a local connection were given priority.

Mr Simpson informed that the City Council was required to produce a Housing Policy that provided for those in most need. Priority was given to local people living in the village and surrounding areas and they were awarded additional housing points. The Housing Trust managed the waiting list on an agency agreement with the City Council. There was limited housing stock (approx 70-80 units in Saughall). The Trust was not in a financial position where it could build but was diversifying into right to but schemes and small schemes, There was and massive demand for accommodation in all areas of the District and particularly the rural areas. People who

wanted to be in the village should put their names on the waiting list as early as possible and then points could begin to accrue.

The City Council may introduce a system of Choice Based lettings. This new system would be more transparent and aimed at giving people more choice. Work was ongoing to draw up appropriate criteria.

Members raised a number of issues with Officers including:

- ? People from the urban area being allocated housing in the rural area and not fitting in.
- ? Lack of social housing for single people.
- ? Frustrations over perceived “queue jumping”.
- ? Housing of refugees and asylum seekers and the Government’s dispersal programme.
- ? Average number of lets each year in the village.
- ? Unruly tenants/nuisance neighbours and Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

Officers informed that they would progress the Choice Based Letting Scheme and were willing to come back and make a presentation on it at the appropriate time.

RESOLVED:

That the Officers be thanked for their informative presentations.

6 PROPOSED AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN SAUGHALL

The County Property Manager had informed that Arena had not heard from the Housing Corporation over its allocation for grant funding for the coming year. When it was announced the County Property Manager would be contacted with the outcome. The biggest fear was that Arena could be in a position to purchase the land without securing the funding to build affordable housing.

Consequently, the County Property Manager proposed not to progress the issue of the land acquisition until Arena had sufficient funds to purchase it and build.

Mrs Amesbury reported that Arena would not take any further action until the grants had been confirmed for 2004-05 and future “partnering” arrangements were announced by the Housing Corporation. Therefore, Arena had declined the invitation to attend this meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the County Property Manager be requested to take this matter forward in the hope that an agreement in principle can be secured to sell the land at an agreed price as soon as Arena has the necessary funding in place.

7 PARISH PLAN

The Clerk circulated Members with the draft questionnaire that would be delivered to every household in the village in an attempt to ascertain what village people would like to see provided in the village and what they would like included in the Plan.

It was reported that Mrs Cowan of the Cheshire Community Council had informed that it would cost approximately £84 to enclose an addressed pre-paid envelope for the questionnaire's safe return.

The Chairman reported that he had devised a list that would assist distribution of the questionnaire.

The Cheshire Community Council had asked the Countryside Agency if the timetable in respect of the publication of the Plan could be extended because of the delays caused by its Officers non-attendance at meetings. A decision was awaited.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

8 GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK

The Committee received a progress report on the proposed development. Issues covered included:

- ? The Awareness Raising Event held on 10 January 2004 and the further Event scheduled for 21 February 2004.
 - ? The revised site layout.
 - ? Advise on the cleaning out of the pond.
 - ? Funding Working Party Report.
- ~~✗~~ Unsuccessful bid for Chester City Council's Parished Play Areas Capital Programme – scheme only partially met the criteria!

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

9 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

The Committee reviewed the Council's Committee structure with a view to making recommendations on a revised structure to be implemented in the next Municipal Year.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) Focus Groups be no longer used as they have only been established to aid the drawing up the Parish Plan which will be completed early in the next Municipal Year;
- (2) the Parish Plan Steering Panel meet once every three months once the Plan is published to monitor and review;

- (3) there be no Community and Safety Committee within the Council's Committee structure as issues of crime and disorder, etc. are dealt with adequately at Council meetings;
- (4) Council meetings continue to be held monthly and scheduled for the first Monday of the month where possible;
- (5) the Environment and Highways and Finance and General Purposes Committees be retained and be held every 6 weeks or so on either Mondays or Thursdays;
- (6) the Planning Committee be retained and be held monthly or more regularly if the need arises;
- (7) a Golden Jubilee Park Committee be established with co-optees (initially those members of the Golden Jubilee Park Focus Group who are not Council Members) but additional co-optees may be invited on to it as the Council determines; and
- (8) the proposal to appoint of an Assistant Clerk to the Council be considered at its next meeting.

10 PROPOSED SUPPORTED BUS SERVICE REDUCTIONS

At the meeting of the Council held on 2 February 2004 Members had been made aware of a proposal by Cheshire County Council to withdraw substantial evening bus services. Consequently, it had resolved to object to the proposal and to complain about the lack of consultation and tight timescales involved.

A letter had now been received from Mr G Goddard. The County Transport Co-ordinator, outlining the proposals in detail. In the light of this a letter setting out the Council's position had been drafted and Members noted its content.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to send the letter of objection in response to the County Transport Co-ordinator's proposed cuts and copy it to other interested parties and provide a copy for Members information at the next Council meeting.