

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 26 January 2006 in the Parish Room, 2 Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor B Kerr (in the Chair)
Councillor R Shukla
Councillor Mrs M Wynne-Eyton
Councillor Mrs J Young

Invited Member: Councillor C Moss

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr K Stinson of Saughall Homewatch.

2 CODE OF CONDUCT – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were received.

3 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 17 November 2005 be confirmed as a correct record.

4 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Minute No 19/2005 – Street Cleaning and Grounds Maintenance Contract

The Chairman reported that the Council's current contractor, Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council, had informed that it did not want to re-tender for the work due to internal service reforms concentrating services within the Borough's boundaries.

The Clerk informed that this issue would be discussed at the next Council meeting on 6 February 2006 as a contract end date and exit strategy would need to be determined. It was proposed to hold a meeting with Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council's Public Spaces Unit Manager, Mr Colin Bailey, to discuss this matter further in a practical and proactive way.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to arrange the meeting with Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council' Public Spaces Unit Manager, Mr Colin Bailey, as soon as possible.

Minute No 22/2005 – the Cheshire Community Strategy Innovations Fund

A decision in respect of the Council's funding application to Cheshire Community Strategy Innovations Fund to provide a basketball court behind the Uniform Groups' Headquarters was awaited. **(Following the meeting the Clerk was informed that the Council's application for funding had been unsuccessful because there had been a lot of worthy projects competing for limited resources.)**

Minute No 24/2005 – Play Area Contribution

The Chairman reported that the play equipment described as a “goal-end” did in fact include a basketball facility and on further consideration was an appropriate piece of equipment to install in the Golden Jubilee Park.

Minute No 25/2005 - Golden Jubilee Park – Overhead Electric Cable

An electricity supply would be needed in the Golden Jubilee Park but Members were unsure from where it would be provided.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to write to Powersystems Ltd in an attempt to establish how the electricity supply would reach the field.

Minute No 28/2005 – Newsletter

The Clerk reported that she hoped to publish the newsletter in February 2006. She had waited to accommodate budget information and the Homewatch, who wished to provide some copy.

Minute No 29/2005 - Vernon Institute Clock

One of the clock faces had been electrically enhanced by Mr Murphy. To improve all three faces would cost approximately £150.

RESOLVED:

That the necessary work being undertaken at a cost of £150 by Mr Murphy.

5 HOMEWATCH – THE WAY FORWARD

At the meeting of the Council held on 5 December 2005 a written report from Mr Stinson on the situation regarding the Homewatch (Minute No 218(b)/2005 refers), surmised that in future the overall co-ordination would become the responsibility of the Council.

Consequently, Mr Stinson had accepted an invitation to attend this meeting and set out his vision for the future of the Homewatch. Unfortunately, he was not in attendance.

RESOLVED:

That this matter be further considered at the next Council meeting scheduled for Monday, 6 February 2006.

6 DRAFT POLICING OBJECTIVES

This matter had been referred to the Committee by the Council at its last meeting on Monday, 9 January 2006. Unfortunately, it had not noted that the consultation period ended on 13 January 2006.

RESOLVED:

That no comments be made on the Draft Policing Objectives.

7 PROJECT RURAL MATTERS EVALUATION

The Clerk had received an e-mail from Mr Jeremy Warren, a Research Officer at the Social and Health Evaluation Unit, Institute for Social and Health Research at the University of Chester. He was currently working on an evaluation report for Chester Community Safety Partnership on Project Rural Matters. As part of the evaluation 60 copies of a Community Survey form were returned but not completed and this unusual finding was difficult to explain.

Three copies of this form had been pushed through the letterbox of the Parish Room and three Members of the Council had agreed to complete the form and return it.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to inform the Research Officer, Mr Warren, that the forms had been randomly distributed (i.e. 3 through the Parish Room letterbox) and consequently some may have been returned to him (uncompleted) as the sender.

8 A BUS STRATEGY FOR CHESHIRE – YOUR OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE

The Clerk had received a letter from Mr Colin Kennington, Principal Transport Officer at Cheshire County Council, dated 29 November 2005. He informed that the County Council was currently producing a Local Transport Plan covering the period 2006 to 2011. Following on from this it was going to produce a Bus Strategy for Cheshire covering the same period. The Bus Strategy would explain in more detail how bus travel would be developed in order to contribute towards achieving the Local Transport Plan objectives.

The Parish Council's views on what should be included in the new Bus Strategy were sought.

RESOLVED:

That as the Council could make no useful contribution, no response be sent.

9 VILLAGE DIRECTORY

At the Council meeting held on Monday, 7 November 2005 Members had reviewed the Parish Plan and made various determinations in respect of it (Minute No 192(e)/2005 refers).

It had been agreed that a Village Directory/Handbook be funded and that this Committee would discuss how to proceed with this initiative.

RESOLVED:

That an article be included in the Parish Newsletter informing of the proposal to produce a Village Directory/Handbook and requesting any business/organisation that wants to be included in it to supply their details to the Clerk.

10 ANNUAL PLAY AREA INSPECTION REPORT – JUBILEE FIELD, SAUGHALL

The Committee noted the contents of the Annual Play Area Inspection Report provided by Chester City Council and agree appropriate actions to take. It was noted that some faults that had been identified had already been addressed. Issues requiring action were as follows:

Inspector's Findings	Actions
Cheshire Fencing not dog-proof Risk – Low	May take action to remedy by adding a chain at a future date
Play Carousel (Sputnik) Fault – speed of carousel exceeds the maximum permitted Risk - Slight	Clerk to ask Officers of Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council for advice
Play Igloo Climber Finger trap present Some horizontal rungs rotate Risk- Slight	Councillor C Moss to ask Mr H Wilkinson to rectify the problem
Play Multi Unit – Junior Swing frames or top beams attached to other equipment without specific or adequate measures to segregate the activities present Risk - Slight	Councillor C Moss to ask Mr H Wilkinson to rectify the problem
Play Multi Unit – Junior Clothing trap present, failed toggle test Risk - Slight	Councillor C Moss to ask Mr H Wilkinson to rectify the problem
Play swing 1B 2C – wet pour surface Swing seat damaged Risk - Slight	Clerk to ask Officers of Ellesmere Port and Neston Borough Council to replace 2 damaged seats
Site – internal concrete path less than 1m wide. Recommendation to widen to 1m.	Councillor C Moss to ask Mr H Wilkinson to widen the path. If he is unable to the contractor, Mr DJ Francis, to be asked to widen the path when he carried out other work on the field

11 CHESHIRE FIRE AUTHORITY – BUDGET CONSULTATION 2006-07

Cheshire Fire Authority was inviting comments on its 2006-07 budget proposals. The Authority, funded by a combination of Government grant, Council Tax and national Non-Domestic Rates, was required to set its budget for 2006-07 at its meeting on 8 February 2006. As a public body, the views of local Council Tax and National Non-Domestic Rate payers were important to it and would be taken into account in arriving at its final budget.

Members considered a report presented to the Fire Authority's meeting on 14 December 2005. It provided the background and context to the budget setting decision and gave details of the provisional funding settlement provided by Government, together with a proposed increase in its Council Tax level of 3.5%.

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk inform Mr Steve McGuirk, Brigade Manager – Chief Officer, that the Council objects to an increase in Council Tax of anything over 3% as it is not justified in the light of the current inflation rate and public sector pay increases.

12 GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK – TENDERING ARRANGEMENTS

The Chairman reported that following the meeting of the Council on 9 January 2006 the Clerk had raised concerns, as the Responsible Financial Officer, over the contracts the Council was entering into after only inviting tenders from one contractor. She was particularly concerned over the tender (total value of £1,540+VAT) in respect of work to be carried out in the Golden Jubilee Park as follows (Minute No 9(a) and 10/2006 refers):

- ? Provide and erect fencing in front of No 2 gate
- ? Tarmac section of pathway to permit vehicles and equipment into central area
- ? Tarmac from No 1 gate to perimeter path
- ? Extend path from the front of the Uniform Group Headquarters to connect with perimeter path

and the tender in the sum of £4,025 to lay a hard surface behind the Uniform Group's Headquarters and make and install a basketball frame and net.

It was noted that the Council's Financial Regulations stated that for contracts over £500 the Clerk should invite tenders from at least two firms. Also, when applications were made to waive Standing Orders relating to contracts to enable a tender to be negotiated without competition, the reason should be embodied in a recommendation to the Council. If an exemption was to be made it must be justified.

It was also noted that at a meeting of the Council held on 30 August 2005 both the Clerk and the Internal Auditor had exercised caution by reminding Members of the importance of obtaining more than one quotation for work proposed. They had also raised concerns that the quotations received in 2003 had been out of date and did not exactly reflect work that the Council required at the time (Minute No 151(a)/2005 refers). Nevertheless, the Council had decided to go ahead and accept the tender.

However, because WREN had withdrawn its grant offer this work had not been carried out.

At its meeting on 10 October 2005, the Council had agreed retrospectively to accept a quotation from Mr DJ Francis in the sum of £14,250.00 “to dig out approximately 700 metres by 2 metres wide of field and construct and lay a pathway of consolidated plantings - £7,250.00. The total cost quoted was £14,250.00 including the hire of necessary plant and equipment, clearing the field and temporary fencing” (Minute No 183(a)/refers).

The work had been undertaken and was now approximately 90% complete and an interim payment of £10,711.60 had been made to Mr Francis in respect of this. The Chairman informed that the additional work was a continuation of work needed in the Golden Jubilee Park and that the contractor’s quotations had been very competitive.

The Committee had due regard to all the facts and after substantial deliberation **RECOMMENDED** the Council to:

- (1) note the requirements for accepting tenders etc. as set out in the Council’s Financial Regulations;
- (2) ensure that no contract is placed in the name of the Council by anyone other than the Clerk;
- (3) reaffirm the decision made at the Council meeting on 10 October 2005 to retrospectively accept Mr DJ Francis’ quotation in the sum of £14,250.00 on the basis that the majority of the work had been carried out; and
- (4) reaffirm the decision made at the Council meeting held on 9 January 2006 to exceptionally accept the tender quotations from Mr DJ Francis as detailed above, for good reason.