

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 18 September 2008 in the Uniform Groups' Headquarters, Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor DF Holman (in the Chair)
Councillor Mrs J Johnson
Councillor R Shukla
Councillor RA Storrar
Councillor A Warrington
Councillor Mrs J Young

Invited Member: Councillor WI Humphrey

Also in attendance: Mr H Dobson, Internal Auditor

18 APOLOGIES FOR AUTHORISED ABSENCE

No apologies for authorised absence were received. Members had heard that Councillor Mrs H Thorniley-Jones was ill and agreed that Councillor DF Holman would drop a card off for her.

19 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor RA Storrar declared a personal interest in respect of Item No. 11 – Cheshire West and Chester Council – Area Neighbourhood Working Consultation – Running to 30 September 2008 (Minute No. 28/2008 refers) by virtue of him being a Member of Cheshire West and Chester Council and sitting on its Committee that has Area Committees in its remit.

20 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 22 May 2008 be confirmed as a correct record.

21 CHESHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S 'PARISH SMALL GRANTS SCHEME' FOR COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

Following the success of last year's grant scheme, Cheshire County Council's Countryside Access Development Team had informed that it had been successful in its bid for funding to run the scheme again in 2008/09.

As previously, the aim of the scheme was to provide Parish and Town Councils with funding towards projects that attracted countryside users and assisted the local economy. Projects could include (but were not limited to) things such as leaflets, map boards, benches, gates to replace stiles and path resurfacing projects.

It was noted that landowners would also be able to apply for the fund directly, provided they had the support of the Parish Council.

Members considered the funding conditions and noted that the application process had altered and that the maximum grant had increased to £2,000. Match funding of a minimum of 25% was required and this could be cash or 'in kind'. There was no formal deadline for applications, funding would be awarded on a first-come first-served basis to all eligible applications until the money available ran out. All projects must be completed by 31 March 2009.

The Chairman reported that he had given this matter consideration and was proposing that the following ideas be considered for possible projects, subject to some follow up action and enquiry:

- Public Footpath Booklet – revised and reprinted
- Map Boards (end of Lodge Lane, gate at Shotwick House and wall at Vernon Institute)
- Provide a bench/picnic table and locate it close to the site where the castle used to be

It was noted that farmers and landowners would need to be consulted before any footpath map was printed to establish that the routes of the footpaths on their land were correct. It was thought that the Public Rights of Way Unit, now located in Phoenix House, Winsford, may be able to offer advice and may still have the template for the original Saughall footpath map (it had printed approximately ten years ago) which could be used as the starting point for revisions.

The tenant at Castle Farm would be consulted if it were decided to make a bid for the bench/picnic table to be positioned near the site of the Castle.

The Clerk reported that she had been in contact with Mr Tony Leach, the Parish Paths Warden, regarding possible projects and he had informed that he was prepared to wait until the paths close to the Welsh Road were reopened as some work may be required on them. It was expected that these paths would be opened soon and he would be in touch once he had walked them.

RESOLVED:

That some follow up action on the ideas put forward be taken with a view to making a report and recommendation(s) at the next meeting of the Council scheduled for Monday, 6 October 2008 on projects that could be included in a funding application to Cheshire County Council.

22 REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

The Committee was requested to consider the revised draft Standing Orders that had been drawn up based on a model provided by the Cheshire Association of Local Councils, that the Council had adopted at its meeting on 3 July 2006 (Minute No. 111/2006 refers).

Members sought clarification on the meaning of some Standing Orders and agreed amendments as appropriate.

It was proposed that the Standing Orders be further revised to ensure that 'Matters Arising from the Minutes' was included as a standard item on all future agenda.

However, the Clerk reminded Members that at the training event facilitated by the Cheshire Association of Local Councils this issue had been debated in full and as a consequence it had been agreed to no longer include such an item on the agenda.

The Clerk further reported that one of the potential problems arising out of the confirmation of Minutes was the temptation for Members to raise issues apart from simply confirming the Minutes as a correct record. At its worst this could lead to an attempt to change a decision taken at the previous meeting and any such discussion should be ruled out of order by the Chairman. Putting 'Matters Arising from the Minutes' on the agenda was not regarded as good practice and, unless the subject to be raised was related to a matter specifically referred to in the agenda, may infringe the statutory restrictions that any business specified in the notice could be dealt with (Local Government Act 1992, S.100B added by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985).

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Standing Orders be further amended in the light of comments received and sent to those Members who are not Members of this Committee requesting their amendments and/or additions be reported to the Clerk by Friday, 17 October 2008; and
- (2) the Clerk be requested to make any further revisions to the Standing Orders following receipt of Members comments and present them to the Council meeting on 3 November 2008 for adoption or otherwise.

23 THE PROPOSED GOOD NEIGHBOUR AND COMMUNITY AWARDS SCHEME

The Committee considered a draft scheme and application form drawn up by the Clerk and agreed an amendment to the scheme.

RESOLVED:

That this item be deferred to the next meeting of the Committee when further consideration will be given to the contents of the proposed scheme with a view to making a recommendation to the Council for its adoption.

24 GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK

(a) The Next Development Phase

The Clerk reported that she had been successful in securing a financial contribution of £5,000 from Chester City Council towards play area improvements with the application for a 4m high playnet. The original quote dated 25 April 2008 was for £9,371.30 + VAT but the revised quote received on 16 September 2008 was for £10,971.30 + VAT.

It was noted that the Council, at its meeting on 2 June 2008, had considered recommendations of the Committee made at its meeting on 22 May 2008 (Committee Minute No. 17(m)/2008 refers):

“That the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to endorse the purchase of a 4m high playnet if it was successful in attracting the necessary £5,000 it has applied for from Chester City Council’s Contributions to Play Areas in Parished Areas 2008-09.”

The Council had agreed the recommendation contained in the Committee’s Minutes of 22 May 2008 (Council Minute No. 122/2008 refers).

The Committee turned its attention to information provided by the Chairman of the Cheshire County Playing Fields Association and proposed that projects for next year could include a boules court and the procurement of two tug-of-war ropes.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Council’s resolution to go ahead with the 4m high playnet if grant aid can be obtained be noted;
- (2) the discrepancy between the two quotations provided by Monster Play Systems be explored; and
- (3) quotations be obtained for the provision of a boules court and for tug-of-war ropes.

(b) Play Equipment Operational Inspection Report – July 2008

It was noted that the missing safety mat from the aerial runway had been found in the pond and would be stored in the Uniform Groups’ Headquarters, as a replacement had already been acquired.

Part of the timber/mesh fencing was damaged, there was some snapped timber and loose/damaged mesh requiring repair. It was agreed to ask Mr H Wilkinson to carry out this work.

It was reported that there was some moss growth evident on the play surfaces but it was agreed to take no action on it at the present time.

Damage to both goal nets was reported but it was agreed to take no action on this as they still served their purpose.

The Clerk reported that she had received letters from residents of the village who believed that the slide, with the wide vertical ladder, was potentially dangerous. They had requested that consideration be given to changing this piece of equipment to a more “child friendly” slide which was easier for any child to climb (possibly with handrails).

The Clerk had asked My Dymond of Morral Play Solutions, who carried out the quarterly playing equipment inspections, for his comments on this. He had responded as follows:

“Play equipment has to have a certain degree of challenge and an element of “self risk assessment” otherwise children wouldn’t use it. My own view is that the slide offers moderate challenge and is certainly not dangerous for the users.

You can gauge how dangerous an item is by the number of serious accidents occurring on and around it – I would suggest that there have been no serious accidents on this item over the years.

I would suggest that maybe under 3's are having difficulty gaining access to the item – which is correct because the item is not intended for that age group.

It is past its best however in terms of age and a replacement would be a good idea purely in terms of continual development of the site.”

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Clerk be requested to ask Mr H Wilkinson to carry out the fencing work referred to above; and
- (2) the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to inform the writers of the letters expressing concerns about the slide of the Play Equipment Inspector's comments as detailed above.

25 INTERNAL AUDIT OF THE COUNCIL'S ACCOUNTING RECORDS AND CONTROL SYSTEMS AND REVIEW OF ITS EFFECTIVENESS

The Council's 2007/08 Accounts were in the process of being audited by the External Auditor, Jackie Bellard of the Audit Commission, and as part of that process the Clerk had completed Section 2 – Annual Governance Statement. Of the nine questions she had been able to answer Yes to seven of them and not applicable to one but had answered No to the following question:

“We have maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective system of internal audit of the Council's accounting records and control systems **and** carried out a review of its effectiveness.”

The Clerk reported that she had answered No to this question because no formal review of the system of internal audit of the Council's accounting records and control systems had been carried out.

Consequently, she had included this item on the agenda for the meeting to provide an opportunity for Members to carry out such a review.

Mr Dobson informed that he was satisfied with the arrangements the Council had in place to maintain what he considered to be very adequate and effective system of internal audit.

The Clerk reported that she had received a letter from the Audit Commission dated 5 September 2008 requesting a copy of any documentation relating to the arrangements in place for the management of risk, including Minutes of actions taken (or to be taken) to address any risks identified within one month otherwise the Council would be asked to pay £20 to cover any further communication required.

The Council discussed risk management in detail and it was.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Council's system of internal audit of its accounting records and control systems be reviewed annually to ensure that they are effective; and
- (2) the Clerk be requested to send the Audit Commission, in answer to its letter of 5 September 2008, a copy of its Quarterly Play Equipment Inspection Report and its Insurance documentation and ask it if this is the type of paperwork required.

26 INSURANCE COVER REVIEW

The Committee received the most recent insurance documentation from Allianz Insurance so it could carry out its annual review and agree any additional cover required.

The Committee noted the detail of the documentation provided and queried whether or not the War Memorial, which was the Clock Tower attached to the Vernon Institute building, was covered by the Vernon Institute Management Committee's (VICM) insurance as it was not covered by the Parish Council.

Mr Dobson, who as well as being the Council's Internal Auditor was the VICM's Treasurer, agreed to check its policy and let the Clerk know if provision for the Tower was included within it.

RESOLVED:

That Mr Dobson's response be awaited.

27 STREET LITTER CLEANING CONTRACT – REVIEW OF LITTER PICKING ROUTES AND THE PROVISION OF NEW BINS IN THE GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK

The Council's street cleaning contractor, Mr R Hipkiss, had informed that, to keep the strip of land, where a hedge used to be in the Park, as litter free as possible, would require an additional two hours of his time. He was currently contracted for 20 hours per week (£211.40 per week or £10,992.80 per annum). The contractual hourly rate for litter picking was £10.57 per hour and the additional cost per annum would be £1,099.28.

The Council at its meeting held on 1 September 2008 had referred the review of litter picking routes to the Committee and delegated it authority to increase the contracted litter picking hours, if after review of the routes, the Committee decided it was the best way forward. The Committee had also been delegated with the authority to purchase additional litterbins for the Park if it considered it appropriate to do so.

Members each had a copy of the contract terms and litter picking routes for information. They considered the matter in detail and following substantial deliberation and being unable to reach a decision on the way forward it was

RESOLVED:

That further discussion be held with Mr R Hipkiss and these matters be referred back to the Council for decision at its next meeting.

28 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER COUNCIL – AREA NEIGHBOURHOOD WORKING CONSULTATION – RUNNING TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2008

It was reported that Councillors Mrs JM Young and WI Humphrey had attended a facilitated session on the current consultation held at The Fourways Inn, Chester Road, Delamere, between 1:30pm and 4:30pm on Tuesday, 16 September 2008. Their view was that the event had been an exercise to say consultation had been undertaken and that on the whole it had been very disappointing. No one had been available who could answer questions put by delegates.

The Council at its meeting on 1 September 2008 had delegated the responsibility for formulating the Council's response to the consultation to the Committee. However, after substantial deliberation it was

RESOLVED:

That the Council will not make a response to Cheshire West and Chester Council's Area Neighbourhood Working Consultation but Members are encouraged to respond individually.

29 EVENT PHOTOGRAPHY

Councillor Mrs JM Young informed that sometime ago discussions had been held and Councillor Mrs JE Storrar had indicated that she would be willing to take on the role of the Council's Official Photographer.

In order that records were kept and no events were missed Councillor RA Storrar agreed to check whether or not Councillor Mrs JE Storrar was still agreeable to fulfilling this role.