

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on 26 February 2009 in the Uniform Groups' Headquarters, Fiddlers Lane, Saughall

In attendance: Councillor DF Holman (in the Chair)
Councillor Mrs J Johnson
Councillor RK Shukla
Councillor Mrs H Thorniley-Jones
Councillor A Warrington
Councillor Mrs JM Young

1 APOLOGIES FOR AUTHORISED ABSENCE

Apologies for authorised absence were received from Councillor RA Storrar.

2 MEMBERS' 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 18 September 2008 and the Notes of the informal meeting of the Committee held on 6 November 2008 be confirmed as correct records.

4 ANNUAL AUDIT

The Committee noted that the Council, at its meeting on 1 December 2008, had considered the External Auditor's letter dated 12 November 2008, which had been sent to the Clerk following completion of the Parish Council's 2007/08 Annual Audit. The letter made recommendations as the External Auditor considered appropriate. The Council had gone on to resolve:

“That

(1) it be noted that the information contained in the annual return is in accordance with the Audit Commission's requirements and no matters have come to the External Auditor's attention giving her cause for concern that relevant legislation and regulatory requirements have not been met; and

(2) the Finance and General Purposes Committee be requested to consider the External Auditor's report at its next meeting scheduled for 7:30pm on Thursday, 26 February 2008 and make recommendations on any actions to be taken as a result to the Council.”

(Minute No 276(a)/2008 refers)

Consequently, the Committee considered the External Auditor's Report. It stated that:

“A formal risk assessment has not been carried out.”

The External Auditor had contacted the Clerk and recommended that a software package be purchased from DMH Risk Solutions at a cost of £100. This had been discussed previously and agreed when the Council had set its budget for 2009/10 and £100 had been allocated for the purpose.

“A review of the effectiveness of Internal Audit has not been carried out.”

Consequently, the Committee undertook a review of the work, procedures and processes of the Internal Auditor, Harry Dobson. Members noted that each year he scrutinised the Accounts before they were presented to the External Auditor. He regularly attended Council and Committee meetings, asking relevant questions on the Accounts and on accounting procedures and took a keen interest in ensuring the Council's Financial Regulations were adhered to. It was noted that he was academically and professionally qualified to undertake the role of Internal Auditor and it was agreed that he effectively carried out this role.

“The fidelity insurance cover is not adequate and should be extended to include Councillors. Cover equivalent to the year-end balance plus 50% of the precept is a guidance.”

The Committee accepted the External Auditor's comment and **RECOMMENDS** the Council to increase its fidelity insurance accordingly.

“The tender value of £500 seems low with regard to the expenditure incurred by the Council – we have discussed this with the Clerk and understand that this has been addressed since the year-end.”

The Committee noted that the Council had been in the process of revising its Standing Orders at the time the External Auditor was completing the Annual Audit of the Accounts. The revised Standing Orders had now been adopted by the Council at its meeting on 3 November 2008 (Minute No 243/2008 refers).

[Note: Standing Order No 75 – Standing Orders on Contracts, referred to intended contracts exceeding £1,000 but not exceeding £10,000 in value.]

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Clerk be requested to consult Councillor DF Holman over the purchase of Risk Management Software and if they are in agreement she will go ahead and place the order for it as the Council has already agreed to allocate £100 for such a purchase at its Budget Meeting on 19 February 2009 (Budget 2009/2010 Appendix 1 refers);
- (2) the Clerk be requested ask Harry Dobson to provide detail of his qualifications and the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to carry out further reviews of the Internal Auditor's effectiveness annually;

(3) the Clerk be requested to contact the Council's insurance company, Allianz Cornhill Insurance Ltd, and request two quotations – one to increase the fidelity insurance so cover is equivalent to the year-end balance plus 50% of the precept in line with the guidance drawn to the Council's attention and one to extend the cover to include Councillors; and

(4) the quotations at (3) be considered at the next ordinary meeting of the Committee scheduled for 7:30pm on Thursday, 16 April 2009 if they were available.

5 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Committee considered a draft Statement of Community Involvement that Cheshire West and Chester Council was consulting on. This was a key-planning document, which would play an important role in the preparation of a new Local Development Framework for Cheshire West and Chester. The statement had been prepared in response to the current process of Local Government Reorganisation in Cheshire, which would lead to the formation of the new Council.

Members had regard to Paragraph 5.15 – Business Groups

“A strong economy and vibrant town and city centre is essential to the future success of Cheshire West and Chester and therefore it is important that the business community is fully engaged in its future planning. Whenever possible we make use of existing business networks and groups, for example Chambers of Commerce, and city centre management to involve businesses in work on development documents”

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to respond to the consultation (before the closing date of 4:45pm on Friday, 27 February 2009) with reference to the above Paragraph making the point that the new Council is not being inclusive and request that it also makes reference to and includes rural businesses.

6 REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S INSURANCE COVER

The Committee received the recently revised insurance schedule supplied by Allianz Cornhill Insurance Limited and noted the revisions to the property damage section.

Members were asked to give consideration to what else should be added to the schedule. Discussions ensued and the following were considered for inclusion:

- The 6 bench seats, 4 of which were recently installed in the Golden Jubilee Park (£1,281.91)
- The new CCTV equipment installed in the Golden Jubilee Park (£2,900)
- The fencing and ROSPA compliant gate around the car park (£2,558.09)
- The reinforced mesh laid under the grass in the car park (£9,344.30)

RESOLVED:

That the Clerk be requested to contact the Council's insurance company, Allianz Cornhill Insurance Limited, with a view to adding the assets above to the Scheduled and establishing whether it is a new for old policy.

7 CHESHIRE WEST AND CHESTER COUNCIL'S PROPOSED HOME ASSISTANCE POLICY

The Committee considered Cheshire West and Chester Council's draft Home Assistance Policy that was out to consultation. Comments were requested by 11 March 2009.

RESOLVED:

That the Council make no response to the consultation document and Councillor Mrs JM Young be requested to draw the home improvement funding opportunities detailed therein to the attention of the Vernon Institute Management Committee.

8 GOLDEN JUBILEE PARK

The Clerk had received a letter dated 19 February 2009 from Cheshire West and Chester Shadow Authority drawing her attention to its Playbuilder Project. The new Authority had recently been awarded approximately £1m of central Government funding from the Department of Children, Schools and Families towards providing improved play facilities.

The Parish Council was invited to submit an application for consideration for inclusion as one of 22 new or significantly improved play spaces. It was expected that each site would benefit from an approximate investment of £40,000.

The Department of Children, Schools and Families had set strict criteria and it would be applied to all bids submitted. If the Council wished to be considered it had to supply the following information by 5:00pm on Friday, 27 February 2009:

- Site name and address, including postcode.
- Location map or sketch if an OS map is not available.
- Current details of projects/proposals.
- Site photograph(s)
- Target group improvements are aimed at (Note the funding should target 8-13 year olds especially girls)
- Access to the site and within the site to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.
- Consultation details already completed or which need to be carried out.
- Details of any secured funding in place or funding application made.
- A statement outlining why your organisation believes the proposed site should be selected as a Playbuilder site.

Members noted the tight timescale and criteria. They considered that a funding application should be made to provide another multi play system to meet the needs of girls between 8-13 years old as there was currently a distinct lack of provision for them in the village and this shortage must be addressed. The application would also

be for another tarmac pad to be laid next to the one already in the Golden Jubilee Park thus increasing the size of the tarmac games surface/court.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Councillor DF Holman be requested to send Cheshire West and Chester Shadow Council an expression of interest and necessary information by the deadline set for receipt; and
- (2) the Council be **RECOMMENDED** to note the Committee's actions in light of the time period for receipt of funding applications and endorse them.

9 WAIN HOUSE

The Committee noted the current position with regard to the proposal to redevelop Wain House and bungalows (65-73 Rakeway) along with the statement issued by the Chester District Housing Trust.

RESOLVED:

That the situation be noted.

10 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was noted that the closing date for receipt of nomination forms in respect of the Council's Community and Good Neighbour Awards was 31 March 2009. Depending on the number of nominations received, it may be necessary for the Committee to meet early in April 2009 to consider them and make recommendations to the Council.

RESOLVED:

That if it is deemed necessary the Committee will hold a Special Meeting at 7:00pm on Thursday, 2 April 2009 in order to consider the nominations received in respect of the Good Neighbour and Community Awards and make appropriate recommendations to the Council on making any such Awards.