

Witham Town Council

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MINUTES

Meeting of: **Policy and Resources Committee**

Date: **Monday, 8th December 2014**

Present:	Councillors	M.C.M.	Lager	(Chairman)
	Miss	L.	Barlow	
	Mrs	M.	Bennett	
		O.A.	Biyi	
		S.J.	Goodfellow	
		M.	Squire	(Town Clerk)
	Mrs	G.	Kennedy	(Committee Clerk)

And one member of the public.

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C.F. Coughlan, Dr R.L. Evans, J.C. Goodman, Mrs J.M. Money, W.J. Rose and R. Williams.

44. MINUTES

RESOLVED That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held 13th October 2014 be agreed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

45. INTERESTS

No interests were declared at this time.

46. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

No comment was made by the member of the public present.

47. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT

The Town Clerk's Report on matters arising was received.

The Town Clerk advised that a total of £44 had been raised for the Poppy Appeal from collection boxes at the Town Hall.

Councillor James Abbott, Essex County Council, had produced a petition in support of a Walk-In Centre or Community Hospital for Witham, and the forms would be in the Information Centre.

The Town Clerk had emailed Members regarding a collection being organised for Paul Hart, Manager of the Citizens Advice Bureau, who would be leaving later this month.

Braintree District Council had been in touch regarding artefacts from the old Bramston Sports Centre, including a plaque and foundation stone; and some photographs. Members considered that the photographs could be displayed for a time in the Information Centre and that consideration should be given towards a permanent placement of the plaque and stone.

The Town Clerk spoke of the great success of the Dickensian Market.

It was agreed to check what Greenfields Community Housing had named their development off Forest Road, as only a small part of it was the re-development of the Forest Road Community Centre.

RESOLVED That the Town Clerk's Report be received and noted.

48. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

(a) BANK RECONCILIATION

The Bank Reconciliations to 31st October 2014 were received.

RESOLVED That the Bank Reconciliations to 31st October 2014 be received, agreed and signed by the Chairman.

(b) BUDGET STATEMENTS

The Budget Statements to 31st October 2014 were received.

The Town Clerk explained that when the budgets were set, details of pension increases had not been available.

RESOLVED That Budget Statements to 31st October 2014 be received, agreed and signed by the Chairman.

(c) **SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

The Schedule of Payments and Receipts for the period ended 31st October 2014 were received.

RESOLVED That the Schedule of Receipts to 31st October 2014 and totalling £232,851.52, and the Schedule of Payments to 31st October 2014 and totalling £130,960.66 be received, agreed and signed by the Chairman.

(d) **TOWN MAYOR'S GIFT FUND**

Details of the Town Mayor's Gift Fund were received.

RESOLVED That the details be received and noted.

49. **LOCALISM FUND & TAX BASE 2015/2016**

A report and email from Braintree District Council were received.

The Town Clerk explained that neither the exact grant payment for the Town Council or the Tax Base are yet available.

RESOLVED That the report be received and information noted.

50. **MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

Details of Members' attendance at Meetings were received.

RESOLVED That the information be received and noted.

51. **REVIEW OF WORKING PRACTICES**

The Town Clerk explained that the following two agenda items focus on –

- (i) a periodic review of maximising efficiency and resources,
- (ii) adapting to and making best use of changes in technology which are used by an ever increasing percentage of the population.
- (iii) and recommending review with further submission to full Town Council to consider.

(a) **EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CURRENT WAY OF DEALING WITH PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

A report prepared by the Deputy Town Clerk regarding the effectiveness of the current system of dealing with planning applications was received.

Members discussed different options to streamline the system at the Planning Applications Sub-Committee Meetings. Suggestions included considering just the larger or controversial applications, or to consider the applications at the start of the

main Committee Meetings. It was suggested that careful consideration should be given as to the start time of the Meeting so that Members do not have to wait between Meetings. Members also commented that the Chairman should effectively control the Meeting to ensure that it finishes on time. Members agreed the importance of all sixteen Councillors being Members of the Planning Applications Sub-Committee.

Another suggestion was to cut back on paper copies of Agendas and to deal with controversial issues first by rearranging the order of agenda items. It was also suggested that Members could be informed by email of applications. Great care would need to be exercised if decisions were to be agreed en bloc as it was stressed that Members must be sure what they are passing.

The suggestion was made that the matter be referred to Town Council with a recommendation that a pilot scheme is trialled up to the next Administration.

RESOLVED That the matter be further discussed at Town Council.

(b) ELECTRONIC DISTRIBUTION OF AGENDAS AND MINUTES

A report was received.

The Town Clerk explained that there had been previous discussions about electronic delivery of Agendas and Minutes.

Members considered that whilst an agenda is being printed it can just as easily be scanned and sent by email. Hard copies would always be available in the office. It was suggested that it be run as a trial, with paper copies available for those without appropriate equipment, and a decision taken at the end of this Administration. It was also suggested that better use be made of the projector at Meetings to show photos, etc. that are on the Agenda.

RECOMMEND TO TOWN COUNCIL That a trial of electronic posting of Agendas and Minutes be undertaken and consideration be given to publishing these documents on the website.

52. BRAINTREE ROAD RESIDENTIAL CAR PARK

A report was received concerning the extension of the lease of the car park to Braintree District Council.

Members agreed that the lease should be extended.

RESOLVED That arrangements be made with Braintree District Council to extend the lease of Braintree Road Residential Car Park.

53. STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes, held in Open Session, of the Meeting of the Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee held 2nd December 2014 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

54. POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE BUDGET

The Chairman detailed a proposed Policy and Resources Committee Budget for 2015/2016. He suggested that the Civic Receptions and International Relations budget should be amalgamated and reduced to a total of £1,000.

Every Member has the option to claim an allowance of up to £200 per annum to cover out of pocket expenses; however in practice no claim has been made during this Administration. He therefore suggested that a sum of £3,200 be put into earmarked reserves which could be topped up if necessary. Members suggested that this should be a subject to be highlighted at the Induction Evening for new Members.

£10,000 was in the budget for newsletters and publications but the suggestion was made that there should be a review on the best way to get information to residents and businesses, with fewer hard copies, whilst still achieving the same impact.

The Chairman suggested that £2,500 p.a. should be earmarked towards the cost of replacing the Ransome mower which has an asset value of c£25,000 (this allocation logically belongs to the Environment Committee budget).

£5,000 was suggested towards assisting the community with the Town Plan but no budget for joint working with Braintree District Council. He added that he would like to encourage economic activity and employment and suggested a budget of £5,000 to which the Town Team could make application.

The Town Clerk said that he would bring a final figure for Administration and Central Services to the Estimates Meeting.

Members were reminded that the proposed budget would be referred to the Estimates Sub-Committee and subject to change at Town Council.

RESOLVED That the following budget bids for the Policy and Resources Committee be presented to the Estimates Sub-Committee for consideration –

Mayor's Fund	-	£100
Civic Receptions/International Relations	-	£1,000
Christmas Expenses	-	£2,500
Mayor's Allowance	-	£2,500
Newsletter and Publications	-	£10,000
Town Plan	-	£5,000
Economic/Employment Support	-	£5,000
Administration/Central Services	-	£48,410

<u>Total</u>	-	<u>£74,510</u>
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Income

Administration/Central Services	-	£2,500
Bank/Investment income	-	£3,000
Hall Hire	-	£11,000

<u>Total</u>	-	<u>£16,500</u>
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Earmarked Reserves

Members' Allowances	-	£3,200
Major Repairs and renewals	-	£15,000
Equipment Replacement	-	£2,500
Election Expenses	-	£15,000

<u>Total</u>	-	<u>£35,700</u>
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EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED That under the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest.

55. WITHAM'S GATEWAYS

A report was received concerning the gateway into Witham on Hatfield Road.

RESOLVED That the Town Council seeks the County Council's consent for a new planter arrangement to be installed and for the mound to be removed; and that Essex County Council be asked to re-instate the 30mph sign/'Welcome to Witham' sign without delay.¹

56. STAFF AND ACCOMMODATION SUB-COMMITTEE

The Minutes, held in Private Session, of the Meeting of the Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee, held 2nd December 2014 were received.

RESOLVED That the Minutes be received and noted.

57. PUBLIC DOMAIN

¹ It had been agreed at the earlier Planning Applications Sub-Committee Meeting, Minute 81(i) refers, that the Town Council will contact Redrow Homes to seek its options regarding the entrance to Lodge Farm estate to ensure it is sympathetic to the nearby Maltings Lane estate.

It was agreed that the resolution at Minute 55 – Witham's Gateways should be moved into the Public Domain.

RESOLVED That the resolution at Minute 55 – Witham's Gateways, be moved into the Public Domain.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 8.42 p.m.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager
Chairman

MS/GK/11.12.2014