

# Witham Town Council

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## MINUTES

Meeting of: **Policy and Resources Committee**

Date: **Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> December 2016**

Present:	Councillors	M.C. M	Lager	(Chairman)
		L.D.	Campbell	
		J.C.	Goodman	
		P.	Horner	
	Mrs.	J.A.	Kempf	
	Mrs	A.	Kilmartin	
	Mrs	J.M.	Money	
		W.J.	Rose	
	Mrs	J.	Williams	
		R.	Williams	

### APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor T.A. Pleasance; and Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin would be leaving the Meeting early.

### 58. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held 10<sup>th</sup> October 2016 be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

### 59. INTERESTS

Councillor J.C. Goodman, declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 69 as a Member of Braintree District Council (BDC). Councillor W.J. Rose declared non-pecuniary interests in Minutes 67 - Witham Leisure Centre and 69 – Future Localism Fund, as a Member of BDC. Councillor L.D. Campbell declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute 65 (a) – Tesco Bags of Help Initiative, as a leader in the Boys Brigade.

### 60. QUESTIONS AND STATEMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There was no member of the press or public present.

**61. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT**

The Town Clerk's gave a verbal report.

He mentioned that the Dickensian Event held on Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> November 2016 had been a great success with large crowds attending on the day. A total of £303.81 was raised on the Town Council stall and he confirmed that the proceeds have been allocated to the Town Mayor's charity fund.

He also indicated that he has recently met with the new Business Development Manager at BDC and two private company directors who wish to stage an evening open air cinema event in the Town Park in Witham during the summer of 2017. This event could dovetail nicely with the next Community Day in the park on the 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017.

Full reports on both these events will be brought to the next Community Committee on the 6<sup>th</sup> February 2017.

**RESOLVED** That the information be received and noted.

**62. FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

(a) **BANK RECONCILIATION**

The Bank Reconciliations to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 were received.

**RESOLVED** That the Bank Reconciliations to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman.

(b) **BUDGET STATEMENTS**

The Budget Statements to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 were received.

At 7.40pm Councillor Mrs A. Kilmartin left the meeting.

It was agreed that the budget headings of 'Witham Gateways' £3,000 and 'Accommodation' £10,000 were unlikely to be allocated before Financial Year End 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, so the anticipated figures at this date should both be recorded as zero.

**RESOLVED** That the Budget Statements to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 were received, approved and signed by the Chairman subject to the amendments to the anticipated Year End 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 budget allocations for 'Witham Gateways' and 'Accommodation'.

(c) **SCHEDULE OF PAYMENTS**

The Schedule of Payments and Receipts for the period ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 were received.

Comment was made that the size of the font of the financial system printouts were too small and difficult to read easily. The Town Clerk would ensure that the size of the printouts are enlarged for future meetings.

**RESOLVED** That the Schedule of Payments for the period ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and totalling £70,807.46 and for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 and totalling £46,317.63; and the Schedule of Receipts for the period ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2016 and totalling £224,250.34 and for the period ended 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016 and totalling £11,158.33 be received, approved 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.

(e) **EXPENDITURE AUTHORISED BY THE TOWN CLERK**

Members were informed that the Town Clerk has authorised payment of c£805 for emergency repairs to inner front door of the Information Centre.

**RESOLVED** That the information be received and the expenditure authorised.

**63. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS**

Details of Members' Attendance at Meetings were received.

It was highlighted that the percentage members' attendance was missing from the copies. This would be rectified for future meetings and members would also be sent the attendance lists before each subsequent Policy and Resources agenda goes out in order to pre-check attendance records.

**RESOLVED** That the details be received and noted.

**64. MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE AT COURSES**

A report was received concerning Members' attendance at courses.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and that if no reasonable notice or explanation is provided to the office of non-attendance at a training course, then the member concerned will be obliged to reimburse the fees of that particular course. Standing Orders will be amended to this effect.

**65. WITHAM STRATEGY GROUP**

An email was received from the Witham Strategy Group.

(a) Tesco 'Bags of Help' initiative

Councillor L.D. Campbell had declared an interest.

An information page from the Tesco website and Members informed that grants are available to the Town Council as well as community groups. Members noted that this funding could be potentially used for outdoor projects along the River Walk, Whetmead or James Cooke Wood.

**RESOLVED** To receive and note and apply for funding if suitable projects are forthcoming in the future.

(b) Parking Strategy Group

Members were informed that the Strategy Group wishes to know if a new Chairman will be appointed for the Parking Strategy Group and the Committee needed to review if it wished to continue and if so the way forward.

It was felt that a thorough and definitive parking strategy plan had already been produced and submitted to the District Council. The Town Clerk would also check that this report had also been sent to the Essex Parking Partnership (EPP). It was thought that a new Chairman would not therefore be required. However the outcome of this report should be followed up within six months and brought back to a future Environment Committee Meeting

**RESOLVED** To write to the District Council for an update and report back to Town Council at a future Environment Committee meeting.

**RESOLVED** To inform the Witham Strategy Group of this way forward.

**66. STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes, held in Open Session, of the Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee Meeting held 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016 were received.

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes be received and noted.

**67. WITHAM LEISURE CENTRE**

Councillor W.J. Rose had declared an interest.

A report was received concerning staffing issues of the Witham Leisure Centre. It had been reported that the pool had not opened at the recent half term linked with problems to do with adequate lifeguard cover. There were also perceived issues with the crèche and cancelled classes. Members remarked that Fusion the operators had presumably a duty of care via their Service Level Agreement. It was apparent that classes when they are running are very well attended. District Councillors were urged to raise the matter

at District Council and that the Town Clerk write to the appropriate officer at District Council also.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and noted.

**RESOLVED** That the Town Council members who are also District Councillors raise the matter at District Council.

**RESOLVED** That the Town Clerk also raises the issues with Mr Lee Crabb, Head of Environment and Leisure at District Council.

## **68. REVIEW OF CURRENT WORKING PRACTICES**

A report on current working practices was received. The aim of the report was to achieve time and resources savings in administration of agendas with particular emphasis on the Planning Applications Sub-Committee and the Environment Committee.

It was thought that the delegation of matters relating to transport could be delegated to a new Planning Applications and Transport Sub-Committee which would continue to report to the Environment Committee. Members could see the merit of this way forward. This new Sub-Committee will start at 6.30pm with business to be concluded by 7.30pm. Discretion would be needed on how many transport related matters could be included if there were intensive/voluminous Planning applications. A trial period would be conducted from the beginning of January 2017 to the Town Council AGM in May 2017.

**RESOLVED** That a new Planning Applications and Transport Sub-Committee is arranged for the New Year 2017 with a trial period to run until the Town Council AGM in May 2017.

Members acknowledged that removing the written reports on the agendas of Planning Applications Sub-Committee Part 1 would reduce some administration work. However, whilst the Part 1 reports would be available at the meetings on the screen and also on the District Council website, it was important that there was a duty of care to examine each application in depth, however seemingly straight forward. The care and attention to planning applications should not be diluted and there were 'Quality Council' parameters to consider. The format of the Planning agendas should not be amended currently. This is not to preclude other suggestions and amendments in the future.

**RESOLVED** That the format of Part 1 of the agendas for Planning Applications Sub-Committee should remain the same.

Day time meetings could make some time and resources savings for the Town Council. Members agreed that Committee and Town Council Meetings would need to continue to be held in the evenings, so as not to preclude any members of the public or councillors (who are employed during the day) from attending the meetings. However, the quarterly Staffing and Accommodation meetings and annual Estimates meetings (in view of the

subject matter) could be held during the day. However, this would only be the case if it did not preclude any member from attending due to work commitments.

**RESOLVED** To hold the Estimates Sub-Committee meeting and Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee meetings during the daytime, on an opportunistic basis and only where this does not preclude any member from attending due to work or other commitments.

**69. FUTURE LOCALISM FUND**

Councillor W.J. Rose had declared an interest.

A letter from Braintree District Council including the future Localism Fund payments, the Council Tax Collection Fund Surplus for Witham and Council Tax Referendum were received.

A member expressed concern that the benefit of business rates / new homes bonus was not always being passed onto parish/town councils despite the reduction in Parish Support Grant/Localism Fund. The District Council had established the Localism Fund to replace the precept lost to parish councils when the government changed the basis of council tax support, and to include the earlier parish support grants. It was noted that there had been previous correspondence between the Town Council and the Chief Executive of Braintree District Council. It was suggested that the Town Clerk contact other Clerks of larger local Parish Councils, e.g. Halstead and Coggeshall to garner support for a further representation to the District Council.

**RESOLVED** That the Town Clerk contact other Clerks of larger local Parish Councils to garner support for a further representation to the District Council to allocate a level of business rate receipts to local parishes.

**70. BUDGET 2017/2018**

(a) Business Plan

Members were asked to consider a Business Plan for 2017/2018.

Suggestions raised were potentially to

- progress with a 'lengthsman scheme' to undertake work such as small highways tasks, e.g. maintenance and signage.
- employ a 'Special Constable' to combat low level crime and anti-social behaviour fill some of the gap in local policing.
- to support the creation of more residents' associations, and to invite them and other local community groups to Town Council meetings to provide regular updates.

**RESOLVED** That the suggested additions to the Business Plan be considered for 2017 budget and beyond.

In view of the time it was agreed to suspend Standing Orders.

**RESOLVED** That in view of the time, Standing Order 4(a) be suspended to allow business to continue.

(a) Budget

A budget for 2017/2018 was received.

I. Central Administration

The draft budget was discussed and reviewed.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and noted.

II. Policy & Resources

The draft budget was discussed and reviewed. The level of earmarked funds for potential election expenses should be raised to £9,750 at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2018, for 2017/2018 budget. It was agreed that the budget headings of 'Witham Gateways' £3000 and 'Accommodation' £10,000 were unlikely to be allocated before Financial Year End 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017, so the anticipated figures at this date should both be recorded as zero.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received and noted.

(a) Year Business Plan/Forecast

Draft 2017/2018 business plans and budget were tabled and received. One which included a 3-year forecast was tabled by the Chairman and one for 2017/2018 was tabled by the Town Clerk.

The Town Clerk explained that the figure work and year end general reserves position would differ between the two reports because he had not yet received the November 2016 bank statements and also differential in the interpretation of allocated year end earmarked reserves for March 2017. Nevertheless, he agreed with the Chairman that on current forecasts the level of expense over income would increase. The general reserve had already peaked and would fall markedly over a period of time unless suitably addressed, leading to unsustainable deficits. The reduction in Localism Fund was a contributor to this potential slide and would have to be replaced from additional precept, creating additional income and reducing costs.

Areas of discussion included

- a more commercial approach to be adopted by the Town Council to increase income.
- reshaping of the Information Centre for increased commercial activity- perhaps sharing with another business entity.
- suitability of existing premises.
- realising assets such as the Whetmead Nature Reserve and James Cooke Wood in a more commercial way.
- increase of hall hire

- a line by line analysis of expenses to achieve cost savings.
- an increase in precept level in line with Town Council tangible aspirations for the town.

It was agreed that a 'task and finish' group be set up to look at income earning opportunities. Councillors L.D. Campbell, M.C.M. Lager and Mrs J. Williams volunteered to be part of this working group.

**RESOLVED** That the business plan/budget considerations be factored into the forthcoming Estimates Sub Committee and full Town Council Meetings.

**RESOLVED** That a 'task and finish' group comprising Councillors L.D. Campbell, M.C.M. Lager and Mrs J. Williams be set up to look at income earning opportunities and areas/projects needing additional funding through the precept.

(a) 3 Year Business Plan/Forecast

A business plan and budget for 2017/2018 to 2020/2021 were received.

This agenda item was discussed and reviewed in conjunction with agenda item (c) above.

**EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**71. NEW 'OPEN SPACES' VEHICLE**

Quotations for a new 'open spaces' van were received.

**RESOLVED** That a new Ford van be purchased to replace the existing older and deteriorating version which is now incurring ever increasing repair costs.

**72. STAFFING AND ACCOMMODATION SUB-COMMITTEE**

The Minutes held in Private Session of the Staffing and Accommodation Sub-Committee Meeting held 18<sup>th</sup> October 2016 were received.

**RESOLVED** That the Minutes be received.

**73. CCTV**

The Town Clerk gave a verbal report following the site visit to the Monitoring Centre on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2016.

**RESOLVED** That the report be received.

**74. PUBLIC DOMAIN**

It was agreed that only the item in Minute 71 be moved into the Public Domain.

**RESOLVED** That Minute 71 recording the resolution to purchase a new van be brought into the Public Domain.

There being no further business the Chairman closed the Meeting at 10.33 p.m.

Councillor M.C.M. Lager  
Chairman

MS/8.12.2016