

MINUTES of the POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE held in the NEW MILLENNIUM CHAMBER, MANOR HOUSE, CHURCH STREET, LITTLEHAMPTON on MONDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2011 at 6.30PM

Present: Cllrs Gammon (Chair),
Belchamber MBE, Mrs Neno,
Dr Walsh and Wiltshire

2010/2011

46. EVACUATION PROCEDURES

The evacuation procedures were noted.

47. MOBILE PHONES

Members and the public were reminded that the use of mobile phones (other than on silent) was prohibited at Town Council and Committee meetings.

48. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Councillors Botting and Butler.

49. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members and Officers were reminded to make any declarations of personal and/or prejudicial interest that they might have in relation to items on the Agenda. No declarations were made at this stage.

50. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2010 (previously circulated) were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

51. CHAIR'S REPORT AND URGENT ITEMS

51.1 Sussex Police

51.1.1 The Clerk circulated two emails that he had received earlier in the day. The first was an update on the progress of the Sussex Police in merging their North Downs and West Downs divisions into one West Sussex Division. These changes would come into effect from April 1st 2011 and it was reported would save £800,000 in management costs alone. The email also referred to an ongoing consultation with staff on the introduction of a new policing model, which could save more than £2.5 million a year as well as improve the service that the police could offer. The major change would be that response officers would continue to attend emergency calls but would now hand over further investigations and prisoners to a new Response Investigation Team. This had been trialled in Brighton and Hove and had resulted in response officers having much less paperwork to complete and had increased their time on the streets. The email also referred to the proposals to change where police officers will be based. It explained that neighbourhood policing teams would continue to work from their current locations but that the Response Investigation Teams would be based at each of the three custody centres on the division (Worthing, Crawley and Chichester). Response officers would work from six district bases at Crawley, Horsham, Haywards Heath, Worthing, Bognor and Chichester. The email went on to explain that there would be no

reduction in service to areas and it was envisaged that response officers would have more time to spend patrolling areas such as Littlehampton.

- 51.1.2 The majority of Sussex Police's budget was staffing and the force as a whole was planning to reduce its establishment by 550 staff and 500 police officers over the next four years.
- 51.1.3 The second email related to concerns that had been raised about Arundel police station becoming open by appointment only. It explained that the police were looking at different ways for the public to get in touch with them and that some of the current buildings and working practices were designed decades ago to serve a different world. A consultation was currently under way on this subject.
- 51.1.4 In commenting on the emails, Members observed that there appeared to be a continual drip feed of information on the potential implications of budgets cuts on Sussex Police rather a coherent strategic over view. It was also thought odd that so many savings could be made whilst improving services and if this was the case why hadn't this been done previously. Members noted that Arun Councillors had been invited to meet with the new District Commander and hoped that good notice could be given of these dates. It was also thought appropriate to invite Chief Inspector Derrick to attend the next meeting of Council both in view of the emerging agenda for the police and as she was newly in post. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. Chief Inspector Derrick be invited to attend Council on 17th March 2011 to update Members on the changes within Sussex Police and to answer Member's questions.**
- 2. Should she not be able to attend the Clerk write to her accordingly highlighting some of the comments of Members and asking for as much notice as possible with regard to the meetings with Councillors.**

51.2 **Standing Orders and Financial Regulations**

The Clerk reported that he had virtually completed a review of Standing Orders and Financial Regulations which would have been brought to this meeting of the Committee. However, he had been advised that significant changes would be needed to these in the near future to take account of both new financial regulations and the Localism Bill and therefore proposed to bring revised Standing Orders to the new Council later in the year. It was **RESOLVED** that:

The deferment of the consideration of new Standing Orders and Financial Regulations be noted.

52. **PUBLIC FORUM**

There were no members of the public present.

53. OFFICER'S REPORT

53.1 New Homes Bonus – Final Scheme Design

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) which had as an appendix a letter from Grant Shapps MP, the Minister for Housing and Local Government, to Local Authority Leaders explaining that the final scheme design for the New Homes Bonus was now available together with provisional allocations for local authorities. The Clerk explained that this was part of his commitment to ensure that Members were fully aware of the emerging strands from the Coalition's plans for the Big Society and Localism. In noting the current position, Members emphasised the importance of parishes being fully engaged with the District and County Council in how new homes bonuses were spent. This was particularly relevant for Littlehampton where significant housing developments were proposed. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. The Clerk write to the District and County Councils highlighting the desire of the Town Council to be fully engaged with both those authorities when discussions on spending the new homes bonus were being progressed.**
- 2. The report otherwise be noted.**

53.2 Service Redesign for Quality in West Sussex – Our Proposals for Better Care

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) which had as an appendix a letter from the NHS regarding their consultation document "Service Redesign for Quality in West Sussex – Our Proposals for Better Care". In noting the proposals, Members referred to the lack of progress with regard to Littlehampton Hospital. Both the Vice-Chair and Clerk had sought a further meeting of the Project Steering Group and were concerned with the lack of news on this front. The Clerk referred to promises that had been made to update him on this and therefore as a result of lack of a response to this, it was **RESOLVED** that:

- In noting the report, the Clerk write a letter of complaint to the NHS West Sussex over the lack of response as to why there had not been a Project Steering Group arranged.**

53.3 The Localism Bill

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) which contained two further summaries of the Localism Bill. These were by the Society of Local Council Clerks and a policy briefing from NALC on the Rural Coalition Briefing on the Localism Bill. It was **RESOLVED** that:

- The report be noted.**

53.4 Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (Amendment) Act 2010

The Committee considered a legal briefing from NALC on Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (Amendment) Act 2010 which updated Members on changes to this piece of legislation. It was noted that significant changes to

the way that the Local Strategic Partnerships operated were under way and that the importance of the parish sector being involved was perhaps increasing. It was **RESOLVED** that:

The current position be noted.

53.5 A Community Right to Challenge and A Community Right to Buy – Assets of Community Value

The Committee considered two reports (previously circulated) explaining that NALC were consulting on these two important initiatives that were emerging from the Localism Bill. These could possibly have significant implications for the Town Council, particularly with regard to its role as a local advocate. Members were supportive of the Clerk preparing a response to be agreed by the Chair and Vice-Chair, and also noted that the Clerk would incorporate details of this in the inductions sessions following the elections. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

The Town Clerk prepare responses to the consultation papers, incorporating the comments of Members and in agreement with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee.

53.6 Mayoral Chain and Jewel

The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) explaining that since this matter had last been considered by the Committee and Council, the jewel had been dropped and badly damaged. The Town Council's insurers have now given permission for the Council to purchase a new jewel from Fattorini's at a cost of £4,980. However, the hard gold plate had over the years worn off the chain and this needed to be replaced to be in keeping with the new jewel. In discussion, Members asked that a price be obtained for re-gilding the chain as it was a part of the heritage of the Town, being that it dated back to the former Urban District Council. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. The option of re-gilding the chain be investigated and if cheaper than the purchase of a new chain progressed as soon as possible.**
- 2. If the re-gilding of the chain was more expensive than the purchase of a new chain, then a new chain be purchased at a maximum cost of £2,075.**

53.7 Mayor's Induction Manual

Members had before them a draft Mayor's Induction Manual, which brought together good practise and previous guidance (previously circulated). From the ensuing discussions the following points emerged:-

- The manual should be shared with those Members of the Town Council who had previously been Mayor and the Deputy Mayor prior to the Town Clerk concluding the document. There was no need for it to be considered again at Council.

- References to “Leader” needed to be taken out of the document.
- A major typographical error on page 4 needed to be amended so that it read “this should **not** take on a party political standpoint...”
- The post titles on pages 17 needed to be corrected.
- The guidance on Mayoral charities was strongly endorsed, although it was thought that it should be made clearer that there was no compulsion on the Mayor to have a Mayoral Charity. It needed to be worded that “the Mayor may wish to have a charity (preferably local), but that this was not essential”.
- The arrangements for supporting the Mayor’s charity work were endorsed.
- There was considerable discussion as to why the flag was not shown on some of the possible days when it could be. These included the birthdays of the Monarch’s children, United Nations Day and the flying of the Royal British Legion flag from November 6th until Remembrance Day. Members wished to incorporate these and therefore asked that a report be taken to Council with this recommendation. The Clerk would incorporate the costs of so doing.

It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

- 1. A report be taken to Council seeking to extend the number of times that flags were flown.**
- 2. The guidance be further circulated to former Mayors and the Mayor-Elect for comment prior to the Town Clerk signing off the document.**
- 3. The proposals for supporting the Mayoral charity be endorsed.**

54. ACCOUNTS

54.1 Finance Report 2010/11

The Committee considered the latest periodic finance report for 2010/2011 (previously circulated) and **RESOLVED** that:

The report be noted.

54.2 Revision of Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003

54.2.1 The Committee considered a report (previously circulated) by the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer explaining that a consultation paper on a Revision of Accounts and Audit Regulations 2003 had been prepared. This had significant implications for the Town Council, mainly as a result of the proposal to extend the budget for those organisations determined as larger relevant bodies from those with a budget of £1,000.000 per annum to those with a budget of £6,500.000 per annum. This would make the Town Council a smaller relevant body. Smaller relevant bodies were permitted to prepare simplified versions of their accounts and were subject to a “lighter touch” limited assurance audit regime.

54.2.2 The Town Clerk explained that whilst at first glance this might seem to be a positive step, particularly bearing in mind the concerns about the costs of audits over the years, both he and the Responsible Financial Officer shared strong concerns that the completion of an annual return and such small scale

auditing was inappropriate given the scale of public money that was being spent by the Town Council. The Responsible Financial Officer had written to colleagues on the Society of Local Council Clerks expressing her concerns which were set out as an appendix to the report. It was thought that to assist transparency and to reflect the size of the budget, the Town Council should continue to produce a meaningful set of supporting, if necessary, unaudited accounts. Members supported the views of the Town Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer on this matter and therefore **RESOLVED** that:

In noting the report, the comments of the Responsible Financial Officer be endorsed.

54.3 Annual Investment Strategy 2011/12

The Committee considered the draft Annual Investment Strategy (2011/2012) (previously circulated), which was supported. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

1. Council be RECOMMENDED to approve the Annual Investment Strategy 2011/12 set out in the Appendix to the report.
2. The report otherwise be noted.

55. MASTERPLAN – NORTH LITTLEHAMPTON

55.1 The Clerk reported that a meeting had been held with representatives of the Courtwick Lane Opposition Group (CLOG) on the previous week. The Planning and Transportation Committee would be considering the responses of the statutory consultees at its meeting on 7th March 2011. This would mean that the decision of Council to hold a public meeting on this matter would therefore be after the Planning and Transportation Committee and as a result after the Town Council had commented. Furthermore, the principal authorities would not be able to attend the meeting and neither would the developers. This was principally because the application was now in train. The Clerk would speak to the Town Mayor suggesting that a public meeting not be held as a result of this and sought the views of the Committee. The Committee strongly endorsed this stance and were happy for the Town Clerk to advise the Mayor accordingly.

55.2 The Town Clerk also reported that the planning application for the possible North Littlehampton development had now also been received and could potentially also be an item for discussion at the Planning and Transportation Committee on 7th March 2011.

56. EXEMPT BUSINESS

It was **RESOLVED** that:

Members of the public and accredited representatives of the press be excluded under Section 100 Local Government Act 1972 due to the confidential nature of the business to be conducted.

57. Bad Debt

The Committee considered a report proposing the writing off of a bad debt dating back to 2009. It was therefore **RESOLVED** that:

This debt, as set out in the report, be written off.

The meeting closed at 7.43pm

CHAIR