

Minutes of the meeting of the Resources & Policy Committee held at the Sportsman Meeting Room, Birchwood Leisure Centre, Longmead, Hatfield AL10 0AN on Wednesday 12 October 2011 at 19:30.

PRESENT: Councillor R. Wheeler - Chairman  
Councillor L. Clark  
Councillor M. Clark  
Councillor S. Laver-Walton  
Councillor L. Mendez  
Councillor M. White

OFFICERS: C. A. Lloyd (Town Clerk)  
P. Widdicombe (Deputy Town Clerk)

11. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor M. Alder, Councillor C. Juggins and Councillor G. Wiltshire

12. QUESTION TIME

There were no questions.

13. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> July 2011 were approved and signed as a true record.

14. WELWYN HATFIELD ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL COUNCILS

The minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2011 were noted.

15. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

16. RISK ASSESSMENTS

Members noted the risk assessments which had been circulated to every Councillor. In view of the external auditor's recent comments, Members undertook to make a recommendation to Council.

Members commented on the high score for fire risk assessments and noted that an external contractor would be carrying these out soon on all the Council's properties.

The website was scored high as a new website was currently being considered.

Some of the risks in the gym had been reduced by the introduction of signs and more vigorous checking by staff on duty.

The planned work to the FunZone would reduce the higher than average scores.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the risk assessments be approved and the work planned or undertaken to reduce the scores be noted.

17. PENSION SCHEME UPDATE

Members noted updates produced by the Department of Communities and Local Government and Hertfordshire's Local Government Pension Fund's Administrators (London Pensions Fund Authority).

18. LICENSING OF SEX ESTABLISHMENTS

Members considered the revised policy on licensing of sex establishments following changes in the law.

Members endorsed the Borough Council's policy and raised no queries.

(Action: Clerk)

19. CONSULTATION ON NON DOMESTIC RATES

Members considered the consultation on non-domestics rates.

RESOLVED that the following comments be made;

1. This Council notes with regret that Town and Parish Councils were not formally consulted or included in the consultation paper.
2. The loss of the distribution of business rates to Town and Parish Councils in 1990 saw an increase in the Council Tax for local residents and an increased financial burden on those Town and Parish councils that had received and utilised the business rate in the past by investing in community infrastructure.
3. This Council believes that it is vital that an element of the NNDR is returned to the sector to help support localism. The additional funding will enable Parish and Town Councils to further develop the range of services they already provide on behalf of their communities.
4. The return of an element of the business rates to Town and Parish Councils would enable them to take a greater role in the delivery of local services, the encouragement of local organisations to take a bigger role in serving their community and further engagement with the local business community.
5. This Council suggests that one option for this to be administered for the sector is to provide local councils with the same rate relief on buildings as

charitable/not for profit organisations. Many Councils nationally have transferred their leisure centres, arts centres and theatres to Charitable Trusts. The argument for doing this is based on the belief that they can deliver better community benefit. However, the bottom line is that the Councils save the NNDR. These Trusts and other charities already manage other community facilities and centres, yet when the Parish and Town Council sector manages these directly for the same public benefit they are obliged to pay business rates.

6. Therefore this Council urges Government to give support either:

Allocating 5% in areas where there are three tiers of local authority or 7% in unitary authority areas of the National Non Domestic Rate to town and parish councils; or

Exempt town and parish councils from paying the National Non Domestic Rate on all its properties in exactly the same way charities are exempt.

7. A situation which is experienced in only a handful of Councils across the country is student Council Tax exemption. Unlike the Borough Council in our area no Government grant is received to partially off-set this loss of Council Tax, the burden of having students living in our community is fully borne by Hatfield Council Tax Payers. We suggest that this is even a greater reason why landlord business rates should be directed back to this Town Council.

(Action: Clerk)

## 20. WEBSITE

Members considered the bids from Tonic Fusion and In Touch with Communities.

RESOLVED that Tonic Fusion be requested to provide the Council's website.

(Action: Clerk)

## 21. CHANGES TO SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Members considered the consultation document from Hertfordshire County Council.

RESOLVED that the proposals be endorsed.

(Action: Clerk)

## 22. CHRISTMAS CLOSURES AND STAFF CHILDREN'S PARTY

Members considered the report and RESOLVED that;

- i. Except for football matches, Birchwood Leisure Centre be closed on the following days;  
Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> December  
Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> December – Christmas Day  
Monday 26<sup>th</sup> December – Bank Holiday  
Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> December – Bank Holiday  
Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> December  
Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> December  
Friday 30<sup>th</sup> December  
Saturday 31<sup>st</sup> December  
Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> January – New Year's Day  
Monday 2<sup>nd</sup> January – Bank Holiday
- ii. Roe Hill, Lemsford, Oxlease and Howe Dell Halls be available for hire on 24<sup>th</sup> December and 28<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> December;
- iii. Staff be given 1 Mayor's Day and will be expected to use annual leave for any other time off during the closure;
- iv. Councillors, the Town Clerk and Leisure Services Manager draw up a rota of play area checking and litter picking so that the grounds staff can also enjoy the extended break detailed above (other than pitch preparation); and
- v. The FunZone be made available from 6.30pm on 17 December for a staff children's party.

(Action: Clerk)

## 23. ANNUAL INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Members considered the Annual Investment Strategy for 2011/12 and RESOLVED that it be adopted.

(Action: Deputy Town Clerk)

## 24. INVESTMENTS

Members considered the Council's Investment Policy in light of recent advice. RESOLVED that up to £400,000 be invested with CCLA and the Deputy Town Clerk set up any mandates necessary.

(Action: Deputy Town Clerk)

25. RESERVES AND BALANCES POLICY

Members considered the Reserves and Balances for 2011/12. RESOLVED that the current Reserves and Balances be maintained.

(Action: Deputy Town Clerk)

26. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL FORECAST 2011/12 – 2015/16

Members considered the medium term financial forecast 2011/12 – 2015/16 as circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED that the forecast be approved.

(Action: Deputy Town Clerk)

27. HALF YEARLY FINANCE REPORT

Members noted the half yearly report. Comment was made on the Twinning budget line and comments made in the press recently. It was suggested that the Rotary Club may like to acknowledge their twinning with Zierikzee on the highways place name boards. The Deputy Clerk was requested to remove twinning from the budget in 2012/13.

Members also indicated that the 2012/13 budget should be maintained as near to 0% increase as possible, allowing for a reduced tax base as experienced in 2011/12.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

(Action: Deputy Town Clerk)

28. ANNUAL RETURN 2010/11

Members noted the completed Annual Return received from the external auditor.

The Annual Return was accepted and approved and the issues arising in the report were noted.

Members noted the amendment to the valuation of the Councils assets to take into account the land swap at Birchwood Leisure Centre.

Weaknesses identified by the Council's Internal Auditor were highlighted in the report and Members noted that at their meeting of 20<sup>th</sup> July they had approved measures to address this.

The Council's risk assessments in 2010/11 had been approved by the Resources & Policy Committee on 8 September 2011. The External Auditor advised that the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulation 2011 which came into force on 31 March 2011 required the full Council to consider the risk

assessments. Members noted that the Committee had recommended approval to Council and this would be considered at its meeting on 19 October 2011.

The External Auditor raised a concern that the Council had not disclosed that it was sole trustee of a charity to the Charity Commission. The Birchwood and de Havilland Playing Fields Trust was registered with the Charity Commission in May 2011 Charity No. 5018451.

Members thanked the Deputy Clerk for his time spent in preparing the Annual Audit Return.

**RESOLVED to RECOMMEND** that the report be noted and the actions approved.

(Action: Deputy Town Clerk)

29. ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT

RESOLVED that the payments be noted and approved.

30. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Noted that the next meeting of the Committee will take place on 30<sup>th</sup> November 2011 at 19:30. The Chairman advised that he was resigning the Chair and the Vice Chairman – Cllr Geoff Wiltshire would take over from the next meeting

Closure: 20:45pm

Chairman