

HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held in the Council Chamber, Public Hall on Monday 9 September 2013 commencing at 7.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors: C. Root (in the Chair), C. Flanigan, K. Helsby, J. Kellett, L. McCartin, L. Rock, S. Rock, J. Silvester, R. Silvester, K. Thomson
Town Clerk: C. Hutchinson

Bolton Ward Councillors present: A. Cunliffe, K. McKeon

CHAIRPERSON TO OUTLINE THE FIRE SAFETY EVACUATION PROCEDURE:

FG 5984 Councillor Root referred to the procedure that was outlined in the information provided.

TO SUBMIT APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ACCEPT THE REASONS:

FG 5985 Apologies for absence were accepted from Councillor Denton and Councillor Ramamurthy who were away.

Resolved to accept the apologies as presented.

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 12 AUGUST 2013:

FG 5986 Resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 12 August 2013 and defer approval of the Part B minutes, which were not available, until the next meeting.

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE FINANCE REVIEW SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 12 AUGUST 2013:

FG 5987 Resolved to approve the minutes of the Finance Review Sub Committee held on 12 August 2013.

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE COMMUNITY INITIATIVES SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 22 AUGUST 2013:

FG 5988 Resolved to approve the minutes of the Community Initiatives Sub Committee held on 22 August 2013.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

FG 5989 None.

TO REMIND MEMBERS TO MAKE A DECISION CONCERNING ANY MATTERS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE MEETING OF WHICH THEY HAVE AN INTEREST:

FG 5989 None.

TO CONSIDER THE FINANCE REVIEW SUB COMMITTEE PROPOSAL REGARDING THE FUTURE FUNDING OF THE TOWN CENTRE CHRISTMAS LIGHTING SCHEME:

FG 5990 The Finance Review Sub Committee had been given the remit to review major items of expenditure and make recommendations to Council. The Sub Committee had resolved that, in order to ensure transparency, that this matter should be discussed by all Members of the Town Council. Members were reminded that in the budget statement for 2013 – 2014, there had been no commitment made to continue financial support for Christmas lighting, although there was provision available under a new heading 'Regeneration'. There had been a clear commitment to reviewing the costs of the whole scheme, particularly in light of uncertainty that Bolton Council may no longer guarantee to absorb the cost of the electricity used. Members of the Finance Review Sub Committee had felt that at a time of financial hardship for many council taxpayers, the provision of Christmas lighting was not a priority. However some Members did feel that the lighting of the civic Christmas tree should be maintained, as this was an important event for the community at the start of the festive season. Other ways of reducing costs such as solar lighting had been investigated, but had proved to be both unsuitable and economically unviable. One Member expressed particular concern at the length of time the process had taken.

Several Members expressed their concerns at the possibility of the loss of the Christmas lights which they felt enhanced the town centre and were very popular with the majority of residents. It was pointed out that the cost was approximately £1 to each council tax paying household over the year. Some Members felt very strongly that it was important to support the town centre in such a difficult economic climate, although it was pointed out that the Town Council does not receive any part of the business rate paid by traders. In response to a query it was confirmed that Farnworth's Christmas lights were funded by its area forum and in response to a query, a Member who was also a Borough Councillor offered to find out if similar financial assistance was available from the Two Towns Area Forum. The Town Clerk informed Members that Bolton Council provided a grant of £250 towards the cost of the Christmas Lighting scheme. Some members expressed concerns that it appeared that Horwich and Westhoughton council taxpayers were paying an additional charge for Christmas lighting.

Members were in agreement that it would be a good idea to have some

public consultation about the future of the lighting scheme, such as a survey in the press and a suggestion was made that the possibility of looking at private funding from local businesses could be looked at, with the involvement of the Rotary Club.

It was confirmed that there was a significant sum under the heading of 'Regeneration' which allowed Council the flexibility to make a decision either way. However Members were generally in agreement that due to time constraints, it would be more appropriate to continue the funding of the Christmas lighting for the current year, with a resolution to discuss again early next year and this would be included as part of budget preparation, with an investigation into more cost effective ways to run the scheme.

In response to a request it was resolved to hold a recorded vote on this matter by 8 votes to 2 with no abstentions.

It was resolved to continue to provide financial support for the town centre Christmas lighting scheme for 2013 by 9 votes to 1 with no abstentions. Those Members voting in favour were as follows: Councillors Helsby, Kellett, Thomson, R. Silvester, J. Silvester, McCartin, L. Rock, S. Rock and Root. Councillor Flanigan voted against the resolution.

TO DISCUSS THE SCOPE AND CRITERIA FOR GRANT FUNDING APPLICATIONS TO HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL:

FG 5991 It had been agreed that clarification was necessary regarding the different grant funds available, as there had been concerns expressed about similar activities being funded at the same. Members were in agreement that applications to Child and Youth Initiatives should only be considered from the under 18s only, with all over applications directed to the main Grants to Voluntary Groups fund. It was confirmed that historically Child and Youth applications had been considered at full Council when necessary, but it was agreed that it would be more appropriate for such applications to be considered by the Grants to Voluntary Groups Sub Committee who met twice a year to consider grant applications. It was agreed that Community Initiatives funding, available to assist groups at the Resource Centre with room rental costs would continue to be administered by the Community Initiatives Sub Committee.

In response to a query it was confirmed that information was always provided concerning alternative funding sources and frequency of previous grant awards, to enable Members to make an informed decision. However it was thought to be good practice to include this information on a front sheet that could be used for all three types of applications

In response to a further query it was confirmed that due to the high demand, there were no funds left for further allocation at the end of the year and it was necessary to apportion funds in order to maintain equity throughout the year.

Resolved unanimously to take Child and Youth applications to be decided by the Grants to Voluntary Groups Sub Committee and to update all application forms to include information as requested.

TO APPROVE THE QUARTERLY STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS TO 30 JUNE 2013:

FG 5992 In response to a request for clarification of the figure for wages of £18,120 it was confirmed that this would be brought back to Members at the earliest opportunity. A query was raised about the rate of interest on the reserve account and the amount of funds kept in the current account. It was explained that this practice followed advice given by the bank manager in order to avoid excessive bank charges which had occurred previously when funds had regularly been transferred between different accounts, often incurring charges that were higher than any interest earned from the reserve account. It was acknowledged that there were alternative accounts with better rates of interest that could be used, although it was acknowledged that ease of access was an important factor. It was agreed that this was a matter for scrutiny by the Finance Review Sub Committee to deal with.

Resolved unanimously to approve the quarterly statement of accounts to 30 June 2013 on the condition that a breakdown of expenditure on salaries is made available to Members.

TO APPROVE THE QUARTERLY BUDGET REVIEW TO 30 JUNE 2013:

FG 5993 Resolved unanimously to approve the quarterly budget review to 30 June 2013.

TO RECEIVE THE QUARTERLY REPORT FROM INTERNAL AUDIT TO 30 JUNE 2013:

FG 5994 Resolved unanimously to receive the quarterly report from internal audit to 30 June 2013.

ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT – SCHEDULE ATTACHED:

FG 5995 Resolved unanimously to approve the accounts for payment as presented and totalling £17,048.20

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT – FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

- FG 5996
- a. Elections Office: statement of persons nominated and location of Polling stations for Church Ward by election on 19 September 2013
 - b. Horwich Heritage: AGM agenda, officers' reports and statement of accounts 1 June 2012 – 31 May 2013
 - c. Horwich Public Hall Veterans Bowling Club: letter of thanks for grant award of £250
 - d. Brazley Community Gardens: letter of thanks for grant award of £300
 - e. Horwich Public Hall Ladies' Bowling Club: letter of thanks for grant award of £100
 - f. Horwich Widows: letter of thanks for grant award of £100

Resolved to note the Town Clerk's Report.

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES:

- FG 5997
- Town Mayor
- The Town Mayor reported that she had enjoyed a busy few days attending the popular Rotary Beer Festival and Horwich Flower, Fruit and Vegetable Society show
- Rivington and Blackrod High School and Horwich Heritage
- Members were informed that copies of 'Excel' the school magazine and the latest Horwich Heritage magazine were available to view.

TO CONFIRM THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE AS 14 OCTOBER 2014:

- FG 5998
- Resolved to confirm the date of the next meeting of the Committee as 14 October 2013.

Councillor Root declared the meeting closed at 8.40pm.

Chairperson..... Date.....

