

HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held in the Council Chamber, Public Hall on Monday 8 December 2014 commencing at 7.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors: C. Root (in the Chair), K. Denton, K. Helsby, J. Kellett, L. McCartin, A. Morley, K. McKeon, K. Ramamurthy, L. Rock, S. Rock, J. Silvester, R. Silvester, K. Thomson.
Town Clerk: C. Hutchinson
Bolton Ward Councillor: A. Cunliffe.
2 members of the press.

CHAIR TO OUTLINE FIRE SAFETY EVACUATION PROCEDURE:

FG 6223 Councillor Root outlined the procedure that was outlined in the Information provided.

TO SUBMIT APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ACCEPT THE REASONS:

FG 6224 Apologies were accepted from Councillor Atkinson due to work commitments.

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 11 NOVEMBER 2014:

FG 6225 Resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 11 November 2014 by 12 votes to 0 with 1 abstention.

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY GROUPS SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 20 NOVEMBER 2014:

FG 6226 Resolved unanimously to approve the minutes of the Grants to Voluntary Groups Sub Committee held on 20 November 2014.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

FG 6227 None.

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

FG 6228 None.

TO APPROVE THE STATEMENT OF QUARTERLY ACCOUNTS TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2014:

FG 6229 Resolved unanimously to approve the statement of quarterly accounts to 30 September 2014.

TO APPROVE THE QUARTERLY BUDGET REVIEW TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2014:

FG 6230 Members were pleased to see that the review showed a clear underspend at the halfway point in the financial year. In response to a query it was confirmed that certain anomalies under the salaries heading were the result of the staffing re-structure earlier in the year.

Resolved unanimously to approve the quarterly budget review to 30 September 2014.

TO APPROVE THE QUARTERLY REPORT FROM INTERNAL AUDIT TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2014:

FG 6231 Members were pleased to see that the internal auditor had reported that the Council's accounting records and control systems continued to be maintained in accordance with the requirements of relevant legislation.

Resolved unanimously to approve the quarterly report from internal audit to 30 September 2014.

TO CONSIDER PRELIMINARY PROPOSALS FOR THE BUDGET FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2015 - 2016:

FG 6232 It was noted that while income from the precept was straightforward, understanding of the general fund heading was less obvious. The figure is estimated by predicting year end expenditure working from half yearly figures. The figure for the general fund had increased gradually over the last few years and shown a larger increase in the current year as a result of savings and efficiencies that have been made. In one sense this was beneficial but may cause concern in future years if expenditure is as budget predictions, thereby reducing the size of the general fund causing either a substantial increase in precept or cutbacks. However there was the scope for Horwich Town Council to take responsibility for additional services. It was pleasing to see that during the last few years the Council had made progress towards considerable savings with a staffing re-structure and had made other economies, laying a firm foundation for a new council in 2015 to build on.

It was agreed it was necessary to increase the training budget to enable new Councillors elected in 2015 to have a greater understanding of how the Council operated. Training was also important with the prospect of devolution leading to third tier councils being given more powers, with a suggestion for a conference for the new council to establish a vision and establish a team for the next four year period. Other initiatives for consideration were the process of establishing Horwich as a 'dementia friendly town' along with taking responsibility for some environmental issues. Members were pleased to see the precept kept the same as last year and that it was prudent to keep sufficient funds in case of by elections. It was agreed that it was important that the Council should be pro-active with training. The Town Clerk informed Members that enquiries would be made with LALC, the Council's training provider to run a course for new Councillors in-house following the election in May 2015. The draft budget proposals were noted and would be brought back to Council in January 2015 for further discussion and approval.

TO CONSIDER A REQUEST FROM HORWICH FESTIVAL OF RACING FOR FINANCIAL SUPPORT OF £3,000 FOR EVENTS IN 2015, SUBJECT TO APPROVAL OF THE BUDGET FOR 2015 – 2016:

FG 6234 Members felt that any financial assistance to this organisation was money well spent, supporting racing events with a national and international reputation attracting visitors to Horwich every year.

Resolved unanimously to approve financial support of £3,000 to Horwich Festival of Racing for events in 2015, subject to approval of the budget for 2015 – 2016.

TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE FROM BOLTON COUNCIL ABOUT ENERGY CHARGES FOR 2013 – 2014 AND TO APPROVE ESTIMATED ENERGY COSTS FOR ENERGY FOR THE CHRISTMAS LIGHTING SCHEME FOR 2014 – 2015:

FG 6235 Members were informed that following receipt of an invoice from Bolton Council in September 2014 for £352.43 for energy costs for the Christmas lighting scheme 2013 – 2014, this was disputed in a letter sent by the Town Council. The Town Council had since been informed that this charge will be waived, however due to financial cutbacks the Town Council will be charged for energy costs for future Christmas lighting schemes starting in the current year.

Some Members expressed the view that although this was inevitable it was also unequitable for the residents of Horwich who were also paying for lighting in Bolton. In response to a query it was confirmed that the Christmas lights in Farnworth were financed by the local area forum. Members were also reminded that the new lighting scheme in Horwich had been paid for by Bolton Council following the six borough Councillors' decision to allocate funding for this purpose. It was confirmed that Members had been informed of the increased kilowatt cost per hour for this year's scheme compared to the previous year and it was estimated that as the new scheme was more energy efficient costs were unlikely to show a large increase.

Resolved by 7 votes to 2 with 4 abstentions to approve estimated energy costs for the Christmas lighting scheme 2014 – 2015.

TO APPROVE A COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE FOR HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL:

FG 6236 Members were informed that this was an update of the Council's existing procedure. It was agreed that this new version was very clear and written in plain English and easy to understand.

In response to a query it was confirmed that the proposed procedure was related to the service provided by the Council and its officers and that

any complaints about individual Councillors should continue to be reported to Bolton Council Standards Committee.

Unanimously resolved to approve the updated complaints procedure for Horwich Town Council.

ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT – SCHEDULE ATTACHED:

FG 6237 Members were pleased about the positive feedback received for the illumination of Rivington Pike during the Remembrance period, especially via social media. It had been an excellent joint initiative with Chorley Council.

Resolved unanimously to approve accounts for payment as presented and totalling £11,170.67 .

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT – FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

- FG 6238
- a. Letter from Horwich Heritage thanking Members for grant of £1,500 from the supported organisations budget.
 - b. Letter from SLCC (Society of Local Council Clerks) about training opportunities.
 - c. Letter from the Wildlife Hospital thanking Members for grant of £400 from the grants to voluntary groups budget.

Resolved unanimously to note the Town Clerk's Report.

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES:

FG 6239 Town Mayor
Councillor R. Silvester informed Members that he had enjoyed a successful visit to Crowborough and although due to travel disruption the Mayor of Crowborough was unable to attend the Tree Lighting on 5 December, he was hoping to visit in January.

Deputy Town Mayor
Councillor J Silvester reported that she had recently attended the Mayor of Adlington's charity bingo evening which had raised £500. The Deputy Town Mayor had also attended Christmas fairs at St Catherines and St Elizabeths.

Horwich Resource Centre Sub Committee
Councillor Root, as Chair of the Committee informed Members that a Christmas Craft Fair had been held at the Resource Centre on 6th December and thanked the Town Mayor and all Councillors who had attended. This had been a very successful first event and it was hoped that more would follow.

IN VIEW OF THE CONFIDENTIAL NATURE OF THE BUSINESS ABOUT TO BE TRANSACTED IT IS ADVISABLE IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST THAT THE PRESS AND PUBLIC ARE TEMPORARILY EXCLUDED AND IF PRESENT ARE ASKED TO WITHDRAW.

