

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting on Wednesday 27th July 2005 at 7.30p.m. in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Swaffham.

Present: Deputy Mayor Cllr P. Darby (in the chair)

Councillors: - Mr D. Butters, Mrs C. Baker, Mrs P. Buxton,
Cllr A. Greaves and Cllr Lister.

Clerk:-	Mr R. Bishop.
Deputy Clerk:-	Mrs M. Meyrick
Internal Auditor:-	Mr B. Clements

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

1.1. Cllr Sherwood, Cllr Emmerson and Cllr Matthews.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST – for items included on the Agenda.

2.1. Cllr Buxton declared an interest on Icen.

Cllr Darby and Cllr Baker and Cllr Butters declared an interest on museum.

Cllr Greaves declared an interest on the Icen thing, husband on the management committee.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

3.1. The minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the 5th April 2005 were agreed and signed as a true record by Mayor.

4. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

4.1. A copy of the Responsible Finance Officer's report was given to Councillors for consideration.

4.2. Final Accounts for 2004/05.

The final accounts were presented to Councillors for consideration and it showed that the General Reserves are higher than predicted back in December at £74,188 against the predicted figure of £52,000. This is a useful sum given the amounts already agreed out of Reserves in the current financial year; it will mean that the Reserves are not as depleted as were first thought.

The additional £22,000 has come from an under spend that was not brought forward into either earmarked funds or this years predicted expenditure.

The Accounts need to be approved by Full Council at the September meeting, this will mean that the end of year form needs to be completed, copied and circulated in the information pack to Councillors.

4.3. Internal Auditor's Report.

The internal auditors report was circulated in the papers to Councillors.

There was also a breakdown of the town hall project given to Councillors that the Internal Auditor had produced.

Page 223

4.4. Receipts & Payments for 1st April – 20th July 2005.

The Receipts and Payments list to date was distributed to Councillors and is purely for information at this point.

4.5. Grounds Maintenance Contract for 2005/06.

The Grounds Maintenance contract was circulated as requested. The concern was regarding the cost of the churchyard. When the Deputy Clerk and Town Clerk had a pre-meeting with Mark Stokes, Sarah Cram and Ernie Buckley before they did the presentation to the Council in June, Mark Stokes offered to work up a specification for the Town Council for grounds maintenance in the town. The Clerk recommended that the Town Council take him up on that offer and go out to tender prior to the budget meeting in December. Cllr Greaves proposed to go out to tender prior to the budget meeting and to take the offer from Breckland to put together a specification.

It was agreed to ask Mark Stokes of Breckland Council to put together a specification for grounds maintenance and to go out to tender prior to the budget meeting in December.

The Internal Auditor advised that the grounds maintenance figure in the accounts should be one that is proportioned.

4.6. Any early budget considerations for 2006/07.

The early considerations will be the increase to staffing costs, as the Council has already committed themselves to in excess of an additional £25,000 worth of expenditure. Replacing funds taken out of Reserves is a necessity and there will also be a debate about Match Funding. Projects for Northwell Pool and the Cemetery should be fully costed out by December and hopefully a more accurate cost of the Recreation Ground Project should allow the committee to look ahead a little more clearly. Another area to be considered is the Churchyard with regards to future maintenance.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Issues listed below (item 6) were given to Councillors for consideration but will require ratification by Full Council in September as they were not on the agenda.

6.1. Facilities Management Contract with Icen Partnership – Community Centre. The Clerk and Deputy Clerk have looked long and hard at the facilities management for the Community Centre, this is something that the Town Council are perfectly capable of doing with the correct level of staff, but the unfortunate tight timescale will make things almost impossible to achieve. To achieve the services standard required this would need recruitment of outside staff, looking at increasing our opening hours for the Town Hall reception and subsequently an increase in administration staff hours or another dedicated member of staff to cope with the additional workload. There is not time to recruit and train staff prior to meet the timescale. The initial period of the contract will be up to 31st December 2006. The Town Clerk recommended that the Town Council look to tender at that point providing sufficient time is given to recruit the necessary staff. It was also

Page 224

suggested that sufficient steps are taken to ensure that the general public are directed to the successful contractor carrying out the administration. Cllr Greaves proposed for the draft letter that was prepared by the Town Clerk to be sent to the Icen Partnership in response to the invitation to tender for a facilities management contract.

It was unanimously agreed to send the prepared drafted letter to the Icen Partnership in response to the invitation to tender for a facilities management contract stating that the timescale will not allow the Town Council to tender.

There followed a lengthy discussion concerning the role of the management group committee that was set up to manage the Community Centre and the Assembly Rooms.

It was agreed that the three Councillors to be appointed onto the management committee to be placed on the September Council meeting.

6.2. Re-pricing structure for the Town Hall Extension.

The draft pricing structure was distributed to committee members. The Clerk suggested that all fees for the hire of the Council Chamber are reduced by 17.5% thus the figures previously advertised plus Vat are the total cost including Vat. There will be no loss of income, as this move is designed to raise income from almost nothing at all. The marketing would be targeted by making it easier to understand how much it costs for each session, although there are still hourly charges if users prefer.

Room 1 is currently occupied by Icen Partnership but will be vacating the office in September. This office was looked at yesterday and it is felt that the Council could maximize the use of this larger space by having a dual use of office and meeting room. The room would be furnished to accommodate one desk and a meeting table with chairs for up to 8 people. This would mean the space would be far more versatile and the charges reflect this.

Room 3 is fairly well used at present, but there could be some new space available if Breckland vacate the office on a Monday morning to take up the larger space. It will be a case of wait and see and there could be further changes necessary if the Council would have to adjust following the Community Centre and Assembly Rooms being back.

Cllr Darby proposed and Cllr Greaves seconded to approve of the reduced pricing structure for the Town Hall.

It was unanimously agreed to accept the Town Hall pricing structure as recommended.

6.3. A request from the Education Officer of the Museum to utilize the Council Chamber on the days when it is not in use for Council meetings or other events. The request was for an all in price to bring in some income for the Council on days when the Chamber would not normally be used. If a nominal sum of £300 could be charged, with the Museum paying the charitable rate for any events that generate income i.e. a fundraising event, as these would need

Page 225

to be booked in the normal way. Cllr Greaves proposed and Cllr Buxton seconded to allow the Museum to use the Council Chamber when not in use for a nominal amount.

It was unanimously agreed to allow the Museum to use the Council Chamber when it is not in use for a nominal amount of £300 per year.

6.3. Progress report on Access to Graves.

The Town Clerk visited the Cemetery to see clearly what the problem is and after inspection it is felt that all is needed is to re-assure Mr. Fuller that he will always be able to get to his wife's grave. At present because the area is where recent burials are taking place a lot of the mounds are still in place, these are usually levelled out when the headstone is put in place by the stone mason and certainly in six months time there would be easy access down the section where Mrs. Fuller is buried. This can be seen in the adjacent section which is now grassed over and has 7'6" between each row of burials with good access over a flat area of grass. If this area of the cemetery fills up quicker than expected, thus creating an access problem, then the Clerk would recommend that the Council write to the relatives to inform them that the Council would be levelling out for the purpose of meeting access requirements under DDA regulations. Providing you agree I will write back again to Mr. Fuller and try to re-assure him that he should not have an access problem in the future and to keep in touch with us at the Town Hall should things progress quicker than we believe they will in the future.

It was agreed for the Clerk to write to Mr Fuller, to re-assure him that he should not have an access problem in the future and to keep in the Town Hall informed if a problem occurs.

6.4. Further information relating to an application for Grant Funding from Rotary Club had been received for the Nelson Day Celebrations.

The costs so far are as follows:-

Fireworks £1500

Torches £180

Marching Band - not known at present

Hire of room at the Community Centre for Traditional Dance – Not known at present

Traditional Band – cost not known at present

BBQ at Campingland – no cost (food for sale)

Cllr Buxton proposed to donate for the torches. Cllr Baker proposed and Cllr Baker seconded to donate £100.

It was agreed to donate £100 to the Rotary Club for the Nelson Day Celebrations they are organising.

6.5. The additional cost of fidelity insurance has not been received so this will have to put on the September Full Council Agenda.

7. TOWN CLERKS REPORT

7.1. A request has been received from the Icen Partnership relating to a previous decision by the Council to use part of the proceeds from the sale of a painting formerly situated in the Assembly Rooms. The painting sold for £12,500 with commission taken from this a net profit of £10,969 was realized. It was agreed to provide something of artistic value to go back into the Assembly Rooms. This request was taken to Icen Partnership who is suggesting that the Council contribute towards a feature in the Assembly Rooms that has had to be taken out of the contract due to pressure on costs. Costs have been provided for both the large and small hall. But the suggestion that a donation for the chandeliers in the Small Hall would certainly be an enhancement to the scheme and something that would be enjoyed by everyone using the hall.

Costs: Small Hall: £9,625.85

Large Hall: £9,255.63

There followed a lengthy discussion. Recommend to set a budget and go to Icen to come up with other ideas to be brought to full council. Cllr Greaves proposed and Cllr Baker seconded to give a £1000 donation for the right project.

It was unanimously agreed to give a £1000 donation for the right project to be decided by Full Council at a later date once alternative ideas have been received from the Icen Partnership.

7.2. A request has been received from Mr. Beat a Market Trader for continuation of sick leave. The Council agreed to grant sick leave up to three months. That period has now been completed and it is requested that we continue at no charge to Mr. Beat. In consultation with other Markets Mr. Beat has been allowed to continue at no cost. This is a genuine case and I have no hesitation in recommending that this continue for a further period of three months.

It was unanimously agreed to allow Mr Beat a further 3 months of sick leave at no cost.

7.3. The Town Clerk reported that correspondence has been received from Tony Dickens on behalf of the Access Group. Tony Dickens has requested various papers in advance of receiving the report that will be produced for the Council meeting on the 7th September. This has been refused to send these out in advance as these will be totally out of context in the absence of the full report. This is an important issue that needs resolving, it will be given full consideration and a member from the Access Group will be addressing the Council on 7th September, the Clerk has been informed that Tony Dickens will be on holiday.

7.4. Planning Application – 3PL/2005/1112/F erection of a garage. 3 Haspalls Rd. R.W. Keeling.

NO OBJECTION

Page 227

7.6. The Clerk reported that an invoice from Norfolk County Council regarding the Community Centre has been received. The Clerk informed the committee that just recently the Town Hall has received another invoice from Norfolk County Council requesting £5,455.44 for the Community Centre going back to the year 2000. The Clerk has again contested the whole amount and await a response or a credit note.

The meeting closed at 8.54p.m.

Chairman_____