

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting held on Wednesday 24th May 2006 at 7.00p.m. in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Swaffham.

Present: Mayor Cllr S Matthews (in the chair)

Cllr. C Baker, Cllr. D Butters, Cllr. P Buxton, Cllr. A Greaves,
Cllr. S Lister, Cllr. I Sherwood, Cllr. J Stockdale.

Town Clerk: - Mr R Bishop
Assistant Town Clerk: - Mrs R Noble
Internal Auditor: - Mr B Clements

1. APOLOGIES & REASONS FOR ABSENCE.

1.1. There were no apologies for absence.

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

2.1. There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING – WEDNESDAY 7TH DECEMBER 2005

3.1. Page 254 – item 6, should read – and if there are any other surplus monies after all expenditure.

3.2. Page 255 – item 10, should read – as a point of order the clerk advised the council that a decision had already been taken.

3.3. Page 258 – item 31, should read – to be either maintained by trimming or pollarding.

3.4. Page 258 – item 33, should read – It was unanimously agreed that all the other income

3.5. Page 258 – item 34, should read – It was unanimously agreed that the Museum grant

3.6. Subject to these amendments the minutes were agreed and signed as a true record by the Chairman.

3.7. It was suggested that agenda's and minutes together with supporting information could be forwarded to Councillors by e-mail. The Clerk stated that if the existing photocopier is replaced the whole pack could then be scanned. It was agreed that an item is placed on the next agenda for scanning the whole pack which is sent to all Councillors.

The Clerk was instructed to place an item on the next agenda for scanning the whole pack which is sent to all Councillors.

4. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

4.1. The Responsible Finance Officer circulated the list of receipts and payments to committee members for information. He suggested that the members look through them and contact him if they wanted to discuss anything.

4.2. A question was asked of item 54, Election, would there be any cost to the town, would the polling cards be going out the same day? The Responsible Finance Officer suggested the cost would be reduced due to the district election taking place at the same time, however he stated he would contact Sue Wright at Breckland.

It was agreed for the Responsible Finance Officer to contact Sue Wright at Breckland Council to see if the cost would be reduced because of the District Election taking place at the same time.

Page 266

4.3. There was a short discussion relating to the Market income, the Responsible Finance Officer stated that this was because of the discount scheme which means some traders pay annually.

4.4. The Responsible Finance Officer reported the end of year accounts are not quite ready, but they will definitely be ready for the July Town Council meeting. The process we are going through at present is to identify the various items of expenditure that were not spent before the year end and therefore need to be carried forward. There are also one or two changes to budget figures. For example the Recreation Ground Project has been projected at £789,293 an £83,000 increase, but the projected income has also gone up by the same amount. The size of the project will be determined by the amount of grant funding the project raises. £664 has been introduced as the balance from the Community Centre Association Accounts. A full list of adjustments will be available when the final accounts are presented to the committee.

5. INTERNAL AUDITOR REPORT

5.1. A report prepared by the Internal Auditor Brian Clements was circulated to committee members. He stated he reviewed the VAT return figured from the Scribe programme, and after a small adjustment the return was finalised. He also stated he reviewed the monthly payments sheets and received clarification on a few items.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. The Responsible finance Officer stated he would welcome any feedback the committee might have on the standard of grounds maintenance contract which covers the churchyard, campingland and the recreation ground. The new contractor is with Country Grounds Maintenance Ltd. It is in its early stages but potentially there is a substantial saving in this years' budget, we are adjusting the contract as the season progresses to give a better service. The Council allocated a budget of £3,500 for additional work, currently the contract is just over 80% of that budget at just over £2,800, however it is envisaged to use the remainder throughout the season. The saving comes from the £15,000 grounds maintenance budget projected for this year. This was based on the cost of employing Norfolk County Services in recent years and allowing for customary increases in costs. In going out to tender with this contract the council are achieving a greater number of cuts to all areas and at present have committed only 55% of this budget, it is predicted that this might increase to two thirds of the budget, but will still amount to a potential saving of some £5,000.

6.2. The Responsible Finance Officer reported he has been corresponding with Icen Partnership regarding the poor condition of the area adjacent to the Community Centre. He stated he supplied them with an estimate to put this area back into good order, as it can't be cut by the contractor at present. The ground is uneven and full of large stones, plus the grass is very patchy. The arrangement was to reinstate this land to its original condition, he went on to say he has been assured by Bernie that everything is in hand, as it is part of the 12 month guarantee on the building contract. He has also raised the matter of removable bollards at the rear of the Community Centre, because at present the land is vulnerable to travellers using the land or other visitors. Again a positive response has been received from Bernie that this matter will be dealt with very soon.

6.3. It was reported the early changes or dipping into reserves will come from the Church Clock mechanism, the gilding and the flagpoles on the Town Hall. The Town Estate may offset some of this expense.

Page 267

6.4. In a discussion with Cllr Ian Sherwood earlier this week, we re-examined the detail of how the loan or loans amounting to £125,000 are structured and drawn down and this resulted in scrutinising my budget figures. In the calculations it was first thought that the Council had budgeted for the loans to be in place at a midway point through this financial year, but looking at this again it was in fact allowed for it to take place at the beginning of the financial year. It is to our advantage, as a saving in repayments is made. It could mean that this saving pays for the Town Clock repairs or the flag poles or it might mean that the £5,000 loan for the Northwell Pool Project may not be required, thus reducing the overall amount the Council need to borrow.

6.5. The responsible Finance Officer reported that three years ago the Council considered paying expenses for the office of Councillor. The Mayor receives an allowance but previously no councillor has received any remuneration. This is none other than reimbursement of travel claims if claimed. Now this will come into effect at the December budget when setting the Precept for the incoming Council. The figure mentioned was £100 per Councillor, thus a budget of £1300 would be required for this purpose. As with all expenditure there will be a need to discuss whether this should be in the budget and if so is it at the right level. Councillors should give this matter some thought.

6.6. Councillor I Sherwood thanked Brian Clements for the years he has carried out the role of internal auditor, everyone agreed he has done a good job and has carried out separate research jobs.

Brian Clements asked the Council if there was any project they would like him to look at. The Clerk stated he would discuss this with Brian.

7. ADMISSION TO MEETINGS ACT (PUBLIC BODIES) 1960 – following the exclusion of the public & press

The Clerk reported he had received notification this morning regarding the Norfolk Pension Fund Dispute with a former employee. The specified person Mr. Chris Harding has not upheld the appeal of the former employee. There is still a right of appeal with the Pension Fund Administrator and then a final appeal to the Pensions Ombudsman who has far wider investigative powers and of legal enforcement. The cost to the Council so far is £350. Mr. Harding stated that he has spent considerably more time than is reflected in the charge, but will restrict the bill because of the impact on the Town Council's budget. Any Councillor is welcome to make an appointment to view all the papers in the Town Clerks office, these would not be in general circulation due to the confidential nature of the case.

Following a short discussion it was agreed for the Clerk to ask the solicitor if the council can claim back the costs.

It was unanimously agreed for the Clerk to ask the solicitor if the council can claim back the costs.

The meeting closed at 7.45p.m.

Chairman