

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting on Wednesday 25th July 2007 at 7.00p.m. in the Assembly Rooms, Swaffham.

Present: Deputy Mayor Cllr F. Sharpe (in the chair)

Councillors: - Mr D. Butters, Mr P. Darby,
Mr C. Gunner, Mr D. Wickerson

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

Public: - 3

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

- 1.1. Cllr Ian Sherwood – on holiday.
- 1.2. Cllr Pippa Wade – on holiday
- 1.3. Cllr Matthews arrived late due to a earlier meeting.

2. VACANCIES ON COMMITTEE

- 2.1. It was reported that there are two vacancies on the Finance committee. Cllr Butters proposed Cllr Gunner to become a member of the committee.

<p>It was agreed for Cllr Gunner to become a member of the Finance and General Purposes committee.</p>

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

- 3.1. Cllr Gunner declared a personal interest on item 6.5.

4. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

- 4.1. The minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of the 28th March 2007 were agreed and signed as a true record by Mayor.

5. QUARTERLY FINANCIAL REPORT

- 5.1. Accounts to date (Receipts & Payments 2007/08).
The Receipts and Payments report is actually Income and Expenditure and was circulated at the meeting.

- 5.2. Report from Internal Auditor.

The report from Brian Clements was circulated prior to the meeting. The report is already out of date, as the Town Clerk had to postpone the meeting on 20th July. The Deputy Clerk is working flat out to try and catch up the accounts, there has been two months entered and a further month to go to allow the VAT return to be completed on Friday morning. The Clerks task tomorrow is to collate all the Museum grant claims so that the Internal Auditor can check them through. The office has suffered through the delay in being able to balance the accounts, the allotments issue, the change of Council and the need to keep all the services going. It is hoped that over the next couple of months normality will be restored as the Council heads towards the budget season.

5.3. Approval of the end of year Accounts to 31st March 2007.

At the full Council meeting last week the Town Clerk was asked to provide a breakdown of the Actual balances to C/fwd amounting to £147,399. This information was circulated to the Finance committee. There was a question raised concerning the Community Centre Association and whether or not it had Charitable Status. Mr Clements who was involved with the association did not think that it had charitable status. It was requested that the Clerk check the charitable status of the Community Centre Association.

Cllr Matthews arrived at 7.15p.m.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1. Progress report of costs of Allotment clearance and preparation.

The Town Clerk has carried out an inspection of Tumbler Hill following a meeting with a fencing contractor. The areas previously cleared have substantial growth due to the sustained period of rain over the past couple of months. This will be cleared and ploughed over in the next 7 to 10 days. It was thought that the instruction was given to Mr. Ray Overman to keep the allotments at Tumbler Hill clear on a monthly basis; unfortunately this has not been done so an alternative contractor has been arranged. The cost of maintaining the allotments in a good condition and completing the fencing programme will bring the overall cost to close on £25,000

With regards the criticism from Mr. Cater at the Town Council meeting, it is difficult to meet his demands when he makes no effort to let us know what they are, and whether he intends to move or not. He seems to prefer the dramatic approach by stating his case at a Council meeting with an audience of Councillors, Public and Press. The Town Clerk will write to Mr. Cater and give him the timetable for site clearance, re- ploughing and fencing. The only other issue to resolve would be to number the allotments. The fencing contractor is providing an estimate shortly, it is not regarded as a priority, but would like to do if the ever increasing budget allows.

There has been regular contact with GO East in the past week. A copy of a letter sent to SCALGA has been received this morning regarding what is available under the Freedom of Information Act. By the Town Council giving permission for copies of correspondence to be given on request to SCALGA, GO East are then exempt from providing such information within the Act. Further information has been requested by GO East and will be sent by the end of this week. It was made clear to the Town Clerk that the current consultation process helps their case, as it raises awareness of allotments in the town and could be seen as promoting them.

It was suggested at the Town Council meeting last week that allotments are not mentioned in any of the newsletters. This is not correct, in each of the newsletters over the past year under the section devoted to Town Council services it contains the sentence, "The Town Council also administers the Allotments, the Saturday Market, the monthly Farmers Market and the Cemetery." In the most recent edition the words "there are vacant allotments available" has been added. A comprehensive report will be given to the Council in September giving the state of play in respect of allotment availability, those moving, not moving and those that have moved. There

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does seem to be about a dozen or so new paper allotment holders, those who have been persuaded to take up an allotment due to the recent publicity but no actual work has taken place to date. It is intended to inspect these allotments in the next three or four weeks and put them under notice to cultivate their allotments as they are in breach of their agreement. It was suggested that a weed suppressor is used on vacant allotment sites until they are taken up. It was thought that the allotment agreement should include tenants are to maintain the number of their site also.

6.2. ROSPA report.

The ROSPA report was circulated for information. The report is to make the Finance Committee aware of where we are with taking action regarding the risks identified. There are no High Risks identified but several Medium Risk items with one urgent item. All Medium risk items are currently being attended to, some by members of staff where possible, other by contractors specifically for the Skate Park or the Play Area. This is part of our annual maintenance budget for the Recreation Ground.

When all Medium risk items are attended to the next priority will be to look at the low risk items to see how many of these can be attended to within the budget. The Town Clerk will then bring a further report to the Council if the budget needs to be exceeded.

The current budget for the Recreation Ground Play Equipment repairs is £1,050 and the balance outstanding for Skate Park maintenance is £3,780. It was requested that the surfacing under the see-saw, even though not a high risk be tended to as a matter of urgency.

6.3. Report from Town Clerk regarding Health & Safety issues

The recent Health & Safety seminar attended by the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk at the Assembly Rooms has highlighted areas where policies, actions and procedures need urgent attention. This is because the claims culture has increased the possibilities of the Council being sued for whatever reason. The Council could be vulnerable and liable if they choose to ignore the current demands of changing legislation particularly through case law:-

Issues currently working on:

- Updating overall health and safety policy for our land & property, leased, owned, managed – Staff, Councillors, Volunteers and Public
- Updating Risk Assessments for all our land & property
- Cemetery headstones – risk assessment programme “topple test”
- Updating record keeping and clear paper trails

Issues to be addressed in the future:

- Health & Safety Implications of an Ageing Workforce
- Working at Height Regulations
- Corporate Manslaughter and the Compensation Act – who is ultimately responsible: the Council, the Town Clerk, Contractors or Employees employed by the Council.

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- Risk Assessment programme and Health & Safety Policy for all new responsibilities i.e. Toilets/TIC, Play Areas
- Increased staffing levels to deal with additional Health & Safety/Risk Assessment issues.

6.4. Early budget considerations for 2008/09.

The early budget considerations to date are as follows:

1. The Twinning celebration with Couhe – budget of £600 – is it enough? What is the Council committed to? Should additional funds be allocated from Reserves?
2. Un-budgeted cost of By-Election estimated at £2,500
3. Un-budgeted cost of loss of interest income on investments for a retention held by Norfolk County Council re-Museum O2 project of £28,595 until December 2007.
4. Un-budgeted cash flow of paying out for allotment clearance etc at £20,000 + and rising
5. Un-budgeted cost of loss of interest on investments re-outstanding amounts due from Icen Partnership - £17,164.31 for play equipment and £2,164.93 as the balance for electricity on the Buttercross. Both were invoiced and paid back in March.
6. Un-budgeted cost of cleaning toilets from October 2007 to March 2008 or until income from investing commuted sum comes on stream.
7. Un-budgeted staffing or contractor cost implications re-cleaning and maintaining public toilets, managing additional play areas and health & safety/risk assessment implications.

6.5. Twinning Event

The budget for the 40th Anniversary event planned for Sunday 26th August was discussed. It was proposed that to allow the budget of £600 be used that is in the twinning budget be used for this event.

It was agreed to allow the budget of £600 be used for the 40th Anniversary Twinning of Couhe and Swaffham.
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7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

7.1. The next meeting will be on Wednesday 3rd October 2007 at 7pm.

This meeting will hopefully identify most of the proposed policy, legislative or responsibility changes to be incorporated into the forthcoming budget debate.

The meeting closed at 8.10p.m.

Chairman_____