



WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL
POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

10 JULY 2017 – 7.30 pm

MINUTES OF MEETING

Present: Councillor Oliver, Chairman; Councillors Balsevics, Hill, Miss Oliver, Tibbs and Tierney.

Apologies: Councillor Miss Hoy and Human.

In attendance: Councillor Wing (as an observer).

Public Participation: None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee held on 12 June 2017 were confirmed and signed.

R4/17 Audit of Accounts 2016/17

The Chairman read to members the report from the council's Internal Auditor, resulting from her inspection of the council's accounts for 2016/17, which had been forwarded, by the Clerk, to the External Auditor with this council's Annual Return for that financial year.

In summary, the Internal Auditor comments upon the level of general reserves held by the council and some of its decisions in relation to budget-setting and financial planning.

Councillor Tierney commented that the Government has, on many occasions, given the message that local councils should not be holding high levels of financial reserves – which is public money and should be spent on the public - and he expressed the opinion that Wisbech Town Council had operated in accordance with that message.

Councillor Tierney stated that he challenges the comments and conclusions of the council's Internal Auditor and expressed the opinion that the council should think very carefully about its Internal Audit arrangements in future years.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

R5/17 Wisbech Town Council's Accounts 2017/18

The Clerk reported to members on the council's financial position as at the end of quarter one of the financial year 2017/18; he gave explanations as to variations between the estimated income and expenditure for the first quarter of 2017/18 and the actual financial position as at 30 June 2017.

As at 30 June 2017, the council had received approximately 49% of the estimated annual income and incurred approximately 18% of its estimated annual expenditure.

The Clerk responded to members' questions.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Tibbs, seconded by Councillor Balsevics, that

(1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;



(2) the accounts for the first quarter of the financial year 2017/18 be approved.

R6/17 Vacancies in the membership of Wisbech Town Council

Members considered whether to request Fenland District Council, as Elections Authority, to issue poll cards in respect of the by-election (if contested), caused by the resignations of Alan Lay on 12 June and Michael and Virginia Bucknor on 27 June 2017, scheduled for 31 August 2017.

The Clerk informed members that Fenland District Council estimates the cost of issuing poll cards for this by-election at £1,200.00.

Members are of the opinion that, although a large number of members of the public would be aware of the situation, because of the level of publicity that these resignations had caused, it is important for the council to not take any action which could result in accusations being made that it had attempted to "hide" the election from voters.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Tibbs, seconded by Councillor Tierney, that Wisbech Town Council would request Fenland District Council to issue poll cards in respect of the by-election (if contested), to fill the vacant seats on Wisbech Town Council, scheduled for 31 August 2017.

R7/17 Wisbech and Fenland Museum

Further to minute R16/16, the Clerk informed members that he had raised with the Management Committee of the Wisbech and Fenland Museum the possibility of Wisbech Town Council having an increased level of representation upon that committee because of the increase (by £15,000) in the amount of funding to be provided by the council to the museum.

The management committee had responded that such a situation would not be possible as it had been necessary to revise the committee's membership to secure a grant from Heritage Lottery Fund's Resilient Heritage Programme - the purpose of which is to ensure that the museum is 'Fit for the Future' - and, consequently, it would not be possible to alter that situation at this time; the committee had suggested that the way forward could be to put in place a Service Level Agreement (possibly based upon the one with that it has with Fenland District Council) between Wisbech Town Council and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum.

The Clerk informed members that he and the Leader had met with representatives of Wisbech and Fenland Museum recently, as a result of which it had been agreed that such an approach be pursued. The Clerk had subsequently prepared a Service Level Agreement (based upon the one that exists between Fenland District Council and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum), which he had circulated to all members of Wisbech Town Council in advance of this meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Tibbs, seconded by Councillor Hill, that the Service Level Agreement between Wisbech Town Council and the Wisbech and Fenland Museum, as prepared by the Clerk, be approved and that following signature of both parties to the agreement, the grant funding agreed at minute R16/16 for the current financial year be paid to the museum.

R8/17 Key priorities and projects for Wisbech Town Council

The Chairman reminded members of the decision reached at 26 June 2017 meeting of Wisbech Town Council (minute 34/17 refers) to adopt a number of priorities and projects for the council for the municipal year 2017/18 (and possibly beyond) and commented that this committee would need to bear these in mind when managing existing budgets and preparing future ones.



Members decided that the comments of the Chairman be noted and that he and the Clerk would undertake “forward planning” discussions in advance of the October 2017 meeting of this committee, at which initial consideration of budget-setting for the financial year 2018/19 would take place.

R9/17 Christmas lighting

The Clerk informed members of requests that had been received from a couple of residents and businesses in Old Market for the council to extend its Christmas lighting display into that part of Wisbech. He mentioned that he had informed those parties that Wisbech Town Council had made a capital allocation of £30,000, following public consultation, on a new “starting from scratch”

Christmas lighting scheme and that the allocation had been spent in full on delivering the council’s agreed scheme (which commenced in November 2014 and was implemented incrementally each year until completed in November 2016).

The Clerk had explained to the enquirers that unless it would be possible for the council to identify an additional financial resource, possibly through sponsorship, it would not be able to extend further its Christmas lighting provision in Wisbech.

The Chairman commented that the council does possess some unused lighting stock, which could be used in Old Market; there would, however, be a need, if this lighting were suitable for that location, to identify funding to meet the costs of both providing new infrastructure and installation of the lighting.

Councillor Tierney commented that the council currently possesses no financial resources available to purchase additional lighting or to meet the associated infrastructure and installation costs; all of the money which had been made available had been spent. He suggested that this may a matter that could be pursued by the council in the future but not at this time.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Tibbs, that, the council does not make arrangements to install Christmas lighting in Old Market during the current financial year; however, investigations into the suitability of the council’s unused stock for use at Old Market and the costs of the necessary infrastructure and installation works be undertaken, to enable an informed discussion of this matter in the future.

R8/17 Wisbech Town Council’s Cleansing Contracts

Members considered a recommendation from the council’s Assets Management Committee that the any savings to the council as a result of entering into new contractual arrangements for cleansing of the council’s community assets be transferred into an ear-marked reserve (to be created) to fund asset management works and equipment acquisitions (minute A5/17).

Councillor Tibbs, chairman of that committee, explained the decision which had been reached by the Assets Management Committee, in terms of selection of a contractor for cleansing of the council’s community assets

Councillor Tierney made the point that, given the situation reported by the Chairman at minute R4/17, it would be more appropriate to utilise any cost savings to general reserves.

Members decided, on the proposal of Councillor Tierney, seconded by Councillor Hill, that any savings to the council as a result of entering into new contractual arrangements for be used to increase the level of the council’s general reserves (not to be transferred into an ear-marked reserve (to be created) to fund asset management works and equipment acquisitions).



Meeting finished at 8.25 pm.

Signed.....

Dated.....