

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

14 SEPTEMBER 2015 AT 1930 HOURS

Present: Councillors: R Berry
D Bowater
A Brandham
S Cotter
A Dodwell – in the Chair
K Ferguson
J M Freeman
G Perham
E Wallace (arrived 1934 hours)

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio (Town Clerk)
S Sandiford (Committee Officer)
A Holden (Senior Administration Officer)
Cllr K Cursons
Cllr S Cursons

Members of the public: 6
Members of the press: 0

029/PF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence had been received.

030/PF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests, including the nature of those interests, which they had in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.

Councillor D Bowater declared a personal interest in the draft Volunteering Policy as a member of the Rotary Club of Leighton-Linslade.

031/PF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

Five members of the public spoke in respect of the draft Volunteering Policy. A number of questions were raised, particularly in respect of the use of casual volunteers who might only wish to help out on a project for the odd hour on an occasional basis. Concerns were expressed that the requirement to sign a Volunteer Agreement might deter such casual volunteers from offering their assistance.

Members of the public were thanked for taking the time to attend the meeting.

032/PF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 3 August 2015 were received.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 3 August 2015 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

033/PF VOLUNTEERING POLICY

The Committee received a report and a draft updated Volunteering Policy, which would potentially replace the existing Volunteering Policy as well as the Friends Agreement. Whilst the Town Council recognised the value offered by volunteers, the growing number of projects supported in this manner meant that further consideration had been given to the protocols involved and in particular, the Duty of Care on the part of the Town Council to ensure the safety, training and provision of information and support to volunteers. The new draft policy included a Volunteer Agreement which every volunteer would be asked to sign, indicating their agreement to Town Council terms of engagement and in recognition of the expectations in place for both parties.

Significant discussion took place regarding the draft policy and potential impact on both the Town Council and volunteers. Concerns were raised that the proposed policy could deter individuals from volunteering and it was suggested that an agreement with the appropriate partner organisation could be a more efficient mechanism for ensuring compliance with the relevant requirements, such as health and safety matters. While the requirement to review protocols was recognised, it was agreed by the Committee that further work was necessary to ensure any new policy was fit for purpose and acceptable to all parties. The Committee expressed recognition of and thanks to all local volunteers in respect of the significant contributions made to a huge number of projects and initiatives within the parish.

It was proposed and seconded that consultation should be undertaken with partner organisations and with individuals, where appropriate, with a view to bringing a revised draft policy back to a future meeting for further consideration. On being put to the vote, the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that consultation should be undertaken with partner organisations and with individuals, where appropriate, with a view to bringing a revised draft policy back to a future meeting for further consideration.

034/PF MINUTES OF SUB-COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The Committee received the draft minutes of the Accounts Sub-Committee meeting held on 10 August 2015.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Accounts Sub-Committee meeting held on 10 August 2015.

The Committee received the draft minutes of the Accommodation Sub-Committee meeting held on 10 September 2015. It was agreed that the recommendations contained therein would be discussed at the end of the meeting in confidential session.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Accommodation Sub-Committee meeting held on 10 September 2015.

035/PF COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORK PLAN

The Committee received the Committee objectives and work plan for 2015-2016, based on the Town Council Three Year Plan as well as projects previously endorsed by the Committee.

RESOLVED to note the Committee objectives and work plan for 2015-2016.

036/PF COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

The Committee received a report regarding communications, providing an update on the Town Council newsletter, website, social media channels and noticeboards. It was noted that further improvements had been made to the website, including featuring short videos on the home page and a pop-up asking visitors to sign up to receive the newsletter electronically. The number of visitors to the website and the number of social media followers continued to increase and targets were in the process of being set. A glossary of terms would be circulated to help clarify the analytical reports.

RESOLVED to note the report.

037/PF QUALITY AWARD

The Committee received a report outlining the eligibility criteria for the Quality Award and was asked to consider a recommendation to Council in respect of submitting an application.

RESOLVED to note the report and to endorse the Town Council's application for a Quality Award in October 2015.

RECOMMENDED to Council that a resolution be made confirming that the required documents, information and conditions were in place to achieve Quality status, in order that an application might be submitted.

038/PF EXTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

The Committee was advised that this item was withdrawn as the external audit report had not yet been received. The report would be presented to a future meeting of the Committee or Council.

RESOLVED to note the information.

039/PF VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANTS

The Committee received a report and a draft policy in respect of Vexatious Complainants. It was noted that while the existing Complaints Policy set out how the Town Council would respond to and process a complaint about the Council's procedures or administration, there was no set policy for dealing with those complainants considered vexatious and/or persistent.

It was suggested that the legal definition of a vexatious complainant should be confirmed and it was agreed that a workable framework was required in order to protect staff from difficult situations.

Discussion took place regarding the proposed policy and a number of queries were raised. Overall, while the need for such a policy was recognised, it was felt that the proposed document was overly complex. It was proposed and seconded that the existing Complaints Policy be revised to incorporate a procedure for dealing with vexatious complainants, whereby such issues would be escalated through Town Council senior management initially and then, if required, processed through the Complaints Sub-Committee. On being put to the vote, motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the existing Complaints Policy be amended to reflect a process for dealing with vexatious complainants, whereby such issues would be escalated through Town Council senior management initially and then, if required, processed through the Complaints Sub-Committee.

040/PF CARD PAYMENT MACHINES (TERMINALS)

The Committee received a report in respect of the use of electronic card payment machines as a more efficient method for customers to pay for goods and services.

RESOLVED to endorse that further investigations be made into the cost implications and preferred options of card payment machines.

041/PF EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded on the grounds of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves the likely

disclosure of exempt information. The public and press to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of detailed discussion regarding procedures, protocols and expenses related to the civic role of Town Mayor.

042/PF TOWN MAYOR

The Committee was advised that following informal discussion with a number of Councillor and Officers, the report regarding the procedures, protocols and expenses related to the civic role of Town Mayor had been withdrawn and would be presented to a future meeting.

RESOLVED to note the information.

043/PF TOWN COUNCIL ACCOMMODATION

The Committee was provided with a verbal update of discussions which had taken place during the meeting of the Accommodation Sub-Committee on 10 September 2015, by way of providing context for the recommendations under consideration.

The recommendations in respect of future Town Council office accommodation were discussed and a verbal indication of potential costs was provided.

RESOLVED to:

(i) endorse expenditure from the Central Administration/Professional Fees budget (12/4384) to appoint a commercial agent to act on behalf of the Town Council in respect of the office accommodation lease.

(ii) Delegate authority to the Town Clerk to appoint a commercial agent as specified above.

The recommendations in respect of future Town Council Depot accommodation were discussed and a verbal indication of potential costs was provided.

RESOLVED to endorse expenditure from the Central Administration/Professional Fees budget (12/4384) to:

(i) appoint a commercial agent to act on behalf of the Town Council in respect of depot accommodation.

(ii) Submit a planning application in respect of the potential to build on Town Council owned land.

(iii) Delegate authority to the Town Clerk to appoint a commercial agent as specified above.

The meeting closed at 21:11 hours.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2015.

Chair

23 NOVEMBER 2015