

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL

POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

21 SEPTEMBER 2020 AT 1930 HOURS

Present Councillors: S Jones (Chair)
C Palmer
R Berry
A Dodwell
J M Freeman
K Cursons (substituting for D Bowater)
S Owen
T Morris
G Perham
R Goodchild
D Scott

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio (Town Clerk)
S Sandiford (Head of Democratic and Central Services)
Cllr P Snelling
Cllr F Kharawala

Members of the public: 2

Councillor S Jones introduced the meeting and gave an overview of the remote meetings protocol.

135/PF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received by Councillor D Bowater, substituted by Councillor K Cursons.

136/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 S Owen and Councillor C Palmer declared a personal interest in agenda item 15 in relation to St Barnabas' Church.

137/PF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

A member of the public spoke in respect of equality and diversity and suggested an amendment to the proposed Town Council statement on this. It was further suggested that the Town Council might wish to support an exhibition in the Library for 2021 during Black History month (October), possibly in conjunction with the local historical society.

138/PF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

(a) The Committee received the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 20 July 2020 for consideration.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 20 July 2020 be approved as a correct record and were signed accordingly.

139/PF EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Committee received a report and proposed position statement in respects of Equality and Diversity. It was requested that the words “regardless of disability” also be added.

RECOMMENDED to Council that the following position statement be endorsed:

“The Town Council is an equal opportunities employer.

Regardless of disability, race, age, religion, gender or sexual orientation all our events and facilities are open to everyone in the community. Ways to make our play equipment inclusive to all remains an on-going priority.

All of Local government is wholly committed to equality, diversity and inclusion reflecting the communities we serve. The Town Council is in full agreement with this aim. We are all part of the much-needed conversation on how we can all confront and end racism for which there is no place within our society. The Town Council will support the aims of all groups who seek to eliminate prejudice in any form”.

And that the position statement, along with the Local Government Association statement on diversity, be published on Town Council media platforms to demonstrate the Town Council’s continuing commitment to addressing equality and diversity matters within its parish council functions as both an employer and community service provider.

140/PF COMMUNICATIONS UPDATE

The Committee received and considered a report which provided a six-monthly update in respect of Town Council Communications. Unsurprisingly, the majority of communication in the period March-August had been driven by the Covid-19 pandemic and the Council’s Covid-19 web page had been the most visited page from March to July. Electronic sign messages continued and had recently been reduced from 20 to 10 key messages. Social media activity was programmed across 11 platforms and profiles, with Facebook still achieving the greatest reach and engagement.

Posts with the largest responses included those regarding VE Day and VJ Day, the spring photographic competition and the re-opening of the High Street following lockdown.

The report demonstrated the significant work being done in terms of creating, scheduling and analysing communications and the Committee expressed its thanks to all those involved.

A question was asked regarding creation of a councillor WhatsApp group for emergency purposes; this was still intended to be done once permissions had been obtained.

RESOLVED to note the report.

141/PF RISK REGISTER UPDATE

The Committee received a mid-year update report regarding the Risk Register action plan for 2020-2021. Some progress had been made in the five identified action areas, although the pandemic had had an impact with the scheduled data protection audit unable to take place. A further update would be provided in January along with the revised Risk Register and proposed action plan for 2021-22.

RESOLVED to note the report.

142/PF ACCESSIBILITY REGULATIONS UPDATE

The Committee received an update report regarding compliance information with The Public Sector (Websites and Mobile Applications) (No.2) Accessibility Regulations 2018. Following a significant amount of work, not only was the website framework compliant but also the majority of content. It was recognised in the Council's Accessibility Statement that not all content could be made accessible but that this could be provided in another format upon request. The next step would be to work towards compliance of the Town Council App by the deadline of June 2021.

RESOLVED to note the report.

143/PF JULY AND AUGUST 2020 PAYMENTS

The Committee received schedules of payments for July and August 2020, which had previously been approved for payment by the Town Clerk and countersigned by two signatories. There were no anomalies or matters of concern to draw to the attention of the Committee.

The schedule for July 2020 dated 7 August 2020 included BACS payments amounting to £124,887.90 (page numbers 2778-2786). The monthly salaries listing for July 2020 amounting to £92,225.19 gross was received.

A cash book report for July 2020, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

The schedule for August 2020 dated 10 September 2020 included BACS payments amounting to £135,228.85 (page numbers 2789-2796). The monthly salaries listing for August 2020 amounting to £97,148.86 gross was received. A cash book report for August 2020, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received. An inputting error on the listing was explained and this had now been corrected.

RESOLVED to note the reports.

144/PF QUALITY GOLD RE-ACCREDITATION

The Committee received and considered a report to apply for re-accreditation under the Local Council Award Scheme. Two statements with minor revisions were also presented for approval. A couple of minor amendments were suggested to the statement on Planning. It was noted that most eligibility criteria could be evidenced online.

RESOLVED:

(a) to endorse that the Town Council submit an application to register its intent to seek re-accreditation as a Quality Gold council under the Local Council Award Scheme.

(b) to endorse the payment of registration costs (£50) and application costs (£200) from the Professional Fees budget.

(c) to endorse the updated statement in respect of performance management of the Town Council.

(d) to endorse the updated statement in respect of Planning.

RECOMMENDED to Council that a resolution be made confirming that the required documents, information and conditions are in place to seek Quality Gold re-accreditation, as set out in the application form.

145/PF COMMITTEE DECISIONS AND WORKPLAN

The Committee received and considered the Committee Work Plan 2020-21 including amendments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The review of two policies had been deferred to a future meeting due to workload. Projects for inclusion in the next year budget would be considered by standing committees but the likely impact of the pandemic on income generation through venue hire would need to be taken into account.

RESOLVED to note the work plan.

146/PF TOWN COUNCIL STANDING ORDERS REVIEW

The Committee received and considered a report in respect of Standing Orders. Whilst reviewed annually, it was felt that a more in-depth review was needed as a result of recent questions arising during meetings. It was proposed that a Task and Finish Group be formed to undertake a comprehensive review and bring recommendations back to committee. It was suggested that the original proposed timescale of January 2021 be extended to April 2021 to allow sufficient time for in depth analysis. This would see recommendations, if approved, coming into effect in May 2021.

RESOLVED:

(a) to note the report.

(b) to form a Task and Finish Group comprising Councillors K Cursons, J M Freeman, F Kharawala, S Jones and S Owen to review the Town Council's Standing Orders, with a view to making recommendations back to Committee by April 2021.

147/PF ASSET REGISTER

The Committee received the asset register for consideration, including land and buildings, infrastructure assets, community assets and equipment.

RESOLVED to note the report.

148/PF INSURANCE CLAIMS REPORT

In accordance with its terms of reference, the Committee received a report outlining insurance claims for the period June 2019 – June 2020.

RESOLVED to note the report regarding the Town Council insurance policy and claims for the annual period 30 June 2019 to 29 June 2020.

149/PF ST BARNABAS CHURCH

The Committee received a request for funding from St Barnabas Church, to assist with unanticipated costs for live streaming of church services as a result of the restrictions imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic. It was agreed to support the request in the same way as that of All Saints, i.e. for 50% of the cost to be funded and that whilst Covid-19 restrictions remained in place, no charges should be made to residents for streaming services.

RESOLVED to support the request for funding by St Barnabas Church by providing 50% of the cost, up to a maximum of £2,750.

150/PF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Committee received a report in respect of the potential creation of a Neighbourhood Plan. This was following the decision made by Committee and Council in September 2019 to not proceed with a Neighbourhood Plan at that time but to review the position in a year's time.

In September 2019, it had been agreed to look at other ways in which to work collaboratively with Central Bedfordshire Council through the Leighton-Linslade Partnership Committee. It was proposed that additional time be granted to that committee in this respect, given the loss of six months due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Two amendments to the recommendations were proposed by Councillor C Palmer and seconded by Councillor A Dodwell: that the scope of the work be extended beyond the south side of the High Street to the whole town centre and that the matter be reviewed again in six months' time rather than twelve months.

Comment was made that the pandemic had had a substantial impact on town centres and the result of this was not yet known. In addition, recent proposals from Government to reform the planning system in England were likely to impact upon the current Neighbourhood Plan process. In addition, it was felt that there was little land left within the parish boundary for any future substantial development, beyond land south of the High Street.

A concern was expressed regarding public frustration and it was believed that many other parishes either already had a Neighbourhood Plan or were in the process of working towards creating one.

Two separate amendments to the four recommendations were proposed by Councillor S Owen and seconded by Councillor R Goodchild. The first amendment proposed pressing the local authority to bring forward a robust action plan for redevelopment of land south of the High Street by the December Partnership Committee meeting. On being put to the vote, the amendment was not carried (4 for, 6 against, 1 abstention) (recorded vote at appendix A).

The second amendment set out the rationale for developing a Neighbourhood Plan by the end of 2021, seeking urgent dialogue with the local authority on unspent S106 developer contributions from past applications and taking a greater role in future S106 infrastructure projects and monitoring. It was felt that the Town Council's Planning and Transport Committee had taken a passive role but that the council should play a greater role in addressing the infrastructure deficit.

It was argued that only a small minority of Central Bedfordshire parishes had or were developing a Neighbourhood Plan and that creation of such a plan was likely to take several years due to the stringent process involved. It was reiterated that the impact of the Government's proposed planning reform on neighbourhood planning could not yet be known.

On being put to the vote, the second amendment was not carried (2 for, 8 against, 1 abstention) (recorded vote at appendix B).

The two amendments proposed by Councillor C Palmer were then put to the vote. The first was carried unanimously. The second was carried by majority (9 in favour, 2 abstentions).

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL:

(a) that through the Partnership Committee the Town Council continues working collaboratively with Central Bedfordshire Council (as the plan making authority) in the review of the Development Brief for the site known as Land South of the High Street, Leighton Buzzard, considering and taking into account the potential uses of other town centre sites such as Bridge Meadow and existing community facilities available in the town, to ensure that the benefits obtained for Leighton-Linslade from the Land South of the High Street site are maximised.

(b) that the merits or otherwise in the creation of a neighbourhood plan for the Town Centre and its hinterland be considered in 6 months' time.

(c) that material consideration be afforded to the Partnership Project List by the Partnership Committee when considering any development proposals that come forward within the parish or its hinterland.

(d) that the Town Clerk writes to Central Bedfordshire Council (Development Management) to express the Town Council's on-going need to continue to be involved in the identification of appropriate projects which qualify for S106 spend by providing development management and economic regeneration colleagues with the Partnership Project List once endorsed by Council.

The meeting closed at 2145 hours.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 SEPTEMBER 2020.

APPENDIX A – recorded vote on first amendment proposed by Cllr S Owen on agenda item 16

BERRY, R	AGAINST
CURSONS, K	AGAINST
DODWELL, A	AGAINST
FREEMAN, J M	FOR
GOODCHILD, R	FOR
JONES, S	AGAINST
MORRIS, T	ABSTAIN
OWEN, S	FOR
PALMER, C	AGAINST
PERHAM, G	AGAINST
SCOTT, D	FOR

APPENDIX B – recorded vote on second amendment proposed by Cllr S Owen on agenda item 16

BERRY, R	AGAINST
CURSONS, K	AGAINST
DODWELL, A	AGAINST
FREEMAN, J M	AGAINST
GOODCHILD, R	FOR
JONES, S	AGAINST
MORRIS, T	AGAINST
OWEN, S	FOR
PALMER, C	AGAINST
PERHAM, G	AGAINST
SCOTT, D	ABSTAIN