

Main issues covered: Payment Schedules/ Annual Return for 2012/13 accounts/ Town Council reserves/ Co-op Fixed Rate Deposit Account/ Middlewood Station

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING HELD AT 8PM ON MONDAY 23rd SEPTEMBER 2013 IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC HALL, POYNTON

PRESENT

Chairman: Cllr C Gorst

Cllrs. G Bartos, M Beanland, L A Clarke, H Murray, Mrs J Saunders and G Smith

Attending under SO 56: Cllrs. P Hoyland and Mrs S Horsman

15. Apologies for Absence

Cllrs. M C G Sewart and A Smith

16. Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Other Interests

None

17. Minutes of the previous meeting

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the F&GP meeting held on 22nd July 2013 are approved and signed by the Chairman (5 – 2 abs)

18. Payment Schedules for July and August 2013

Page 4. Cllr Clarke drew attention to the payment made to Cheshire East of £7,763.09 for administering the Town Council's by-election in December 2012. This he said was an appallingly large amount to charge for running an election. He hoped a proper breakdown of cost will be provided. The Clerk explained that the Town Council had a Special Earmarked Reserve (SER) of £5,000 to cover elections, but that this amount was exceeded by the CE invoice. He added that the Town Council's decision to opt for polling cards had also led to increased costs. Cllr Murray defended the cost, and said it was a price worth paying.

Page 2. The minus figure shown against a cheque payment to ChALC was because they lost the original Town Council cheque, and a second cheque had been raised,

PCSOs. The Clerk pointed out that there were two PCSO payments close together, and he undertook to check whether we had paid twice, or if this was due to a time lag on payments.

RESOLVED: That the Payment Schedules for July and August 2013 be received and signed by the Chairman (NC)

19. Bank Reconciliations for end-July and end-August 2013

RESOLVED: That the Bank Reconciliations for end-July and end-August 2013 are received and signed by the Chairman (NC)

20. Annual Return: Audit of 2012/13 Accounts

The external auditor had only raised two minor issues concerning the Annual Return. The first concerned responding with a 'No' to one of the questions rather than 'N/A', and the other questioned our level of fidelity guarantee cover. Concerning the latter, Cllr Clarke proposed that the Clerk investigate the additional premium payable for increasing insurance cover to £750,000.

RESOLVED: That the completed Annual Return for 2012/13 by the External Auditor, BDO LLP, is received and approved, and that the Clerk investigates the cost of increasing fidelity cover to £750,000 (NC)

21. Town Council's Reserves

The Chairman began by explaining that consideration of the Town Council's reserves needed to take place, given the possible joining together of the Civic Hall and Library buildings. The Civic Hall/Library project will feature at next week's FIED Committee meeting. The recommendations will then be put forward to the full Town Council.

The Clerk had submitted a written report with a schedule of the Town Council's reserves. This shows that there may still be a shortfall of some £15,000. As mentioned in the Clerk's brief, a loan can be applied for from the Public Works Loan Board. The Chairman said that he did not think it would be wise to leave the Town Council vulnerable in the short term, and unable to take on new initiatives. A loan could therefore be a possible way forward.

Cllr Murray asked when payments to Cheshire East for the work needed to be made, and suggested that consideration be given to lengthening the

repayment period. He also said it was important to ensure that a 10% contingency of the total is retained.

The Clerk explained that there are some unknowns about the true level of reserves until the accountant visits in late October 2013, adding that his brief was more to bring Councillors' attention to the position at the moment.

The Clerk clarified for Cllr Clarke that work is due to begin in the Spring 2014 with payments probably due in the Autumn. The Town Council will be billed at the end of the project net of VAT.

The Chairman said that at this stage the issue to consider is whether the Town Council has sufficient funds to pay for the Civic Hall/Library project and still have enough reserves for other projects by taking out a loan and considering future reserve levels. Instead of taking out a loan Cllr Beanland suggested that the Town Council could draw the money from other earmarked reserves.

Cllr Mrs Saunders suggested that at this stage the report could be received with the accountant's visit providing more clarity. The Chairman proposed that if there is a shortfall in the available reserves to fund the merger of the Library/Civic Hall buildings then consideration should be given by the FGP Committee to financing part of this by a loan from the Public Works Board. This could be repaid from the precept over a number of years. The Chairman said that this would ensure that the project could be funded with confidence.

RESOLVED: That the written brief on the Town Council's Reserves is received, and that if there is a shortfall in the available reserves to fund the project, then consideration should be given by the FGP Committee to financing part of this by a loan from the Public Works Board, to be repaid from the precept over a number of years (6 – 1 abs)

22. Authorised Signature

The Committee passed a resolution as set out in Section 3 of the RBS mandate for the re-submission of Cllr C Gorst's authorised signature for the purposes of signing Town Council cheques.

RESOLVED: That the re-submission of Cllr C Gorst's signature for the purposes of signing Town Council cheques is noted (NC)

23. Fixed Rate Deposit Account

The Committee noted the closing of the Town Council's Fixed Rate Deposit Account with the Co-operative Bank, with effect from 30th August 2013. The Chairman mentioned that at a previous meeting it was suggested that the monies from that account are moved into three separate banking institutions. The Clerk explained that this was dependent on the length of time the money

would be locked away for, given the possible call on funds for the Civic Hall/Library project. It was proposed that both the Chairman and the Clerk investigate the short term investment options and report back to the Committee.

RESOLVED: That the closing of the Town Council's Fixed Rate Deposit Account with the Co-operative Bank, with effect from 30th August 2013, is noted; and that the Chairman and the Clerk investigate the short term investment options and report back to the Committee (NC)

24. Middlewood Station

The Chairman provided an update on Middlewood Station following a meeting he attended on 17th September 2013. Cllr Gorst explained that several weeks ago the Working Group agreed to engage with Councillors representing High Lane residents to seek their views concerning the future of Middlewood Station. Cllrs Gorst, Murray, Mrs Saunders and West met with Cllr Kevin Dowling. Together they went on a site visit to the station, when they also discussed potential sites for car parking. The visit concluded with Cllr Dowling agreeing to seek the views of his fellow Councillors at Stockport MBC and report back to the Working Group. The Working Group feels that if the two communities work together it will greatly strengthen the case to improve the timetable and lead to more people using the station.

Cllr Gorst also attended a meeting of the High Peak and Hope Valley Rail Partnership in Glossop on 23rd September in connection with the new franchise, Rail North, that may take over from Northern Rail and Trans Pennine, with some discussion also around improvements to the Middlewood service.

A half hourly service to Buxton calling hourly at Middlewood Station would be the best possible service. Cllr Murray asked how this could be achieved. Cllr Gorst explained that one half hourly service would be fast and the other a slower service, allowing a stop at Middlewood. They are also proposing the electrification of the Buxton line. Cllr Clarke voiced his concerns because the Buxton line is old fashioned and would be very expensive to modernise. He added that this is a difficult line in terms of engineering, given the number of tunnels and the implications for electrification and pantographs. Cllr Gorst assumed these issues would be considered.

Cllr Gorst explained that to have some representation on the Management Group of the High Peak and Hope Valley Rail Partnership you need to contribute a minimum of £2,000 annually. Cllr Murray agreed with Cllr Gorst that it would be good to have such representation. He suggested that Cheshire East could be asked to consider increasing their contribution to the Partnership to £1,500 from the present £1,000, and the Town Council contribute £500, with the latter then nominating a representative to the Management Group.

Cllr Murray proposed that the Town Council writes a letter to the Portfolio Holder at Cheshire East, drafted by Cllr Gorst and the Clerk, asking for consideration to be given to increasing their contribution to £1,500, with the balance of £500 coming from the Town Council.

Cllr Gorst's written brief was circulated by e-mail after the meeting, and is attached.

RESOLVED: That the verbal report on Middlewood Station is received; that Cllr Gorst and the Clerk draft a letter to be sent to the Portfolio Holder at Cheshire East, asking for consideration to be given to increasing their contribution to the Rail Partnership from £1,000 to £1,500, with the balance of £500 contributed by the Town Council; and that the Town Council nominate a representative to join the Management Group of the Rail Partnership (NC)

The meeting concluded at 8.40 pm