

SWAFFHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes meeting on Wednesday 31st March 2008 at 7.45p.m. in the Council Chamber, Town Hall, Swaffham.

Present: Mayor Cllr S. Matthews (in the chair)

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

Clerk:- Mr R. Bishop.
Assistant Clerk:- Mrs R Noble

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE.

1.1. Ian Sherwood – Unwell.

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

2.1. There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES of Finance & G.P. meeting held on 5th Dec 2007.

3.1. The minutes were circulated to all Councillors. It was agreed the minutes would be circulated in the meeting pack for the full Council meeting next Wednesday and agreed at that meeting.

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4. FINANCIAL REPORT from the Responsible Finance Officer.

4.1. It was reported the Deputy Town Clerk is presently working on the accounts to date, the report circulated has been taken from the Accounts this afternoon. It has not been checked, apportioning salaries to different cost centres has not been carried out and any other apportioning or adjustments have not been made. All of this will take place prior to distributing the annual accounts.

4.2. A copy of the report by the Internal Auditor Brian Clements was circulated for consideration. This relates to the period October to December 2007 where checks were carried out on the Wages, PAYE and Pensions for the year ending 31st March 2007. The Vat return for the third quarter was reviewed by the Internal Auditor and agreed. A spot check on all expenses for the same period was also reviewed and agreed with any amendments being made accordingly.

For the period January to March 2008 the annual spot check of the Market took place in February with the Internal Auditor and the Market Superintendent satisfactorily. The Vat and final accounts inspection will take place in April and May respectively.

4.3. It was reported the interim report on end of year Accounts to 31st March 2008 shows Reserves are extremely low, but compensated and helped by the fact that the Swimming Pool Land Purchase has still not gone through. There will be a need to carry some balances forward as expenditure has already been committed for things like street furniture and work in progress at the Town Hall for an example.

Page 423

Overall the year is showing that we haven't received money in from the sale of surplus allotment land (net in the accounts of £80,000) and we have paid out £35,000+ for work carried out on the allotments with more expense committed on the access tracks.

To date we have received only £100,000 from Breckland Council to cover most of the costs of the refurbishment of the toilets. The remaining £145,000 will follow at the point where the property is finally transferred to the Town Council. This is causing further cash-flow problems as money is being paid out for cleaning and maintenance costs from day one. It was suggested that Swaffham Town Council should be earning interest on the £145,000 from the day the toilets opened.

It was agreed for the Responsible Finance Officer to contact Breckland Council to discuss the interest on the remaining £145,000

A discussion took place relating to the toilets, various issues were discussed, it was suggested a notice is displayed in the toilets stating these toilets are inspected on a regular basis together with a contact telephone number.

It was agreed for a notice to be placed in the toilets stating these toilets are inspected on a regular basis together with a contact telephone number.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1. A progress report was given on the allotment sites, the precise figure is not known at the present time as there is still some fencing work and access tracks to complete. There are still some invoices to double check against estimates and these need to be added to expenditure already incurred in excess of £37,000 – the final figure will be close to £70,000.

It was reported an estimate for costs from Bidwell's has been received for the disposal of both sites. A report will be going to full Council next week with the options open to the Council. The Town Clerk will outline some of the issues, but time is also a factor. Following a discussion the Finance Committee felt it is necessary to obtain two further estimates from Savills and Brown & Co.

It was agreed to obtain 2 further estimates from Savills and Brown & Co.

A further discussion took place relating to the Land Agents, it was suggested to arrange a meeting for all 3 agents to give a presentation to the Full Council.

It was agreed to arrange a meeting for all 3 agents to give a presentation to the Full Council.

5.2. It was reported the insurance policy has been adjusted to take account of the additional liability with the TIC building. The insurance will need to increase later this year to take in play equipment on three further play areas. The policy is renewable at the beginning of June. It is envisaged that the Council look to other companies to compare prices such as Zurich and Cornhill who specialize in local authority insurance. The Town Council's insurers are currently Ecclesiastical who specialize in Churches but were the best value two years ago when the Council last changed insurers. There have been stringent checks and obligations placed upon the Council in the past two years; a meeting has been set up with Ecclesiastical to discuss the reasons why this is? They have queried valuations given by the District Valuer and are looking for the amounts insured to be increased, particularly on the buildings i.e. Assembly Rooms, Community Centre and Town Hall. Councillor Wickerson offered to work with the Town Clerk on insurance, implementing a tender process.

It was agreed for Cllr. Wickerson to work with the Town Clerk on insurance, implementing a tender process.

5.3. The Responsible Finance Officer reported on the cash-flow and early budget considerations for 2008/09. The cash-flow continues to be a concern and the picture will become much clearer as the surplus allotment land issue unfolds. As the Council get into developing a strategy to go through with the sale of the Shoulder of Mutton in the first instance, the timescale will be known and there will be a need to set up temporary borrowing at that point. There may be a need for an extraordinary Council meeting when the timescales are finally known or if we reach crisis point before the money comes on stream. It is recommended that the Town Clerk continues to monitor cash-flow and call the Council together at the appropriate time.

Early budget considerations – TK Drake will be installing a new sound system in time for the meeting next week. The Town Clerk discussed this with the Mayor as the cost was well within the budgeted figure of £5,000 it was decided to proceed. The system will be very adaptable and easy to manage.

5.4. The existing Finance Regulations were circulated to the committee prior to the meeting. The Town Clerk highlighted some changes in red on a further copy circulated at the meeting.

It was agreed for the Financial Regulations to be on the next agenda for Full Council.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

6.1. The date of the next meeting is Wednesday 30th July 2008 at 7pm.

The meeting closed at 9.00p.m.

Chairman