



Cricklade Town Council
First Town on the Thames

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POLICY & RESOURCES MEETING
Monday, 11th January 2010
7pm at Ockwells

Councillors present - Cllr D Tetlow, Chairman

Cllr B. Atfield

Cllr D. Avenell

Cllr B. Beasley

Cllr G. Chapman

Cllr T. Clements

Cllr Colmer

Cllr M. Hatton

Cllr T Robertson

Cllr R. Szybiak

Two members of the public were also present.

Fire evacuation instructions were pointed out before commencement.

Public Question Time

There were no questions.

MINUTES

09.39 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies received.

09.40 Declarations of Interest

None received.

09.41 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting dated 9th November 2009 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chairman.

09.42 Clerk's Report

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| 09.38 | <p>Budget 2010/11 – In addition to making recommendations to Full Town Council involving adjustments to Budget Sheets for the proposed precept levy, the Town Clerk had:</p> <p>i) investigated proposed rises in rent and service charges by Wiltshire Council</p> <p>Details of a rent review for Ockwells based on rateable value were discussed at the Full Town Council Meeting on 30th November. Rises in service charges were also discussed at the meeting and are in line with calculations set out in the P&R budget sheet. Officers are looking at the background to the current lease and in particular the contribution made by the Town Council to the Ockwells refurbishment project. Cllrs Robertson and Szybiak have also undertaken research and reported that comparative rents are difficult to research but preliminary findings confirm that the rent increase (now agreed) was reasonable. Research around this will continue in the lead up to the lease renewal in 2012</p> <p>ii) looked at the possibility of increasing charges for services</p> |
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| | <p>(e.g. photocopying, laminating) and rechargeable services to Wiltshire Council</p> <p>Officers currently undergoing a review of chargeable services and looking at what charges are made by other Town Councils and local businesses. In line with the Ockwells rent increase, the rechargeable rent on the Wiltshire Council office will increase by 26%. A memorandum will be drawn up before 1 April 2010.</p> <p>iii) asked Wiltshire Council for an explanation of how the number of Band D households is calculated for precept purposes</p> <p>This information had been requested from the team at Wiltshire Council and a general response received.</p> <p>ACTION: Town Clerk to request information more specific to Cricklade</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| 09.35 | <p>Land Registration – Town Clerk continuing liaison with solicitors about any ownership documents held by their offices and updating of registration requirements.</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| 09.35 | <p>Deferred Grant Application from Rugby Club – The Town Clerk had spoken to the Rugby Club about progress on the design and funding of the proposal. An architect had drawn up plans (largely based on those put forward as part of the Cricklade Country Way project) and discussions are underway with Wiltshire Council planners. Approaches have also been made to the Environmental Agency about flood risk. The Club was awarded £1,000 by the Area Board at its meeting on 2nd December towards the cost of Architects, Environmental Agency and Planning Authority costs.</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |
| 09.35 | <p>Review of External Professional Services – See Minute 09.46</p> <p>Closed</p> |
| 09.35 | <p>Cricklade Museum Lease – New lease currently being registered with the Land Registry</p> <p>Ongoing</p> |

09.43 Grant Applications

There was one grant application to consider.

Thames Pre-School – This application was for £365 towards a new fence to help ensure the safety of young children at the pre-school. Members agreed that the pre-school offered a good service to local parents and that it was admirable that parents and the school had fund raised towards another, larger boundary fence allowing children to use the outdoor space available. It was **RESOLVED** to award £365 (S137) to the Thames Pre-School.

Members **NOTED** that the balance now remaining in the 2009/10 budget for small grants was **£1,330**.

09.44 Information Point

Members considered a background report by the Town Clerk which highlighted the findings of a review by Wiltshire Council officers on the future funding of the Information Point. This provides services for Wiltshire Council (and formerly North Wilts District Council) under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with an annual payment of £8,000 pa. The information provided through the Town Council's Front Office deals with local enquiries around Highways issues, refuse collections, planning applications, etc. The £8,000 contributes a large part to the staffing costs of manning the Front Office.

The Wiltshire Council report concludes that the payment of £8,000 under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) to towns in North Wiltshire will be reduced to 80% for 2010/11 and should be withdrawn after March 2011. The recommendation will be used to inform the budget round

at Wiltshire Council. A project is now underway looking at alternative ways of providing Customer Services in towns and parishes.

Discussion included:

- The importance of maintaining face to face services to residents in Cricklade - the most northern town in the county and without public transport links to the nearest Wiltshire Council hub in Chippenham
- That withdrawing funds represented a reduction in services to local people
- The anomaly in that Wiltshire Council were encouraging delegation of services locally to towns and parishes but appeared to be taking back a cost effective way of providing its Customer Services
- A decision would need to be made ahead of the next precept round about whether to retain Front Office services through savings or to raise the precept to do this
- Options would have to include reducing the opening hours of the Front Office or closing it altogether
- It should be remembered that this SLA and associated payment was for North Wiltshire's towns only
- There was some scope to work more closely with the library in providing a full range of services - a one stop shop approach

During a Suspension of Standing Orders, the Chairman of the Business Association stressed the importance of retaining a Front Office particularly with regard to its role providing tourist Information.

It was **AGREED** that Cricklade Town Council should work closely with Wiltshire Council for the best option for local people and that the Town Clerk should:

- i) Write to the Chief Executive of Wiltshire Council setting out the Town Council's concerns making clear Cricklade's special case in being remote from Wiltshire Council's services
- ii) Liaise with other town councils to learn more about how they deal with enquiries about Wiltshire Council services (particularly those not working to the SLA)
- iii) Write to the Operations Manager for Customer Services asking whether the existing SLA (which expires in March 2010) will be extended or renewed and which 20% of the services Cricklade should withdraws now that funding was to be reduced to 80% from 1 April.

09.45 Employment Law

Following agreement by Full Town Council that an element of the 2010/11 budget should include taking on the services of professional Employment Law consultants, the Town Clerk had identified suitable companies to provide these. Advice was provided by the Society for Local Council Clerks (SLCC) and local Town Clerks.

During a Suspension of Standing Orders the Chairman of the Business Association questioned the requirement for this service as the Town Council employed 7 employees and this could provide a savings opportunity.

Member discussion included:

- The importance of outsourcing this work which would protect both the Council and its employees
- The decision was in line with the professional services taken on by towns and parish councils throughout the country
- This service was important for small organisations without professional in-house expertise
- Costs around employee claims could not be covered by reserves
- Indemnity (part of the fee) would cover the Council for up to £1m and include representation at tribunal
- The merits of each company and the services provided
- The fees involved

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be delegated to enter into a contract with the company offering the most cost effective contract ensuring that this allows the Town Council to withdraw from it after 3 years without penalty.

09.46 Legal Services

As part of a review of professional services, the Town Clerk had been asked to write to a number of local solicitors asking for details of their fees and of their experience working with local authorities. Members were presented with a short list of those companies offering services most appropriate to the needs of the Town Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that, following the review, Members delegate decisions about where to seek legal advice to the Town Clerk who should take into account the experience of the Town Council's preferred solicitor in dealing with property, land and commercial issues. The Town Clerk should, where possible, obtain written quotes for legal work.

Meeting closed at 8.07pm