

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, GROVE HOUSE, HIGH STREET NORTH, DUNSTABLE

ON MONDAY 18TH JUNE 2007

Present: Councillor A E Green (Deputy Town Mayo); Councillor Mrs S A Newton (Chairman), Councillor M J P Mullany (Vice-Chairman), Councillors A J Fairbairn, M Hearty, M Jones, P E Russell, T Stock and M Tilley

In Attendance: Councillors Mrs J Fairbairn, J Freeman, Mrs C Gresham and Mrs A Stock with Mr D Ashlee (Town Clerk) and Mrs R G Smith (Administration and Finance Manager)

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Mrs B M Boatwright, P J Boatwright and T C Colbourne

178 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meetings of the Committee held on 5th March and 26th March 2007 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

179 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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| Councillors Freeman, A E Green, A Fairbairn, and M Hearty | Unitary Status | Prejudicial Interest (Members of South Bedfordshire District Council |
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| Councillor Mrs J Fairbairn | | Prejudicial Interest (Member of Bedfordshire County) |
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| Councillor Mrs Gresham | | Personal Interest |
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In advance of consideration of the Town Clerk's report on Unitary Status, Councillors Mrs Fairbairn, Freeman and Mrs Gresham left the meeting and did not attend for subsequent items.

Councillors A Fairbairn, A E Green and M Hearty left the meeting for that item only.

180 STAKEHOLDERS CONSULTATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW PROCESS (UNITARY STATUS)

The Committee considered the report of the Town Clerk which set out to clarify to Members the current situation regarding the local government review process in Bedfordshire and seek their views in order that the Council could respond to Central Government's stakeholder consultation process.

On 26th October 2006 the Government introduced guidance inviting local authorities in shire areas to make proposals for unitary local government. During January 2007 the Government had received 26 proposals from Councils wishing to move to a single tier of local government. All proposals were assessed against the criteria set out in the Invitation to Councils, and decision letters were sent out to applicants on 27 March 2007. In Bedfordshire proposals had been submitted by the County Council, Bedford Borough

Council and a joint submission had been made by Mid and South Bedfordshire District Councils. The County proposal was predicated on a single unitary authority covering the whole of Bedfordshire whereas the two other bids were predicated on a unitary authority covering the boundary of Bedford and another covering the boundaries currently covered by Mid and South Bedfordshire District Councils.

Each of the proposals had been assessed on criteria that covered;

- Affordability
- Cross section of support
- Strategic Leadership
- Neighbourhood Empowerment
- Service Delivery

and each of the proposals were given a High, Reasonable or Low rating depending on an assessment as to whether the proposals would achieve the specified outcomes.

Members noted that the proposals from Bedfordshire County Council and Bedford Borough Council had been approved to go forward to stakeholder consultation but the proposal from Mid and South Bedfordshire District Council was rejected, which meant that as far as the Town Council is concerned consideration should only be given to the County Council proposal and the Bedford Borough Council proposal.

The outcome of the initial assessment process by Central Government left the Town Council in a difficult position in relation to responding to a consultation exercise as it begs the obvious question as to what would happen with the rest of the County if the Bedford Borough Council proposal was successful.

The consultation process had been further undermined by the fact that there had been extensive press coverage as to Luton Borough Council's possible response to the consultation process and by the fact that Mid and South Beds District Councils appeared to have been given approval to revise and resubmit their original proposal.

The stakeholder consultation guidance complicated matters further still as it asked consultees to comment on the outcomes specified by the criteria in the Invitation to Councils as detailed above. To do this effectively would require considerable analysis of the proposal documents prepared by the County Council and Bedford Borough Council and even then it would be difficult to make a judgement as much of the detail of the proposals would only emerge once a new Council was agreed.

However, accepting the prevailing difficulties inherent in the consultation process Members had had an opportunity to peruse the proposals made by all four authorities and to some extent the Government's responses as included in the Town Clerk's report gave some indication as to the quality of the proposals submitted. As a result the Town Council had a number of options available to it in terms of how to respond to the stakeholder consultation. Any such decision would reflect what Members thought best for the residents of Dunstable. All the proposals indicated support for the continuance of town and parish councils and the Government had made it clear that it supports the further development of local councils.

RESOLVED: i) that, in light of the apparent approval gained by Mid and South Bedfordshire District Councils to re-work their original proposal, the Council express in principle support for a Central Bedfordshire Unitary Authority but retain the right to further respond once the council has had sight of the revised proposal

ii) that the response to Communities and Local Government include reference to this Council's firm view that Dunstable is a separate and individual community with a clear independent identity established over the centuries and the Council would oppose any suggestion that Dunstable should in some way be merged within the administrative boundaries of Luton Borough Council

iii) that the Town Clerk and Chairman be authorised to finalise the response in accordance with the above.

Action: Town

Clerk

181 **BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE**

The Committee considered the style and content of the Best Value Performance Plan 2007 which the Council had a statutory duty to publish by 30th June.

The BVPP sets out the Council's performance as measured by the annual satisfaction survey. The survey covers most areas of the Council's services and is detailed in section 5 of the document.

In summary, the outcome of the Council's performance for 06/07 can only be described as very pleasing. Although some of the performance outcomes were slightly off target, the targets were very challenging. Every area of service provision had a score of over 90% satisfaction, with 5 areas actually achieving a satisfaction rate of 100%.

The document also catalogued a "year in Dunstable" setting out some of the Council's achievements and milestones throughout last year. It also set out the Council's finances and sets targets for next year's performance.

The plans for next year as set out in section 6 were not intended as an exhaustive list of aspirations but will form the basis for a new system of service planning and work programming for the Council. The key actions are set against the four principal areas of the Council's work namely:

- Corporate Management
- Parks and Cemetery Services
- Events and Town Centre Services
- Community and Young People Services

Members were encouraged to put forward any additional key actions that they would like to see progressed during any discussions at this meeting.

The actions for 2007/2008 contained within the document would have revenue and capital implications for the Council. These would be reported at the appropriate time to this Committee.

Members recalled that at last year's June meeting this Committee had agreed that the Council would review and update a range of issues in order to improve the corporate governance arrangements of the Council. The Best Value Performance Plan 2007/08 recommended further work that would contribute to the process of improved corporate governance namely reviewing personnel policies, staff appraisal systems, performance management arrangements, service planning processes and the introduction of a planned building maintenance programme.

In addition to the above it was further recommended that officers present proposals to review the Council's Standing Orders and Constitution, the officer's scheme of delegation and a treasury management plan.

- RESOLVED:** i) that the draft Best Value Performance Plan as submitted be approved and the Town Clerk be authorised to make the document available to the public by the end of June in line with the Council's statutory duty
- ii) that Town Clerk be authorised to make any final amendments to the document in liaison with the Chairman of this Committee
- iii) that the plans listed to ensure the Council continues to improve its corporate governance arrangements be approved.

Action: Town Clerk

182 ACCOUNTS

a) Accounts Sub-Committee

The Committee received the Minutes of the meetings of Accounts Sub-Committee held on 19th April and 24th May 2007 (see Appendix 'A').

b) Statement of Accounts 2006/2007

- RESOLVED:**i) that the Statement of Accounts 2006-2007 be approved and the Chairman be authorised to sign the Statement on behalf of the Council
- ii) that the Chairman and Town Clerk be authorised to sign the Statement of Internal Control included at page 7 of the Statement of Accounts as approved by Accounts Sub-Committee on 24th May 2007.

183 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2008

RESOLVED: that the Calendar of Meetings for 2008 be approved (as enclosed at Appendix 'B')

184 DIGITAL MAPPING

The Town Clerk reported on a digital mapping system available from Pear Technology which would assist with the management of the Council's assets.

RESOLVED: that the purchase of software from Pear Technology Ltd be approved in the sum of £1,625 to be met from the current year's budget for office equipment., with necessary licences renewable annually.

Action: Administration and Finance Manager

185 THEFT OF COUNCIL VEHICLE

The Administration Manager reported the theft of the Council's vehicle registration KY02 FCJ on the morning of Tuesday 5th June. A detailed insurance claim had been submitted and a decision thereon was awaited.

186 CIVIC EVENTS AND MAYORAL ACTIVITIES

The Committee received a detailed report of the Civic Administration Officer on recent events and activities at which Councillors Mrs Gresham and Mrs Boatwright as Town Mayor had represented the Council since the last meeting of the Committee.

187 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: that, in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the press and public be excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

188 PRIORY HOUSE STAFFING

RESOLVED: that the new staffing structure for Priory House as set out in the report of the Culture and Regeneration Manager be approved.

Action: Culture and Regeneration Manager

189 STAFF REVIEW

Members considered a detailed report presented by the Town Clerk recommending the redesignation of Council departments and the subsequent re-designation of departmental heads of service along with new job specifications. The Committee were in agreement with all the recommendations whilst also acknowledging the contribution that all current staff had made to the Council's Quality Status.

- RESOLVED:**
- i) that the re-designation of Council departments as set out in the report be approved
 - ii) that the roles of Administration and Finance Manager, Performance and Environment Manager, Culture and Regeneration Manager and Youth and Community Manger be deleted from the Council's establishment and be replaced by the roles of Head of Finance and Support Services, Head of Parks and Cemetery Services, Head of Events and Town Centre Services and Head of Community and Young People's Services respectively
 - iii) that all incumbent posholders of the existing roles given above be assimilated into the new proposed roles on existing terms and conditions
 - iv) that the process for furthering the review process across the rest of the organisation, as set out in the report, be approved
 - v) that the requirement for the Council to adopt a new system for evaluating jobs be noted, proposals for which would be presented to this Committee later in the year
 - vi) that the consolidation of the additional pay award made to the Administration and Finance Manager following the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 5th February 2007 be approved.

Action: Town Clerk

