

## DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

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

ON MONDAY 5TH-FEBRUARY 2007

Present: Councillors Mrs C M Gresham (Town Mayor), Mrs B M Boatwright (Deputy Town Mayor and Chairman); M J P Mullany (Vice-Chairman), P J Boatwright, A J Fairbairn, Mrs J K Fairbairn, J Harnett, M Hearty, M Jones, Mrs S A Newton, P E Russell and M Tilley

In Attendance: Councillor A E Green with Mr R Walden (Town Clerk) and Mr D Ashlee (Town Clerk Designate) and Mrs R G Smith (Administration and Finance Manager)

#### **48 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 20th November 2006 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

#### **49 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Mrs Fairbairn	Proposals for Unitary Councils	Personal Interest (Member of Bedfordshire County Council)
	DITA	Personal Interest (Council Representative on the Association)
Councillor A Fairbairn	Proposals for Unitary Councils	Personal Interest (Member of South Bedfordshire District Council)
	DITA	Personal Interest (Council Representative on the Association)
Councillor Mrs Boatwright	DITA	Personal Interest (Council Representative on the Association)
Councillor Green	Proposals for Unitary Councils	Personal Interest (Member of South Bedfordshire District Council)
Councillor P Boatwright	DITA	Prejudicial Interest and left the meeting during discussion (Member of the Association Executive)
Councillor Mullany	DITA	Prejudicial Interest and left the meeting during discussion (Member of Club in receipt of grant from DITA)

## **50 TOWN MAYOR AND DEPUTY TOWN MAYOR**

**RECOMMENDED:** Unanimously, that Councillor Mrs B M Boatwright and Councillor A E Green be nominated for election as Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor respectively at the Annual Council Meeting to be held on 21st May 2007.

## **51 ANNUAL COUNCIL MEETING**

Members considered the detailed arrangements for this year's Annual Council Meeting which would be held for the first time in the new Grove Theatre on Monday 21st May 2007. There was sufficient space for all Members and Officers to be accommodated on the stage (for the Council Meeting) and for invited guests to be seated in the auditorium. The Theatre had capacity for substantially more invited guests than in previous years and it was agreed that additional representatives of local organisations could be invited on this occasion. After the formal business of the Council there would be brief reception in the first floor foyer following which the Dunstable Town Band would give a shortened one act performance.

## **52 PROPOSALS FOR UNITARY COUNCILS**

The Committee noted the proposals of competing bids for Unitary Status submitted to the Secretary of State by Bedfordshire County Council and South Bedfordshire District/Mid-Bedfordshire District Councils. The views of Luton Borough Council on the matter were also noted. The Secretary of State would be announcing her decision in March following which there would be a period of public consultation on the preferred proposal. Members agreed that it would be appropriate for this Council to formulate its views on the preferred proposal at that time.

Members also agreed to consider the implications of Chapter 2 of the Local Government White Paper at its next meeting.

## **53 DUNSTABLE MARKET**

Members were disappointed to note that South Bedfordshire District Council, having received further representations from this Council and Leighton-Linslade Town Council, had reaffirmed the awarding of the contract to operate its general markets to Wendy Fair Markets Ltd. It was, however, agreed that it was essential for the Council to work in partnership with Wendy Fairs in the future promotion of the Town Centre and a representative of the Company would be invited to the next meeting of the Committee for that purpose.

## **54 POST OFFICE NETWORK**

Consideration was given to a consultation arranged by Postwatch concerning government proposals on the future of the Post Office Network. Members expressed the firm view that any future specific consultations on Post Office closures should involve meaningful discussions with local people and, wherever possible, innovative and community initiatives towards Post Office provision should be explored.

**RESOLVED:** i) that the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to respond to the consultation in the light of specific views voiced by Members

ii) that the local representative of Postwatch be invited to the next meeting of the Committee to discuss the matter further.

## **55 CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MEMBERS**

Consideration was given to the Government Consultation Paper on proposed amendments to the Model Code of Conduct for Local Authority Members. Whilst there was support for some of the improvements to the Code, Members were still concerned at the difficulty in interpreting the certain clauses and felt that the Code should be written in plain English.

**RESOLVED:** that the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chairman, be authorised to submit a detailed response to the consultation in the light of views expressed by Members.

## **56 MINIMUM AGE FOR ELECTIONS**

The Town Clerk reported on the provisions of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 which would come into force on 3rd May 2007 and provided that the minimum age for standing for election and holding office of a Member of a Local Authority was now 18 years of age.

## **57 DUNSTABLE TOWN TWINNING ASSOCIATION**

Consideration was given to the annual grant application of DITA.

**RESOLVED:** that a grant of £1000 be award during 2006/07.

## **58 BEST VALUE PERFORMANCE PLAN**

The Committee was pleased to note the satisfactory conclusion of the audit of the 2006 Best Value Performance Plan.

**RESOLVED:** that the Best Value Working Party be authorised to approve the detailed content of the 2007 Plan after having considered the responses to the annual public satisfaction survey currently being undertaken.

## **59 ACCOUNTS**

**RESOLVED:** i) that the Minutes of Accounts Sub-Committee held on 23rd November and 14th December 2006 and 25th January 2007 (see Appendix "A") be received

ii) that the start of the external audit of the 2005/06 accounts on 26th February 2007 be noted.

## **60 TOWN COUNCIL PRECEPT 2007/08**

The Town Clerk reported that pursuant to the Council's policy of long term financial planning, the four Committee Chairmen had considered the approach they wished to see followed in the preparation of the budget for the coming year (2007/08). For the past 3 years the Council had adopted a budget strategy of increasing the precept by no more that 5% plus inflation. This had allowed new items of expenditure (i.e., memorial safety at the Cemetery, Disability Discrimination Act compliance and Priory House) to be profiled over several years (usually 5) so that the impact of particular proposals could be levelled out and would not create an undue impact in any one year. The Chairmen had agreed this approach should continue but, noting budgetary pressures on other tiers of councils, had recommended that any rise be kept to less than 5% plus inflation but that long term economies be explored to compensate for known budgetary pressures in the next financial year (2008/09) when the increase should ideally be no more than the prevailing rate of

inflation. The Chairmen were accordingly recommending that the Council adopt the 5 year budget plan set out at Appendix "B".

The Committee then considered the draft budget proposals of Standing Committees prepared in accordance with this strategy, together with expenditure proposals for the various reserve funds (Appendix "C"). A net budget of £1,486,712 was proposed which equated to a Council Tax of £120.98 per Band D property, an increase of £5.39 or 4.66%.

- RECOMMENDED:**
- i) that the 5 year financial plan be approved
  - ii) that the revised Estimates of income and expenditure for the financial year 2006/2007 and the draft Estimates of income and expenditure for the financial year 2007/2008, as set out in the report to be presented to Council be approved
  - iii) that the Town Clerk be authorised to incur the various items of expenditure detailed in the Estimates, subject to compliance with the requirements of the Council's Standing Orders
  - iv) that the revised scale of charges, set out in the report, be approved with effect from 1st April 2007 or the start of the 2007/2008 winter playing season, as appropriate
  - v) that, in consequence of the foregoing recommendations, the Town Council issue a precept upon South Bedfordshire District Council in the sum of £1,486,712
  - vi) that the expenditure proposals funded from reserve funds as set out in the report be approved.

## **61 CIVIC EVENTS AND MAYORAL ACITIVITIES**

The Committee received a report of the Civic Administration Officer on the many and varied events at which the Town Mayor had represented the Council since the last meeting of the Committee.

The Committee noted the following forthcoming events:

Saturday 3rd March	Charity Ball	7.00pm - till late	The Riverside Suite, Vauxhall Recreation Club
Saturday 28th April	Bedfordshire Police Choir	7.30pm	Salvation Army Worship and Community Hall

## **62 DUNSTABLE TOWN CENTRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**RESOLVED:** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Management Committee held on 28th November 2006 (see Appendix "D") be received.

## **63 SOUTH BEDFORDSHIRE LOCAL STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP**

**RESOLVED:** i) that the Minutes of the meeting of the LSP held on 21st December 2006 be received.

ii) that Dunstable Teen Council be invited to provide an evaluation of their opinion of the Funkee Monkee website.

**64 WORKING BEYOND AGE 65**

The Administration and Finance Manager submitted draft procedures for considering applications from employees to continue working beyond the age of 65 which had been based on the policy in force at South Bedfordshire District Council.

**RESOLVED:** that the proposals be adopted.

**65 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

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

**66 STAFFING MATTERS**

**RESOLVED:** that the proposals set out in the report of the Town Clerk including promoting the Administration and Finance Manager to deputise in his absence for the Town Clerk, a revised staffing structure for the Tourist Information Centre and confirming the date of the current Town Clerk's retirement as being 31st March 2007, be adopted.