

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 19 JUNE 2017

Present: Councillors Gloria Martin (Town Mayor), John Kane (Deputy Town Mayor), Andy Whayman (Chairman), John Chatterley (Vice-Chairman), Sid Abbott, Eugene Ghent, Peter Hollick, Liz Jones, Patricia Russell, Ann Sparrow, Pat Staples, William Tookey and Nigel Warren

In Attendance: David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), and Rosemary O'Sullivan (Head of Finance and Support Services)

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Terry Colbourne, Claire Meakins and Des Moffatt

Public Attendance: None

122 MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 27 February and 20 March 2017 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

123 SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no specific declarations of interest.

124 MTRF – PRIORY GARDENS ENTRANCE OVERTHROW

The Committee considered a recommendation from the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee for the release of funds from the General Reserve.

RESOLVED: that the recommendation be adopted and the sum of up to £10,000 be released from the General Reserve as a contingency to support the implementation of the Priory Gardens entrance overthrow.

125 ACCOUNTS SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received the Minutes of the meetings of the Accounts Sub-Committee held on 22 March, 19 April and 24 May 2017.

126 FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT – OUTTURN 2016/17

The Head of Finance and Support Services presented financial reports for year ending 31 March 2017 which would inform the Annual Return to be approved at the meeting of the Council on 26 June 2017.

All information was subject to audit but Members were pleased to note the positive outturn against the budget which would result in a contribution to the General Reserve and thanked officers for their work.

Members noted the balance of the Council's Earmarked Reserves and Councillor Sparrow asked that consideration be given to expenditure on redecoration of the frontage of Priory House in advance of the Anglia in Bloom judging on 17 July. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised of the specialist treatment required for this Grade II* listed building and the awareness that all the render needed to be removed before any redecoration could be undertaken. He advised that the Feasibility Study was still in progress but he was discussing with the Architect any works that could be undertaken in advance of its completion. In the meantime he would ascertain what could be done to improve the appearance of the building from the high street.

It was agreed that it would be helpful to provide public information boards in Priory House regarding the progress of the Feasibility Study and planned works.

127 INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2016/17 (FINAL)

The Committee received the report of the Internal Auditor which set out the areas examined during the course of the final report for 2016/17. Members were pleased to note that no issues had been raised and thanked officers for their work.

Councillor Chatterley had noted the Internal Auditor's reference to his review of the Cemetery records and in answer to his question, the Chairman of Grounds and Environmental Services, Councillor Jones, advised that consideration was being given to renovating the scroll map of the first interments and its future display.

128 APPEALS AND APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting of the Appeals and Appointments Committee held on 20 March 2017.

129 PERSONNEL SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee received the Minutes of the meeting of the Personnel Sub-Committee held on 27 April 2017.

130 MARKET TOWN REGENERATION FUND PROJECTS

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented an update report on Market Town Regeneration Fund projects that related to this Committee.

a) Architectural Lighting Scheme

The first phase of this project had now been completed and lighting had been installed on Grove House, Priory House and the Dunstable Conference Centre. Phase two of the project would be commissioned shortly. Phase 2 includes completing lighting to Grove House, including up lighting the main entrance to Grove House Gardens (for which planning permission should be achieved shortly) and completing the lighting scheme at Priory House. This aspect cannot be completed until the new overthrow for Priory Gardens is implemented which requires Historic England consent.

b) Quadrant Shopping Centre

Since the last meeting of this Committee the Town Clerk and Chief Executive and Councillor John Kane had met with a representative from Edinburgh House, who own the Quadrant Centre, to further discuss the possibility of re-opening the public toilets.

Edinburgh House had intimated that they were now prepared to have the toilets re-opened but would want the Town Council to pay for the revenue costs this would incur. It was estimated that this could cost the Council approximately £20,000 per annum.

Edinburgh House had been requested to approach the Council in writing with a costed proposal and this was still awaited. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive had sought advice from the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) as to whether the Council would be legally empowered to incur such expenditure if it so wished. NALC had responded that as long as the Council was satisfied that such expenditure was an appropriate use of public funds and was able to justify the same such expenditure could be incurred under the General Power of Competence.

c) New Town Centre Signage and Street Furniture

The bulk of this project would be carried out in conjunction with the de-trunking of the High Street and Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) designers had been issued with a list of attractions and services that should be signed from the town centre. Officers had met with representatives from CBC and Luton Borough Council to discuss possible signage installations at the White Lion Busway stop. A scheme had been agreed and signage designs and costings were being developed accordingly.

Officers would be meeting again with CBC the next day when it was hoped detailed proposals for the town centre would be submitted. Councillor Martin expressed her frustration at the lack of information being provided by Central Bedfordshire Council.

d) High Street Improvement Scheme

Officers were still working on this scheme with colleagues from CBC and 15 retail units were currently progressing to stage two of the application process. This is the most retail units actively engaged in the scheme than anywhere else in the Central Bedfordshire area. It was anticipated that works could start in September 2017.

e) Financial Implications

Officers continued to submit payment schedules to CBC, the first tranche of which had now been settled.

f) Splashpark

The update report in respect of the Splashpark was ordinarily reported to the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee, however at Members' request the Town Clerk and Chief Executive advised that handover of the site was expected on 21 June and as long as the Sports and Leisure Facilities Manager was confident that everything was in order, the facility would be open on Friday 23 June with the official opening on 21 July. An area would remain fenced off to allow grass growth and Members asked that due notice be displayed to explain this. The Town Clerk and Chief Executive also confirmed that the CCTV was working with comprehensive cover.

It was intended that directional signage for the Splashpark would be included as part of the proposed new town centre signage.

g) Town Centre Ranger

The work of the Town Centre Ranger was praised and Members were advised that discussions were taking place to resolve the issue of increased flytipping.

131 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2018

The Committee considered a draft calendar of meetings for the calendar year 2018. It was noted that the Council is required to hold 6 meetings of full Council during the year (including the Annual General Meeting) with the requisite cycle of Committee meetings reporting thereto.

In answer to a question from Councillor Chatterley, the Head of Finance and Support Services confirmed that the calendar also allows for a meeting of full Council on the last Monday in June, to ensure that the Council complies with the requirements of the Accounts and Audit (England) Regulations 2015 (S1 2015/234) in that the Council “**must** no later than 30th June – consider the accounting statements by the members meeting as a whole”. In order to achieve this, and taking account of bank holidays, it was not always possible to have one week’s grace between the cycle of Committee meetings and the meeting of full Council in June, which had been the situation in 2017 and would be again in 2018.

The Town Mayor, Councillor Martin, enquired about the possibility of changing the date of the AGM so as not to conflict with that of other Councils but this was not favoured.

RESOLVED: that the meeting dates set out in the Calendar of Meetings for 2018 be approved.

132 REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

a) CAB Management Committee – Councillor Meakins had provided a report which was given by Councillor Jones. The CAB continued to be very busy with clients, in the main presenting with problems around benefits, family breakdown and debt (benefits and debt make up 60%). They also dealt with lots of requests for assistance with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) and Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) claims. E-mail advice was proving popular with a response time of 2-4 working days.

The Bureau had been short staffed as one experienced member of the team had moved to Camden CAB and there had been a loss of some volunteers to paid employment. Urgent recruitment was being undertaken.

The outcome was awaited from the resubmission of a business case to CBC for the continuation of welfare reform funding to enable the Bureau to open for an extra six hours per week.

b) DITA –Councillor Warren advised that the next meeting would be held on 25 July when dates for a planned visit by a delegation from Porz would be considered. Members were unable to assist with Councillor Warren’s request for information on when DITA was established and he was referred to past Mayor, Mrs Brenda Boatwright who may be able to help.

c) Hospice at Home – Councillor Jones advised that the organisation’s AGM would be held on 3 July. They had been awarded a “Highly Recommended” at the recent Cheering

Volunteers Award evening. They had taken a stall at the Council's Motor Rally and had recruited new volunteers. They continued to look for funding.

d) Ashton Schools Foundation – Councillor Sparrow reported that the sale of Ashton School site had been completed with proceeds being put in trust for Manshead and St Peter's schools, to be used for plant and building only. A new classroom was to be built at St Peters by September. Grant aid had been awarded to assist 53 children.

e) Chews Foundation – Councillor Chatterley advised that the next meeting would be held on 20 June.

f) Poors Land Charity – Councillor Staples advised that the Maundy money had been distributed on 13 April at £30 per eligible person and many cards and letters of thanks had been received.