

Highworth



Town Council

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www.highworthtowncouncil.gov.uk

G90.

MINUTES OF THE GENERAL PURPOSE AND FINANCE COMMITTEE 7 MARCH 2017

PRESENT

Councillor S Weisinger (In the Chair)

Councillor: R Acres
P Adams
C Adams
A Bishop
(Mrs) J H Bishop
(Mrs) J Clark
(Mrs) A Durrant
G Edwards
N Gardiner
(Mrs) M R Penny
K Smith
(Mrs) P M Webster

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr R Williams (Market Manager) and 10 Members of the Public.

APOLOGIES

85. Councillors (Mrs) L Vardy (Unwell)



Highworth is a Fair Trade Town



Twinned with Wassenberg



Twinned with Pontorson

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QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC ON AGENDA ITEMS

86. None

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

87. None

HIGHWORTH MARKET

88. a. Correspondence. None.
- b. Market Manager's Report. Different publications are being investigated to publicise the market in an endeavour to increase the footfall.
- c. Market Accounts. The accounts listed on pages G94 and G95 were agreed.

SBC SERVICES – REPORT OF MEETING WITH CABINET MEMBER FOR STREET

89. This meeting followed a meeting of all the Rural Parishes which was held to discuss issues that these Parishes had with the negotiations on devolvement of services down to Parish level by Swindon Borough Council (SBC). At that meeting it was decided to ask for a meeting with the Cabinet Member most directly involved with these matters. It was also decided to keep the requested meeting attendance to a small number of representatives in order to keep the meeting focussed.

The substance of the meeting was to address the Parishes' perception that devolvement of some of these services was being imposed, namely Fly-Tipping, Dead Animals, Graffiti Removal and Cleaning of Signs and that they would be required to pay a tariff or fee for some of these services. They were also concerned that if they had to take on these services they had neither the means nor the expertise to deal with them. There was also the issue that the financial implications had not been considered fully, especially as all the Parishes have submitted their Precept demands for the coming year. There was also concern at the documents that had been sent to them as they were concerned that each Parish may have been dealt differently from each other in these documents and they had issues with some of the conditions.

Those there also wanted to put on record that Parishes are not subordinate to SBC and that the size of a Parish is not an indication of its importance, that all Parishes need to be treated equally whilst recognising that they do have different issues one from another.

The meeting was two and a half hours in duration. Councillor Keith Williams and his Head of Street Services listened and took copious notes. There was a very fair hearing extended on their part and the meeting was successful in clarifying the issues discussed.

The following items were agreed:

- Fly-Tipping - The Borough will continue to collect major Fly-Tipping free of charge but does expect Parishes to deal with minor examples themselves. This is already the case with most Parishes and is not an issue. However a proper and acceptable definition of what constitutes "minor" and "major" Fly-Tipping is still to be agreed.

- Dead Animals - Dead Animals do not need to form any part of the negotiations. Partly, this is a Highways issue and Parishes can make arrangements to dispose of them if they so choose (apart from dead cats and dogs, for which there are separate arrangements), either in general waste for disposal if they wish or, log the case with SBC for their removal.
- Road Signs and Bollards - There have been discussions with a number of Parishes about this where they have been advised that they can carry out such cleaning if they wish, either themselves or as part of a Community Clean-Up.
- Graffiti Removal - There is no evidence that there is, or has been, a large number of cases reported to Swindon. It was suggested that the Parish can be supplied with the materials to remove minor instances, such as on street signs, but where it is considered to be beyond the Parish's capacity to deal with, that it should be logged with SBC for removal.
- Deeds - SBC will re-examine the Deeds sent out to the Parishes and will look at the issue of making them all consistent. It was agreed the "ad-hoc requests" paragraph would be removed. Other concerns were as follows:
 - The current Deed should be replaced with a Service Level Agreement (SLA) so that it reduced potential impact on each Parish.
 - That the SLA should be the same for all Parishes with two schedules attached for each, one specifying what functions the Parish is taking on and the second stating what functions are remaining with SBC.
 - The Parishes are not happy that the deed on offer legally ties them into a long-term agreement, in most cases 20-year with min 10-year first break, and places full responsibility and insurance matters, claims etc onto the Parishes.
 - They were also unhappy with the clause in the document that required them to indemnify SBC
 - The Parish representatives took the position that Parishes should be "AGENTS of SBC" so that SBC retains all the legal ramifications and that the Parishes were effectively a simple contractor doing the agreed functions "on behalf of SBC".
 - There does need to be a clear understanding at SBC that the smaller Parishes cannot be considered as having the finances to provide the staff, expert knowledge, Health and Safety, training and equipment and the myriad of Acts that are needed to comply with work SBS is expecting them to take on.

The meeting was helpful and there can be some optimism that the Rural Parishes can expect to all be dealt with consistently and that the Borough does recognise that how these issues are brought to the Parish is key.

BRING SITES – RECYCLING POINTS

90. Generally the Bring Sites across the borough are to be removed. There is one exception within the Borough so far, and there are also some that are controlled by other organisations, such as Supermarkets which do not form part of this particular exercise.

A Parish can negotiate the taking over a Bring Site if it wishes; but the Parish will have to fund the cost. SBC would be happy to help a Parish to negotiate with the waste company in this eventuality. It was agreed that the Town Clerk write to Keith William, expressing the Councillors' disappointment in this decision and the lack of consultation with Highworth Town Council.

The re-marking of the car parking spaces has been delayed to enable the site to be marked out with new bays once the recycling containers have been removed. Councillor S Weisinger is to contact the Head of Street Smart to see what action SBC has taken to bring this to the notice of Highworth residents, or, indeed, residents in other parts of the Borough affected by this decision. The Town Clerk is to write to the Head of Street Smart expressing the Councillors' disappointment in the decision to withdraw the Bring Sites and the lack of prior consultation with the Town Councillors. The Town Clerk is to request quotes to see how much it would cost to provide this service by the Town Council. Any decision should be taken in advance of and for inclusion in the 2018/2019 Precept Demand. Councillors will consider the effect of the withdrawal of this service from Highworth and investigate whether it needs to be re-instated, balanced against the likely financial impact. An article is to be written for inclusion in the Link Magazine.

ACCOUNTS

91. The accounts as listed on page G96 to G100 were passed and payment of bills authorised. There is no written policy on how high our unallocated reserves should be but this is scrutinised by both our Internal Auditor and our External Auditor. Councils are expected to maintain healthy reserves for very obvious reasons. Crises occur and a Council cannot be seen to fail to meet its commitments, whether budgeted or unexpected.

The Co-op bank has informed its customers that it is no longer going to pay interest on savings accounts, which will reduce our forecast income. The Deputy Town Clerk is to evaluate whether we need to change bankers or whether we should remain with the Co-op Bank, but find an alternative means of investing our savings.

CORRESPONDENCE

92. None

MEMBERS' BUSINESS

93. Councillor K Smith: A letter is to be written to the Vicar, Geoff Sowden, to arrange a meeting with the three chairs of Committees and the Council Chairman prior to the Civic Service in September 2017. Councillor N Gardiner requested that he be included at this meeting because, as Deputy Mayor he can expect to be the Mayor and it will be his Civic Service.

Councillor P Adams: The Town Clerk has appealed against the TPO that has been placed on the London Plane Tree on the Podium, as have some members of the public.

Councillor A Durrant: A blind and partially deaf resident of Highworth finds it very difficult to use the public bus service due to lack of drop kerbs and he can neither see nor hear the arrival of buses. Drop kerbs are not installed at bus stops as the bus hydraulic lowering and raising of its entrance doors is designed to use the full kerb heights. It was advised he should be eligible to use the Dial-a-Ride service which is a door to door service.

Meeting Closed at 8.24 pm