



MONMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL

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Minutes of meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee of Monmouth Town Council Held on Tuesday 29th August 2006 in the Community Room starting at 7.00 pm.

Present: Chairman, Councillor G F W Buckland
The Mayor Councillor T Christopher, Councillor R Bond, Councillor Mrs S Chivers,
Councillor Mrs A Dewhurst, Councillor N Hacket Pain, Councillor Mrs C Pearce
and Councillor D Stevens.

Absent: Councillors R Hayward

In attendance: Mrs Sarah Robson Town Clerk.

1. **Apologies were received from:** -
Councillors Mrs V Mitchell, L Robson, Mrs A Were and Mrs S White.
2. **'Declarations of interest' in items on the agenda:** -
N/A
3. **To consider for approval the minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee of 17th July 2006.**
The minutes were approved and signed as correct
Proposed Councillor Buckland
Seconded Councillor Bond **Unanimous**
4. **a To receive the summary of expenditure.**
Decision Required To approve the accounts between 11/07/2006 & 17/08/2006 for payment.
The accounts were received and approved for payment.
Proposed Councillor Stevens
Seconded Councillor Hacket Pain **For 7 Against 0 Abs 1**
- To review a statement of the bank reconciliation's (pages 2,3 & 4).**
The bank reconciliation's were received and approved as correct.
Proposed Councillor Buckland
Seconded Councillor Mrs Dewhurst **Unanimous**
5. **To consider the authorisation of payment of the following invoices and decide where to allocate spending within the agreed budget:**

N/A

6. **To Receive RFO's Report.**
Electricity Invoices and Supply at Shire Hall.
Following the recent advise to members concerning the sharp increase in the electricity bill's and

the subsequent letter that was written to Asset Management, the Clerk read out a response that had been sent by MCC. Their response was to confirm that while there had been an increase of 24% in energy costs over a twelve-month period it still did not explain why the bills had more than doubled when compared to the same period in the previous year. There was agreement that the electric heaters would have contributed, and in fact the mail then went on to say that the cost was likely to increase substantially. Members were advised that the heaters had been purchased by MCC and that the Clerk had not been informed until the heaters had actually been installed. There was never any discussion concerning the use of the heaters or who would be responsible for bearing the increased cost of the supply.

Members requested that The Clerk respond in writing and offer to pay the 24% increase and advise that in their opinion MCC should pay any shortfall as it must be assumed that anything over and above this could be attributed to the new heaters.

Review The Public Services Ombudsman for Wales Annual Report 2005/2006.

The Clerk circulated copies of selected parts of the report and pointed out some relevant information for the Monmouthshire area. In particular the number of complaints against local authorities, Monmouthshire's share was only 2.4% for the year, and of the 29 complaints received only 1 had been upheld and 9 were still being investigated, the other 19 were thrown out. Also it was noted that of the complaints against authority by service area the top number received were for planning with 31% followed by housing 23%. The Clerk informed members that the report in full is available in the office for anyone wishing to see it in full detail.

Review of the Beecham Report for Welsh Assembly Government.

The Clerk circulated a brief summary of the report into Local Service Delivery. It préciséd the report under the following headings, Introduction, The Citizen Model, The barriers to improving local service delivery, Making the Welsh pound go further, Supporting evidence on performance and satisfaction, conclusions and recommendations. The findings of the review are available for any member at the Clerk's Office. Members were advised that Councillors Robson and Buckland and The Clerk are to attend a seminar in Cardiff on 21 September to enable discussion of the report and there will also be an opportunity during the session to discuss issues raised with senior managers from across Welsh public services and third sector.

7. To Consider WAG provision for indemnities to members and officers.

Councillor Buckland advised that the Welsh Assembly Government have recently issued guidelines on providing indemnities to members and officers of relevant authorities. Town and Community councils are included in this provision of indemnifying members for any personal liability arising from actions or decisions taken by them in the course of their official duties. The Local Government Act 2000 provides the NAW discretionary power by way of an order to allow relevant authorities to grant indemnities in certain circumstances, either in terms of financial support or support in kind, such as legal advice or representation by an employee of the authority. A copy of the full guidelines is available to members who wish to read it, it will be kept in the Clerk's Office.

8. To Consider request for assisted funding for bursary places at the summer film school.

This item had been deferred from the previous full Council meeting. The Clerk reported that the organisers had been extremely pleased with the success of the event and the series of short films that were produced over the week of the summer film school. It was reported that at the end of the week there was an over shortfall in funding of approximately £150.00.

Councillor Buckland proposed that a donation from the contingency fund in the sum of £150.00 should be made.

Proposed Councillor Buckland

Seconded Councillor Mrs Dewhurst

For 5 Against 2 Abs 1

9. To Consider funding request for Eco Africa Conservation experience.

The Clerk read out a letter from a student requesting help with funding a three-month visit to a

wildlife rehabilitation centre in Africa.

Members agreed that it is not Town Council policy to fund individuals.

10. To Review appointment of Internal Auditor, Clive James.

Members were advised that as part of the intermediary audit additional information had been requested by The Wales Audit Office in connection with the Internal Auditor for the 2005/2006 return. The Clerk recommended that members review the appointment of Clive James who has conducted the internal audit for the last three years. It was agreed that the level of service that Mr James has provided is very satisfactory and that a thorough audit is undertaken in conjunction with the Clerk. Mr James has indicated that there should not be an increase in fees other than in line with inflation, except in circumstances where the remit of the internal audit changes. Councillor Buckland endorsed the Clerk's recommendation and asked members to accept the re-appointment.

Proposed Councillor Buckland

Seconded Councillor Christopher

Unanimous

11. To Review development of CCTV User Group.

Councillor Buckland advised members that following a recent meeting of the CCTV User group progress had been made in connection with the revised Service Level Agreement. He pointed out that there is still no available information or statistics despite repeated requests to the control room which is run by Caerphilly County Borough Council. A representative from Caerphilly CBC had attended the recent meeting and agreed that every effort would be made to rectify the situation. There was no representation made by The Police and members showed concern that there should be a greater partnership involvement in order to test the effectiveness of the system. Some members present raised their concerns regarding the disproportionate amount of the precept that makes up the contribution by the Town Council, and the lack of data means that effectiveness of the system is unknown. Any agreement previously made was done so in good faith and members felt that there was a lack of accountability.

It was proposed to defer any decision regarding pulling out of the CCTV contract to the next Full Council meeting on 18th Sept.

Proposed Councillor Stevens

Seconded Councillor Hackett Pain

Unanimous

12. Matters arising from previous meetings: -

i) Risk Assessment.

Members were informed that the training for Risk Management and Assessment had been completed and The Clerk advised that preparations to complete the register are in hand.

ii) Sworn Declaration by Derek Watts re use of Shire Hall in 1974.

Mr Watts attended the office following a letter that had been sent from The Clerk, and confirmed that he will be happy to make a statement to confirm the position of the Town Council in relation to the use of The Shire Hall in 1974 when the reorganisation of the unitary authority took place. The Clerk advised that she has made enquiries with a local firm of Solicitors who have offered two options. The first that they will draw up the statement at an hourly charge of £140.00 plus vat, it was suggested that to draw up the statement it would take about half an hour, or alternately if the statement was provided then only a swearing would be necessary at a nominal fee.

Members asked the Clerk to go ahead with the affidavit option and draw up the statement in conjunction with the information Mr Watts provides.

iii) Annual Audit 2005//2006

The annual audit has now been called for 2005/2006 the official date is Monday 23rd October. As required a notice of inspection of accounts has been placed on the notice board outside the Shire Hall and a notification has been issued in the Free Press. All of the documentation has

been completed and forwarded on the The Wales Audit Office for inspection. Members will be updated with further progress in due course.

iv) Update re offer from MCC re taking over services and amenities.

Councillor Buckland advised members that the first meeting of the working party group for devolution had taken place. At that meeting concerns were raised regarding the perceived poor relationship between Town and County Council, and whether or not this issue would be a good place to start and try to make improvements. It was considered that for any type of approach to be taken seriously improved communications would need to be tackled and in doing this it would be intended to raise the profile of the Town Council and its' effectiveness. Also by trying to be more vociferous in taking up causes that could be seen as controversial and gritty. It was recognised that in the past sometimes the Council has been slow to share successes and that all too often reports in the press would appear to indicate few successes and a lack of vision and pro-activity.

There was a difference of opinion at the meeting about how to further this and two opinions emerged; one to produce a business plan for one specific service and demonstrate to MCC that we can achieve devolution of services, this could be used as a fact finding exercise. The other idea was to follow the suggestions of the working party and try to improve communications and relations with MCC in order to be taken seriously.

The Clerk agreed to arrange another meeting for the working party to progress matters further.

v) Any other matters arising from Finance and Planning Meeting of 17th July not covered elsewhere. As they are not specifically listed, no decisions may be taken on any of these other matters arising.

N/A

16. **Any Other Business, i.e. general information or notification of future discussions, no decisions can be made at this meeting on items that arise under this heading.**
17. **Next meeting Old Library Community Room Monday 9th October 2006.**

There being no further business the meeting closed at 8.25 p.m.