

Monmouth Town Council

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Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and Policy Committee of Monmouth Town Council held on Monday 23rd February 2009 in Market Hall, Priory Street, Monmouth starting at 5.00 pm.

Present: Deputy Chairman Councillor N Hacket Pain
Councillor G Bright, Councillor T Christopher, Councillor Mrs A Dewhurst,
Councillor M Jones

In attendance: Mrs Sarah Robson Town Clerk, Councillors Fletcher & Mrs Smith

101. To receive declarations of interest on items on the agenda

No declarations of interest were received

102. To receive apologies for absence

Councillor Mrs S Chivers, Councillor R Hayward, and Councillor Mrs A Were

103. To approve and sign the minutes of the previous meeting dated 12th January 2009

As there was only one member present from the previous meeting it was agreed to defer the signing of the minutes until the following meeting.

**Proposed: Councillor Hacket Pain
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Mrs Dewhurst

104. To receive and approve the summary of expenditure

i) To approve the accounts for payment between 01/01/2009 & 13/02/2009.

The accounts were received and approved for payment.

**Proposed: Councillor Mrs Dewhurst
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Jones

ii) To review a statement of the bank reconciliations as at 31/01/2009.

The bank reconciliations were reviewed and considered correct. The Clerk advised that the un-presented out of date cheque for £25 had been reissued.

iii) To review a statement of income as at 31/01/2009

The Clerk advised members that the majority of income was derived from the precept payments all of which had now been received, interest due and vat refunds.

iv) To review committee expenditure to date and note where monies from General Reserve had been allocated

The Clerk advised members that a number of payments had been authorised from the General Reserve in the budget code for Civic Entertainment which have to be shown as an expense but which make the accounts look as if an overspend has occurred. Members were advised that the Administration budget was on track and that there was a likelihood that there would be a small under spend by the end of the financial year. It was noted that the Community Affairs budget would be almost completely spent at the year end. Whilst the Environment committee budget at present shows a large under spend it was likely that there would be calls for money in the coming weeks which would mean having to earmark funds for projects from this financial year.

v) To consider a virement for Copying in the Administration Section which is over budget by £205.00

Members were advised that there would be additional invoices for copying charges before the yearend but that a virement of £500.00 should be sufficient to cover the expenditure. It was agreed that this amount should be vired from the Clerk's Contingency Fund budget head to cover the over spend.

**Proposed: Councillor Christopher
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Mrs Dewhurst

**105. To consider Action Review summary and Town Clerk's report
'Shaping our Future'**

The document entitled 'Shaping our Future' is still outstanding and the Clerk advised that there had been a delay but work is ongoing to finalise this.

CCTV

Members were advised that correspondence had been received from MCC to advise that Chris Norman was unaware of any dispute and that the outstanding CCTV invoice from 2003/2004 in the sum of £11,500.00 remains unpaid. Members agreed to take no further action.

Town Clerk's report

The Clerk reported that for several years the SLCC and other partners such as NALC and the Audit Commission have been pressing the Government to change the law which requires 2 town or community councillors to sign all money orders. The requirement which derives directly from the 1933 Local Government Act is out of keeping with current electronic banking methods and fails to recognise the other broader internal controls now in place in many local councils. In addition many councils are already operating a variety of payment systems which do not strictly accord with the actual legal requirements.

The SLCC has confirmed that, in the absence of a change in the law Section 150 (5) of the Local Government Act 1972) still requires that "every cheque or other order for payment of money" by a local council must be signed by two council members. It also points out that credit cards do not provide this requirement and are therefore not legal even though the local council could probably initiate strong and robust financial controls to cover their use. It should also be noted that the use of a credit card requires entering into a credit agreement and as such may contravene borrowing requirements.

106. To discuss introducing guidelines to give authority to the Mayor and Clerk to speak to members regarding matters of non attendance at meetings

The Mayor made it clear that the problem of non attendance at meetings was in relation to persistent and long term absenteeism. He informed members that in the past informal meetings had been conducted with the Clerk and himself with members who do not attend. This had been done without any formal authority from the Council. The members were asked to give approval for informal, off the record meetings to continue taking place and for the Clerk to have authority to correspond when necessary on behalf of the Council. It was made clear that the desired outcome is to have sixteen members who are actively participating.

**Proposed: Councillor Bright
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Jones

107. To consider the procedure for reviewing or accepting committee minutes

Members were given a report outlining the relevant procedures laid down within Standing Orders that made it clear that under the present arrangements there is no requirement for Full Council to do anything other than to note the minutes of the committees. Members were reminded that when the former structure of committees changed there was not unanimity and concerns were expressed about the lack of a democratic principle for the selection of committee members. However there was general consensus within the meeting that the present system is robust and transparent and offers every opportunity for inclusivity. On this basis it was agreed that there was no further action necessary but that in due course when a review of Standing Orders was undertaken this could be re-considered then.

**Proposed: Councillor Bright
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Christopher

108. To review the register of gifts to members

Councillor Christopher advised members of a declaration of a gift that had been registered that was under the agreed limit of £25. He reminded members of the need to be aware that there could be occasions when gifts could be offered that could compromise members' integrity and in particular in relation to planning applications.

109. To consider changes to Admin Assistants Contract of Employment regarding carrying over of holidays

The Clerk advised members of the inconsistency relating to staff contracts of employment relating to unused holidays at the end of the year. Members were asked to approve a change to the Admin Assistants contract to bring it in line with the Clerks. In effect this will mean that a total of no more than one weeks' contractual hours can be carried forward at the end of March.

**Proposed: Councillor Christopher
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Jones

110. To discuss procedure for meeting prior to Mayor Making to consider applicants for Mayor and Deputy Mayor

There was a discussion in relation to the best way to proceed with selecting a Mayor elect and whether to continue with the procedure that had been adopted in 2005. It was agreed that this would be the best option and that a closed meeting would be arranged towards the end of April. This would provide an opportunity for candidates to address members and for questions to be asked. It was suggested that the Clerk should send all members a letter asking for nominations in writing to be submitted prior to the meeting to help manage the meeting better. It was agreed that by having an agreement to choose the mayor elect in advance it would streamline the Annual Meeting and make it a more dignified event with only one candidate being put forward.

**Proposed: Councillor Mrs Dewhurst
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Christopher

111. To discuss arrangements for Civic Service on 14th June 2009

The Clerk explained that due to timing difficulties it was necessary to make some arrangements for the Civic Service in advance of the mayor making. Members were advised that St Mary's church and Monmouth Priory had already been booked as well as a military band. There was unanimous agreement that this was necessary if the Civic Service was take place soon after the Mayor's appointment and this was preferable to holding the service later on in the summer. The members agreed that the Clerk should continue on the same basis as other years as a precedent had now been set.

**Proposed: Councillor Christopher
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Hacket Pain

112. To consider extending the provision of services by Monmouth Town Council

Councillor Christopher's report was circulated to all members in advance. Some concern was expressed about the management of such a project and the staffing implications. It was agreed that the best way forward would be to set up a working group to consider whether this was a viable proposition. The group will consist of Councillors Christopher, Hacket Pain, Jones, Mrs Dewhurst, Mrs Smith and the Clerk. The Clerk will arrange a time for the first meeting which will be to consider the groups' terms of reference.

**Proposed: Councillor Mrs Dewhurst
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Christopher

113. To consider regalia valuation and discuss insurance implications and discuss future use of maces

Members were advised that the recent valuation had revealed that the regalia is underinsured. There was unanimous agreement that the insurance cover should be increased to reflect this.

It was agreed to defer any discussion regarding the future use of maces until further details of a conservator could be obtained.

**Proposed: Councillor Bright
Unanimous**

Seconded: Councillor Hacket Pain

114. To confirm procedure for disqualification of members for non attendance at meetings for a period of six months

The Clerk read out the relevant paragraph from the Local Government Act 1972 and advised members that advice had been sought from the Monitoring Officer at MCC. The legislation clearly states in Sections 85 (1) and(2) that if a member fails throughout six consecutive months to attend any meetings of the council.... he ceases automatically to be a member of the council.

Members were advised there were exceptions however the member in question had failed to respond to all communication from the office in an attempt to resolve this issue. This matter will be referred to Full Council at the meeting due on March 16th.

115. To agree items of business for next meeting

Payment schedule for renovations at Shire Hall

116. Next meeting: Market Hall, Priory Street on Monday 6th April 2009 at 7.00pm

There being no further business the meeting closed at 6.40pm

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____