

Sandy Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee of Sandy Town Council held in the Council Chamber at 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire on Monday 31 March 2014 commencing at 7.30pm

		<u>Action</u>
Present:	Cllrs P N Aldis, C Butterfield, C Osborne (part of meeting), M Pettitt, M Runchman, M Scott (Chairman), D Sharman, and K Sharp	
Absent:	Cllrs Osborne, Smith and Walsh	
In Attendance:	Cllr Ali, four members of the public and the Town Clerk	
1	Apologies for absence (77-2013/2014) Apologies for absence had been received from Cllr Walsh and from Cllr Osborne for anticipated late arrival.	
2	Declarations of interest (78-2013/2014) i) Declarable Pecuniary Interests - None ii) Other Interests - None	
3	Minutes of previous meeting (79-2013/2014) RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee meeting held on 17 February 2014 as a correct record of proceedings.	Admin
4	Review of Standing Orders (80-2013/2014) The committee continued its unfinished review of draft new standing orders deferred from the last meeting of the committee on Monday 17 February 2014. There was discussion of the sending of summons and agendas by email and it was agreed that the draft SOs should permit the summons to be served electronically although hard copies would continue to be provided. RESOLVED to recommend adoption of the revised draft orders by Sandy Town Council at the next opportunity.	Town Clerk
5	Community Engagement Strategy (81-2013/2014) A draft community engagement strategy deferred from the last meeting of the committee on Monday 17 February 2014 was considered. RESOLVED to recommend adoption of the draft community engagement strategy by Sandy Town Council at the next	Town

Sandy Town Council

opportunity.

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6

Financial Matters (82-2013/2014)

Clerk's Report

- i) A financial report on progress to date against the budget for the financial year 2013/14 was discussed.
RESOLVED to note the financial report and to recommend to Town Council that unspent funds remaining in the training budget (accounting code 4237) be carried over to the budget for 2014/15 because staff absences meant that it had not been possible to complete the planned training within the financial year.
- ii) A list of payments and receipts made since the date of the last committee meeting on 17 February 2014 was reviewed.
RESOLVED to note the list of payments.
- iii) An update report on transitional arrangements for accounts work had been circulated before the meeting and members noted that a recoding exercise would take place following the first quarter which would be backdated to 1 April 2014. Members would be asked for input on the coding structure to be used.
RESOLVED to note the Clerk's report.
- iv) A report on arrangements for securing quotations for internal auditors for the town council for the financial year 2014/15 had been circulated.
RESOLVED to instruct the Clerk to prepare an audit programme (based upon the guidance in the Practitioner's Guide 2010) to be used as the basis for securing quotations.
- v) **RESOLVED** to note the enactment of The Legislative Reform (Payments by Parish Councils, Community Councils and Charter Trustees) Order 2014 and the likely need for a further review of Sandy Town Council's Financial Regulations during the coming financial year. The Town Clerk confirmed that no changes to the financial regulations or banking arrangements of the council were planned as yet.
- vi) Members discussed a quotation which had been received from T Seymour with regard to provision of street lighting maintenance services. The Town Clerk explained that alternative quotations had not been provided as it had proved difficult to find a reliable alternative local contractor with the necessary expertise to provide the service required. Amey would be able

Town
Clerk

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Clerk

Sandy Town Council

to provide a quote but the service standard currently experienced had deterred officers from seeking this based on previous knowledge (is stated 4 week response time following report of a fault which had previously not been acceptable to STC). Transitional arrangements had been made if the committee did not wish to renew the contract on the basis of only one quotation and this would allow more time to source an alternative although the Town Clerk asked for suggestions as to suitable contractors if this route was followed. Following discussion it was **RESOLVED** to renew the council's street lighting maintenance contract which was due to expire on 31 March 2014 for a period of three years at a cost of £1,470 per quarter.

Town
Clerk

7

Vexatious Complaints and Unreasonable Behaviour Policy and Procedure (83-2013-2014)

A draft new vexatious complaints and unreasonable behaviour policy and procedure had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

A member of the public addressed the committee on this policy arguing that the policy as drafted would stifle public debate. He stated that according to the policy a triumvirate of the Town Clerk, Mayor and Deputy Mayor would determine who should be allocated the title vexatious and this was unreasonable. The member of the public asserted that Sandy Town Council had already failed to appoint a complaints committee in breach of its constitution and the Town Clerk had stated in an email that this had been overlooked. A follow up question asked whether the Gunning principles had been considered in proposing the policy and asserted that the policy breached these principles, eg by not including timescales etc.

Following this contribution Cllr Butterfield responded in support of the member of the public arguing that the policy was a means to prevent members of the public from articulating views that the council did not like. Other members responded that the policy was not anti-democratic and was not intended to prevent the expression of views; it was a structured policy containing many caveats which was designed to protect staff from bullying and to ensure that council resources were not used disproportionately.

The Town Clerk confirmed that an email had been written

Sandy Town Council

suggesting that appointment of a complaints committee had been overlooked but that on further investigation she had been reminded that the council had decided not to elect a complaints committee until a complaint was submitted so that the committee could consist entirely of councillors who were free of any conflict of interest in the specific complaint. Only one complaint had been received during the past year which necessitated use of a formal procedure and this had been a complaint against a member of staff which fell into a different category and so did not involve the complaints committee as this procedure is not used to investigate allegations against individuals. The Town Clerk also advised that the Town Council did not have a constitution.

Cllr Osborne joined the meeting.

Cllr Butterfield confirmed that he wished to protect staff from unreasonable behaviour but suggested this could be done by some other means than restricting contact (means as yet to be determined). The Clerk reminded the council that it had a statutory duty as an employer to protect staff from harassment and that by not doing this it could leave itself exposed to financial risk. If the objection was to the Clerk making a decision in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor the committee had the option to consider a different structure for decision making. All decisions would be reported to Council. However the Clerk as manager of the staff team needed to be able to protect employees from harassment and to deploy resources for the benefit of the majority of the community rather than to suit the needs of one or two individuals.

In response to a question from Cllr Aldis the Town Clerk confirmed that the draft policy had been prepared with advice from a range of sources and in consultation with Central Bedfordshire Council whose policy had been used as a template. The Gunning principles had not specifically informed this process.

There was continued extensive discussion of the need for the policy and the safeguards which were included such as prior warning, appeal arrangements etc and several members spoke in favour of the draft policy. A recorded vote was requested.

It was **RESOLVED** to recommend the draft policy for

Sandy Town Council

adoption by Sandy Town Council at the earliest opportunity.

Votes for the resolution: Cllrs P N Aldis, C Osborne M Pettitt, M Runchman, M Scott D Sharman and K Sharp.

Votes against the resolution : Cllr C Butterfield

8

CCTV (84-2013/2014)

Following a meeting on 27 March 2014 an additional report on the current position with CCTV provision in Sandy had been tabled (copy in minute book) which included indicative costs for 2014/15 and options for future provision of this service. The Chairman reminded members that Council had resolved to reduce its CCTV budget for 2014/15 to £15,000. Members noted that the reason for the cut in budget was CBC's decision not to pass on the Council Tax benefit support grant from central government to local councils in its area leaving STC with a shortfall on the previous year's income of over £40,000. Extensive debate followed including discussion of the fibre links within the system, the value of cameras at Sunderland Road and Cauldwell Court, the deterrent effect of cameras, BT line costs etc.

RESOLVED to recommend to Town Council that the camera at Sunderland Road is decommissioned and the fibre link from that site to the Sandy Hub is removed resulting in an anticipated saving of £6,481.08 on the 2013/14 CCTV costs.

Town Clerk

RESOLVED to recommend to Town Council that the redeployable camera at Cauldwell Court which costs £1,200 per year is also decommissioned although the Clerk was asked to inform Aragon Housing of this proposal and to discuss with them whether they wished to take on the monitoring and maintenance costs.

Town Clerk

Members noted that if these recommendations were adopted the council would still spend c £440.60 over its budget of £15,000 for 2014/15. The Town Clerk advised that CBC would be contacted and told that STC wished to take advantage of the 5% discount in BT costs afforded by CBC's agreement to a one year contract with them.

9

Health and Safety General Risk Assessment (85-2013/2014)

Members discussed reports on the Town Council's Health and Safety General Risk Assessments which had been conducted by Ellis Whittam in January and February 2014 and noted the considerable amount of work required to address the items

5

Sandy Town Council

raised especially those connected to the council's premises and grounds activity. The Chairman noted that some of the action points required expenditure though many could be dealt with internally provided staff resources were available. There was concern about meeting the stated timetable.

RESOLVED to note the completion of the Council's annual health and safety general risk assessment report and to write to EW with a statement of a more realistic timetable for completion of all action points. It was anticipated that an extra 2 months should be added to the times stipulated in the report.

**Town
Clerk**

The Town Clerk was asked to provide an update report at the next PF&R Committee meeting.

10

Sandy Town Council Staff Restructure (86-2013/2014)

RESOLVED to exclude members of the public and press under the Public Bodies (*admission to Meetings*) Act 1960 (*as extended*) for the following item of business which involved the likely disclosure of confidential personal information as defined as exempt information in Part 1 of Schedule 12a of the Local Government Act 1972 (*personal and confidential data*).

Members noted the recent resignation of the Deputy Town Clerk and agreed that the proposed staff restructure should now be reviewed in the light of this. A Human Resources Advisory Group meeting had been arranged for Tuesday 1 April 2014 and following this a further update would be provided at the Town Council to be held on 7 April 2014.

**HR
Advisory
Group**