

HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held in the Council Chamber, Public Hall on Monday 13 October 2014 commencing at 7.30pm.

PRESENT: Councillors: C. Root (in the Chair), G. Atkinson, K. Denton, K. Helsby, J. Kellett, L. McCartin, K. McKeon, A. Morley, J. Silvester, R. Silvester, K. Thomson.
Town Clerk: C. Hutchinson
Mr John Rowlands, Assistant Director Customer Services, Bolton Council
3 members of the public

CHAIR TO OUTLINE FIRE SAFETY EVACUATION PROCEDURE:

FG 6188 Councillor Root outlined the procedure that was outlined in the information provided.

TO APPROVE SUSPENSION OF HORWICH TOWN COUNCIL STANDING ORDER 1.M WHICH STATES 'PHOTOGRAPHING, RECORDING, BROADCASTING OR TRANSMITTING THE PROCEEDINGS OF A MEETING BY ANY MEANS IS NOT PERMITTED WITHOUT THE COUNCIL'S PRIOR WRITTEN CONSENT' IN ORDER TO COMPLY WITH THE AMENDMENTS OF THE OPENNESS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT BODIES REGULATIONS 2014 (THE "2014 REGULATIONS")

FG 6189 Copies of the legal briefing from NALC had been circulated to all Members with explanatory notes which stated that the Town Council can no longer continue to use the relevant model standing order and will be required to suspend its application at the start of each meeting until such time that standing orders have been updated and approved to incorporate the new provisions.

TO SUBMIT APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND ACCEPT THE REASONS:

FG 6190 Apologies were accepted from Councillors Ramamurthy and S. Rock due to work commitments and Councillor L. Rock due to family commitments. An apology for lateness was received from Councillor Atkinson. Resolved unanimously to accept the apologies as presented.

TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2014:

FG 6191 The following amendments were requested:
FG 6175 to read 'Mr David Hawes' and 'Black Edge Brewery'
FG 6178 to read 'As requested quotations had been obtained for a pennant shaped flag to possibly replace the existing flag'

Resolved unanimously to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8 September 2014 with amendments.

TO NOTE THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HORWICH IN BLOOM ADVISORY COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 SEPTEMBER 2014:

FG 6192 Resolved unanimously to note the minutes of the Horwich in Bloom Advisory Committee held on 2 September 2014.

Councillor Atkinson arrived at this point.

Resolved unanimously to move the order of business to allow Mr John Rowlands, Assistant Director Customer Services at Bolton Council to speak.

TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSED CLOSURE OF THE BOLTON COUNCIL ACCESS POINT AT HORWICH LIBRARY:

FG 6193 Mr Rowlands informed Members that it was Bolton Council policy to co-locate information services in library buildings in order to offer a diverse range of services to the local community. A review process had begun and speculation about the situation at Horwich had escalated before consultation had taken and more information had been made available. Mr Rowlands felt that it was misleading to describe the proposed changes to the existing service as a closure of the service and re-iterated that no timescale had been decided.

The main rationale behind the new proposals was the continuing decline in the number of customers accessing the service at Horwich, at 18% over the last three years, equating an average of 65 customers per week. This corresponded to a similar decline in other outlying districts with an average of 1 – 2 customers per hour compared to 7 – 8 in central Bolton. It was acknowledged that the main reason for the decline was a reduction in benefit claims due to a change in the way claims are processed with less evidence required and it had been estimated that 65% of enquiries were benefit related. There had also been an increase in the number of claims made on line and the availability of a home visiting service available to older and vulnerable customers. The other 35% of enquiries were either general enquiries and 10% of these were not Council related.

It was envisaged that the proposed changes would safeguard the same delivery of advice and information through absorption by library staff, whose remit would be extended to provide low level advice and the verification of documentation for benefit claims. More complex enquiries would be dealt with by either a home visit or arranging a visit at the library. Free phone and on line services would also be extended and a confidential space made available. An assurance was provided that there had been no timeframe set for implementation of the proposed changes and further information would be brought back to Town Council when available.

Members were then invited to ask questions.

It was confirmed that existing staff would be redeployed at other access points in the borough. While it was acknowledged that the role of the modern library service had changed to offer a broad range of services there were concerns were raised about the additional responsibility for library staff along with issues of confidentiality. Mr Rowland assured Members that there was a well proven and tested training process in place and ongoing support would be provided for staff. There were also concerns raised about the disproportionate effect these changes would have on older and vulnerable people and Mr Rowlands confirmed that an EIA (Equality Impact Assessment) would be carried out and made available to the Town Council.

While there were concerns that this was an important service being lost to Horwich Members were pleased to receive the re-assurance that the final decision had not yet been made. It was acknowledged that changes in technology had led to a reduction in demand for the existing service and its absorption by library staff would enhance the important role of the library service in Horwich.

Mr Rowland was thanked for his attendance and left the meeting at this point.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION:

FG 6194 None.

TO REMIND MEMBERS TO MAKE A DECISION CONCERNING ANY MATTERS TO BE DISCUSSED DURING THE MEETING OF WHICH THEY HAVE AN INTEREST:

FG 6195 None.

TO RECEIVE A REPORT FROM KEITH JACKSON, HOMEWATCH LIAISON OFFICER:

FG 6196 All Members had received copies of this report. It was confirmed that the Town Mayor had provided a list of contact details for local residents' associations.

Resolved unanimously to receive the report from the Homewatch Liaison Officer as presented.

TO APPROVE THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE TOWN SIGNAGE 'START AND FINISH GROUP' HELD ON 18 SEPTEMBER FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF 5 PICTORIAL BOUNDARY SIGNS AT A COST OF £639.60 EACH, A NEW BOUNDARY SIGN ON LEVERPARK AVENUE PLUS COST OF ARTWORK AT £40 PER HOUR AND ARRANGEMENT COSTS:

FG 6197 All Members had received the notes detailing the outcome of this group which had been assigned to deal with this matter. It was recognised that the current boundary signs provided by Bolton Council had reached the end of their useful life and in their current state did not present a good image of

Horwich. Some Members expressed strong views about the substantial financial outlay for replacement signage while others took the view that these were reasonable costs when spread out over several years. It was confirmed that the existing signs had been in place for many years.

It was confirmed that it was not possible to provide accurate costings for the artwork as this would not be available until designs had been chosen. Some Members felt very strongly that the railway/locomotive theme should be incorporated. One Member felt that the proposed signage was too wordy. While there was general agreement in principle on the requirement to replace the current signs, the majority of Members were unwilling to approve either the proposed costs or the unspecified costs.

Resolved by 8 votes to 3 to refuse approval of the recommendation of the town signage 'Start and Finish Group' for costs for replacement of boundary signage and associated costs as detailed in the notes of the meeting held on 18 September.

TO APPROVE COSTS FOR LIGHTING THE CIVIC TREE FOR REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY:

FG 6198 Members were informed that the approximate costs for providing strings of red lights and installation on the Civic Tree for Remembrance Sunday would be £700. The suitability of these lights for the occasion had also been brought into question and Members were of the opinion that although there were excellent intentions behind such an initiative they did not feel able to give their approval to the substantial costs involved.

Resolved unanimously to refuse approval of costs for lighting the Civic Christmas tree for Remembrance Sunday.

TO CONSIDER THE RESPONSE FROM CHORLEY COUNCIL REGARDING THE COSTS OF ILLUMINATING RIVINGTON PIKE ON REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY:

FG 6199 A breakdown of costs for this proposal had been received from Chorley Council and circulated to Members. It was noted that the substantial costs reflected the involvement of a professional company in an event of this nature. Due to the importance of the centenary of World War One the Town Council had indicated its willingness to consider some financial contribution towards this event. However some Members felt that the expectation from Chorley Council, a much larger borough authority, for Horwich to pay half of the costs was disproportionate and it would be more appropriate to offer grant funding to the British Legion. It was acknowledged that while it would raise the profile of the town in an important year more meaningful events had already taken place and would continue to commemorate the centenary of World War 1.

Resolved by 7 votes to 4 against approval of a financial contribution to Chorley Council for half of the costs of illuminating Rivington Pike during the Remembrance Sunday period on grounds of cost.

ACCOUNTS FOR PAYMENT – SCHEDULE ATTACHED:

FG 6200 Resolved unanimously to approve accounts for payment and supplementary accounts for payment as presented and totalling £ 4,526.71.

TOWN CLERK'S REPORT – FOR INFORMATION ONLY:

- FG 6201
- a. LALC: note of accounts for year ending 31 March 2014; newsletter September 2014.
 - b. Fields in Trust: correspondence and newsletter.
 - c. Friends of Real Lancashire: correspondence and newsletter.
 - d. HCWT: correspondence about Community Event Day on 8 November.
 - e. Horwich Heritage: thanks for grant award of £400 from World War 1 centenary grants scheme.
 - f. Invitation to Remembrance Sunday Parade and Service on 9 November

Resolved unanimously to note the Town Clerk's Report.

REPORTS FROM REPRESENTATIVES:

FG 6202 Town Mayor
Councillor R. Silvester was pleased to inform Members that he had held a successful charity dinner on Saturday 11 October at a local restaurant and had raised £300 for Bolton Mountain Rescue.

Deputy Town Mayor

The Deputy Town Mayor reported that she had attended a Murder Mystery Night at St Elizabeth's in aid of Cedar Avenue Village Green Fete and a Country and Western Evening at the RMI to raise funds for Emma's Dream, a teenage mental health charity. Town Clerk asked to circulate details of a forthcoming event for this charity at Hilltops, Blackrod.

Rivington and Brinscall Local Advisory Group

Councillor Thomson informed Members that among the items discussed was a report of a burglary in Rivington.

TO CONFIRM THE DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING AS 10 NOVEMBER 2014:

FG 6203 Resolved unanimously to confirm the date of the next meeting as 10 November 2014.

The meeting closed at 8.55 pm

Chair..... Date.....