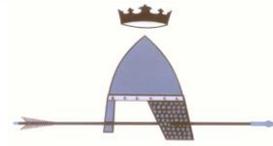




Battle Town Council



**MINUTES of a Meeting of the
FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
held on Tuesday, 6 March 2012 at
The Almonry, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllr R Harris - Chairman
Cllrs: R Bye, Mrs M Kiloh, Ms M-L Neill and Mrs S Pry.

1. Apologies for Absence – Cllr R Jessop.

2. Disclosure of Interest – Cllr Mrs Pry disclosed a personal and prejudicial interest in that part of item 5 as shown below, as a member of DDARA.

3. Minutes of the Meeting held on 10 January 2012. Cllr Bye proposed approval of the minutes, seconded by Cllr Mrs Pry. This was agreed and they were duly signed.

4. Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

The Clerk confirmed that the bank had been asked to **invest the further £20,000** as agreed at the Council meeting on 17 January. This will be for a 9 months period at an interest rate of 2.2%. The **Instant Access Savings Account** is also being transferred to an Active Saver Account. The need for instant access to these funds limited the options available but this change will improve the interest rate from 0.05% to 0.38%.

As agreed by Council and enshrined in the Financial Regulations cheques may be signed by 2 Members of F&GP. Following Cllr Hussey's resignation **Cllr Harris proposed, seconded by Cllr Ms Neill that Cllr Mrs Kiloh should be added to the Mandate. This was agreed unanimously.**

Cllr Harris spoke briefly about the presentation to **Rother's Devolution Working Group**. The summary of that discussion as recorded for the purposes of reporting to Rother's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is attached to these minutes.

5. Correspondence and Communications

The **Methodist Church** had written requesting the Council's **financial support** towards the new facilities at **Blackfriars**. No specific sum had been mentioned but, bearing in mind the limited resources available within the Council's usual grants budget, the Committee could see no way of offering help at the moment. However, they would be prepared to recommend to Council a payment at some point in the future when the new building is completed and based on a specific request for a community facility such as the provision of play school equipment. **It was agreed to recommend accordingly to Council.**

Cllr Mrs Pry repeated her personal and prejudicial interest in the following item.

A request had been received from DDARA for a contribution towards the cost of providing a replacement picnic table at the top green, Darvel Down. The District Council has agreed to fund 50%. Noting that £50 remained in the Council's grant budget **Cllr Harris proposed that Council be recommended to offer this sum. This was seconded by Cllr Ms Neill and agreed unanimously.**

Two requests had been received to **use the Abbey Green**. The first from a new

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business in the town wishing to promote its arrival. Bearing in mind the terms of the agreement with English Heritage and the policy of restricting the use of the Green to community events it was felt that this request should be declined. In conveying this decision the Clerk was asked to draw attention to the potential use of the Market Square for such purposes. On the other hand, as part of its Switchover Help Scheme, the BBC wished to use the area in order to provide information to local residents about the switch to digital tv. Since this would be in the public interest the Committee agreed to this request.

6. Budget Report 2011-12

The Clerk had circulated a summary together with a commentary explaining why forecast figures had changed since the previous report. The main reasons for the reduction in spend concern further savings on Mansers Shaw (£1000); no spend on capital equipment (£1000); a saving on cemetery maintenance (£1000) and higher income from Almonry rents and room hire. On the other hand there had been additional spend on machinery repairs and the cost of the Battle flag had been brought forward from next year. He also drew attention to the fact that the planned works to the Almonry had been deferred for the time-being. The Committee felt that greater priority should be given to the maintenance of the building and that a proper reserve for this purpose should be established. As a first step towards this, the unspent funds of £4000 allocated for 2011-12 should be shown in the budget report as the first contribution to this reserve. The attached summary reflects this decision.

Looking ahead the Clerk's report also highlighted that he had established that the cost of the children's play area fencing and tennis court resurfacing would be more than originally estimated. Recent information about equipment repairs, utilities, rates and the maintenance of the Watch Oak allotments also suggests that next year's budget provision may be inadequate.

The Committee considered the need to fund these additional costs next year taking into account the fact that a higher than anticipated level of general reserves will be carried forward arising from this year's underspend. **Cllr Harris proposed that Council be recommended to acknowledge the potential overspend in next year's budget since this will have a neutral effect on general reserves over the 2 year period 2011-13.**

Regarding the proposed purchase of replacement tractor and trailer early in the new financial year it was acknowledged that an instant decision may be required. **Cllr Harris therefore proposed that Council agree to delegate to him and one other F&GP Member authority to make the purchase subject to the total amount for both items not exceeding £10,000. This was agreed unanimously.** It was noted that this would still leave the equipment replacement reserve at £19,500.

Cllr Mrs Kiloh reported a discussion at the recent Services Committee regarding the provision of **a water supply to the allotments at Netherfield.** The minimum cost of making a formal connection to the main would be about £1400 but this would still leave the Council to make arrangements to link this with the allotments and to provide storage facilities at the site. The Clerk had investigated the cost of safe storage (ie not large open tanks which might prove to be a health and safety hazard) which would probably be around £1000. Reluctantly the Committee shared the view of Cllr Harris that such substantial expenditure could not be justified for 8 allotments and agreed that efforts should be made to discover how water had been provided when the site had previously been used for allotment services. Cllr Bye has contact with a previous allotment owner and will investigate.

7. Bank Reconciliation Statement at 31 January 2012 was noted as attached.

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8. Standing Orders & Financial Regulations

Cllrs Harris and Mrs Kiloh had undertaken a thorough review of earlier drafts and, together with the Clerk, had produced final proposals which had been circulated to all Committee Members. Committee Members thanked all concerned for a very thorough piece of work and had no hesitation in endorsing the current proposals. **Cllr Bye, seconded by Cllr Mrs Pry proposed that the attached Standing Orders and Financial Regulations be approved by Council.**

9. Internal Audit

Under the Council's internal audit arrangements monthly checks are carried out to ensure that basic financial control procedures are being followed. This has to be undertaken by someone who is competent but independent of the Council and hitherto former Councillor Peter Sutton has carried out the task. He has written to say that he is now leaving the area but another former Councillor, Tony Calloway, has offered to take his place. **Cllr Mrs Kiloh proposed to recommend to Council that he be appointed. This was seconded by Cllr Ms Neill and agreed unanimously.**

10. Councillors' Training

In the light of the discussion at the latest Council meeting the Committee considered how best to deliver Councillors' training. The general consensus was that the proposal to devote 15 minutes after each Council meeting was unlikely to achieve the necessary results and the Committee would prefer less frequent but slightly longer sessions separate from Council meetings. 3 or 4 sessions of one hour duration was suggested. So far as the evidence necessary for the Quality Council reaccreditation is concerned Cllr Harris felt that a basic statement of intent supported by a summary of current arrangements should be adequate. The Clerk was asked to produce this and consider further how the content of future training sessions should be identified.

11. Insurance

Following the change of insurers the new company had appointed their own risk advisor to assess the Council's business in relation to its exposure to insured risks. Whilst his report indicated that the Council has already taken measures to protect it to a generally good standard there were a few areas where existing arrangements could be improved. In particular they wished to see an updated fire risk assessment undertaken together with more formalised arrangements for weekly testing of the fire alarm. They have also required that risk assessments are undertaken for the grounds maintenance staff particularly in relation to training for the operation of work equipment and machinery. The Clerk will put the necessary work in hand but asked for approval to contract out the preparation of a fire risk assessment at an estimated cost of £300. This was agreed.

12. Quality Council Reaccreditation Submission

The Clerk suggested that it would be appropriate to appoint a Council Member to monitor the content and progress with this submission and it was agreed that Cllr Harris would take on this task.

13. Almonry Repairs

As indicated in the budget report above, for various reasons the planned work for the exterior of the building had not progressed. However, guided by Cllr Eldridge, a list of urgent works had now been compiled estimated to cost £5-6000. These have been discussed with potential contractors and formal estimates are awaited. In summary, the

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work proposed involves the refurbishment of the whole porch area; repointing of stonework around the main gates; timber replacement and treatment to a number of windows; rebuilding of an area of brickwork in the courtyard and refitting of coping on the adjoining boundary wall; general replacement of damaged or broken clay tiles on both the walls and accessible areas of the roof; and the inspection and clearing out of all gutters. The Clerk has asked that the costs of these tasks be identified individually in the event that they need to be prioritised. As also recorded above, it was agreed that the cost of this work should be funded from a reserve to be created from this year's underspend together with the £2000 provided in next year's budget. Looking further ahead the Committee agreed with Cllr Harris' recommendation that contributions to a building maintenance fund should be a regular element in the budget.

14. Almonry Garden Report

Beautiful Battle had submitted a brief report. This focussed on the replanting of the north bed in the top garden including providing 2 obelisks each of which will provide support for a climbing rose. A blue wisteria has also been planted on the north east corner which will train along both walls. In the lower garden, wisteria plants have been trimmed and the climbing roses adjoining the wall of the Council office have been pruned and attached to a new trellis. The rambling rose above the herb bed has been cut back hard and new fence installed by the Town Council's staff. The Committee expressed their thanks for the continuing commitment and hard work of the Beautiful Battle volunteers.

15. Matters for Information and Future Agenda Items

Cllr Mrs Kiloh suggested that the Council should consider a reduction in street lighting for both environmental and financial reasons. She was advised that this had been considered before and, depending on what is proposed, the capital costs of adjusting all the street lighting columns would be very high and the payback period in terms of the reduction of energy reduction would be lengthy. Further research is clearly required before any proposals could be put forward. This should include liaison with the Highway Authority who have conducted a review and concluded that their current regime should be maintained. In the first instance any initiative should come from the Services Committee.

16. Date of Next Meeting: Tuesday, 6 June 2012

The meeting closed at 9.00pm

**CLLR R HARRIS
CHAIRMAN**

