

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE AMENITIES COMMITTEE,
HELD ON WEDNESDAY, 21ST OCTOBER 2009,
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, KING'S HOUSE, THETFORD,
STARTING AT 7 P.M.

Present:

Councillor T J Jermy, Chairman (as of item 250/09 below)
The Mayor, Councillor Mrs P A Spencer

Councillors:

G P Balaam
R F W Brame

T J Lamb *
Mrs P P Quadling

In attendance: Councillor S N H Wright

** Councillor T J Lamb had not indicated at Mayor-Making 2009/10 his wish to be a member of the Committee but had now made that intention clear.*

250/09 ELECTION OF COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor T J Jermy be elected Chairman of the Amenities Committee for Mayoral Year 2009/10.

Vic-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Mrs P P Quadling be elected Vice-Chairman of the Amenities Committee for Mayoral Year 2009/10.

251/09 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

252/09 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies had been received.

253/09 MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Committee's meeting held on 22nd July 2008, as received by Council on 30th July 2008 under minute 136/08c, be confirmed as a true record and signed/initialled by the Chairman.

254/09 FINANCIAL REPORT 2009/10

A print-out of the six-month position under Cost Centre 8 had been included in the agenda papers.

The Chairman took members through each line item, with the Town Clerk and Town Manager invited to comment and/or explain, as appropriate.

The Chairman was keen to have the line-by-line analysis inform the Committee's views on what might be appropriate budgetary provisions in 2010/11, for eventual recommendation to the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

Amongst the key points noted and/or agreed:

Hanging Baskets (Codes 4355 and 7736)

The Town Manager was complimented on the extremely high quality of this year's baskets.

Xmas Lights (Codes 4375, 7727, 7728,7729)

The Town Manager pointed out that there was inadequate funding available to achieve any significant improvement this year in the quality of the annual display.

Burrell Museum (Code 7704)

The Town Clerk reported that there was not yet a full set of Burrell financial statements available to justify payment of the Town Council's annual donation.

CAB Funding (Code 7714)

The Town Clerk was asked to obtain a copy of the CAB accounts to see evidence of explicit reporting of the Town Council annual donation.

Barnham Cross Common (Code 7724)

In light of a possible future call on funding for specialist study reports, the Committee was minded to recommend increasing the 2010/11 provision to £1.5K.

Litter Bins (Code 7730)

The Town Clerk reported that there were currently 21 litter and 17 dog waste bins in the Council's depot, awaiting installation as part of the autumn works programme.

The Town Manager was asked to look once more into the offer made by McDonald's to provide litter bins along the London Road for general use. The Committee was keen to establish the degree of visible 'corporate branding' that McDonalds would insist on. A discreet logo, for example, would certainly be acceptable.

Trees (Code 7733)

The Town Clerk pointed to the additional responsibility the Council now had for areas like Castle Park, commenting more on this under item 257/09 below. Expenditure was now beginning to be incurred.

Section 137 Payments (Code 7760)

The Chairman was supported by the Mayor in advocating a review of how the monies - currently £1K - earmarked for small donations to community organisations.

The Committee supported his advocacy of an increase in 2010/11 to £1.5K, with the availability of funding to be advertised far more effectively than in the past. The Council would be asked the next week to agree the need for a fundamental review of 'custom and practice' ahead of the allocation of any 2010/11 funds.

Grounds Maintenance (Code 7784)

The Town Clerk apologised for failing to recall what this related to specifically and would advise members in the coming days.

Afternote: This expenditure line currently shows the cost of maintaining both Dane Close public open space (former allotment site) and the two closed churchyards (St Peter's and St Cuthbert's) under a single maintenance contract with CGM. Future reports will combine Codes 7722 and 7784 under the heading 'POS/Churchyard Maintenance'.

Major Event Funding (No provision currently in Cost Centre 8)

The Town Manager was keen to know what events the Committee might have in mind for 2010/11 and beyond.

The Committee agreed that there should be at least some explicit provision made in the 2010/11 operating budget and a figure of £5K was the recommendation.

RECOMMENDED that the Finance & General Purposes Committee pay heed to all the views expressed above under this agenda item.

255/09 OPEN SPACE TRANSFER

The Town Clerk confirmed the view recently expressed by Breckland Council's Chief Executive that the transfer of any POS (= Public Open Space) could take years owing to the number of parcels of land that Breckland owned district-wide (some 6,000).

That said, the Chief Executive had made it clear that, if there were any particular pieces of land that the Town Council wanted to take ownership of 'sooner rather than later', then any such requests should be submitted.

RESOLVED that the Committee note the position and give further thought to this at its next meeting.

256/09 PLAY AREA MATTERS

i. Play Area Transfer

The Town Clerk confirmed that this was no longer inextricably linked to POS transfer, but when it might occur was not altogether clear. Whilst it would be a less complicated transaction, no dates had been indicated by Breckland Council.

The Committee noted the position.

RESOLVED that, in anticipation of the eventual transfer of play areas to the Town Council, the Committee, at its next meeting, consider what form of 'play area review' consultation with residents might be undertaken by the Town Council.

ii. Castle Park Play Area: Operational Overview

The Town Manager responded to various points raised. The Committee greatly regretted recent acts of vandalism and could see the potential need in future, when it came to refurbishing other play areas, to place a greater emphasis on the robustness of equipment. The Committee noted that the worn surface evident in some locations was to be upgraded.

iii. Abbey Estate: Equipment Needs

This discussion concerned re-use of the equipment previously installed on the Cloverfields MUGA (= Multi-Use Games Area). The Committee had no objection in principle to a location adjacent to the Abbey Estate being equipped with this and was of the view that Breckland Council should be approached with this in mind.

RECOMMENDED that the Town Council support an approach being made to Breckland Council's Chief Executive.

257/09 TREE MANAGEMENT

The Town Clerk expanded on his comments passed under item 254/09 above, providing details of the recently carried out surveys of Castle Park trees and two trees in front of King's House. He had been impressed with the quality of the reports and their reasonable cost.

RESOLVED that the position be noted.

258/09 TOWN TOILETS: OPERATIONAL OVERVIEW

The Chairman had asked for this item to be included on the agenda. The Town Clerk tabled some figures relating to Cost Centre 10, confirming that what had been budgeted for toilet maintenance would be significantly exceeded. He explained that, in large part, the excess resulted from an increase in cleaner costs (cleaning was currently carried out in the main by an agency cleaner, with Council staff covering his days off on overtime rates). That said, the projected 'salary' overage in this cost centre in the current financial year would be offset by projected salary under-spends in other cost centres.

He confirmed that the toilets covered were those at the bus station, in Cage Lane and by Castle Park. The King's House Garden toilets remained a cost to the Staniforth Trust.

The Committee was generally satisfied with the general cleaning standard and could envisage no change to the bus station arrangement over the course of the next financial year. In terms of cleaner costs, it understood that this would most likely become more of an 'in-house' responsibility with cleaners to be engaged on more cost-effective rates of pay.

RECOMMENDED that the Amenities Committee take on responsibility for periodic reviews of how the town's public toilets are being managed.

259/09 'RECREATIONAL CONTRIBUTION' FROM TAYLOR WIMPEY DEVELOPMENTS

A letter received from Breckland/Capita's Planning Obligations Officer and dated 15th October 2009 had been included in the agenda papers.

There was some discussion as to what interpretation might be put on 'recreational contribution'.

RESOLVED that the Town Manager make some initial enquiries as to possible interpretations and report these to the Committee in due course.

260/09 YOUR PARISH YOUR DECISION: FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

Information received from the Norfolk Association of Local Councils had been included in the agenda papers. Applications had to be submitted by 31st December 2009, with 'Decision Day' on 20th February 2010 and grants award needing to be spent in full by 31st March 2011.

RECOMMENDED that the Town Council bid for funding to cover a St Peter's Church Feasibility Study.

261/09 EVENT PLANNING 2009/10

The Town Manager reported that there were no other major events now planned for the current financial year, other than the Barnham Cross Common Fireworks Event in early November and the Christmas Lights Switch-On in early December.

262/09 ANY URGENT MATTERS

None

263/09 DATE OF NEXT MEETING

To be agreed at a later date

Chairman