

FINANCE AND AUDIT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday, 10 November 2009, at the Town Hall, Royal Leamington Spa at 6.00pm.

PRESENT: Councillor Mrs Knight (Chair); Councillors Malcolm Doody, Edwards, Guest, Illingworth, Kinson, MacKay, Pittarello, Mrs Tyrrell and Vincett.

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Mobbs (Portfolio Holder for Finance).

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Rhead.

72. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Minute Number 76 – Executive Agenda (Confidential Items and Reports)

Councillor Guest declared a personal interest in item 10 on the Executive agenda, because he was a board member of South Warwickshire Tourism/ Shakespeare Country. However, this item was not discussed by the Committee.

Councillors Illingworth and Vincett declared prejudicial interests in Executive item 12 as members of the Town Council, and left the meeting prior to the issue being considered.

Councillor Pittarello declared a personal interest in Executive item 13 as he was part of the group opposing the proposal. He left the meeting prior to the item being discussed.

Councillor Kinson declared a personal interest in Executive item 13 as a former portfolio holder. After taking advice that his interested could be prejudicial, he left the meeting prior to the item being addressed.

73. **MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2009 were taken as read and signed by the Chair as a correct record, subject to the addition of Councillor Kinson to the list of persons present.

74. **EXECUTIVE AGENDA (NON-CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)**

The Committee considered the following non-confidential items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 11 November 2009.

Item Number 5 – Management of Oakley Wood

The Green Infrastructure Manager responded to Members questions relating to the pros and cons of thinning the wood in a single operation, as opposed to over a period of time. The Committee questioned him extensively over the effects of both approaches on wildlife, habitat, residents and on the wood itself.

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It also took into consideration comments forwarded to the Committee by Councillor Rhead, who was unable to attend the meeting.

The Officer confirmed that the Procurement Manager had been consulted in relation to the tendering process and would continue to be involved.

Members discussed the justification for purchasing Oakley Wood, the aspirations of the Council when it made the purchase and changes in the timber market since the purchase had been made. It was agreed that a report looking into the background of the business case should be brought to a future meeting of this Committee for consideration.

The Committee supported the recommendations as presented in the report, subject to recommendation 2.3 being amended to read "paragraph 5.5".

(Councillor Tyrrell joined the meeting during the course of this item.)

Item Number 4 - Royal Spa Centre Report

The Committee considered the financial implications of recommendations made by the Task & Finish Group, and feedback from Spa Centre staff which had been emailed to all Councillors prior to the meeting.

Members felt that, contrary to stories circulating in the press and between staff, the Task & Finish Group were recommending a constructive, measured approach which included putting the site out for market testing and looking for alternative accommodation for community groups who used the centre, should it be required. They noted that an Entertainments Manager had recently been appointed who would be looking at ways to close the subsidy gap, and this Committee's own role in monitoring this and overseeing the formulation of a business plan.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the covering report and volunteered itself for the tasks listed in recommendation 3 of the Task & Finish Group's report. Members asked the Executive to be mindful of comments made by Spa Centre staff, including financial figures which appeared to conflict with the Task & Finish Group's report, and to encourage the Task & Finish Group to continue to address these issues with the Spa Centre staff.

75. PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED that under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the following item, by reason of the likely disclosure of exempt information within the paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006.

(Councillor Mobbs left the meeting at the conclusion of this item.)

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76. EXECUTIVE AGENDA (CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS & REPORTS)

The Committee considered the following confidential items which would be discussed at the meeting of the Executive on Wednesday 11 November 2009.

Item Number 12 – Sale of Wilton House

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report, subject to the Executive being satisfied with the personal circumstances of the occupants of 18B.

(Prior to consideration of this item, Councillors Illingworth and Vincett left the room and did not return until after a decision had been taken by the Committee.)

Item Number 13 – Disposal of Bedford Street Car Park

The Committee requested that the Executive change recommendation 2.4 to read “amended, cancelled or extended”.

(Prior to consideration of this item, Councillor Pittarello left the meeting and did not return. The Senior Committee Services Officer offered advice to Councillor Kinson with regard to a possible prejudicial interest, so Councillor Kinson left the meeting and did not return. Members of the Planning Committee were also offered advice, but elected to participate in the discussion.)

77. COMMENTS FROM THE EXECUTIVE

The Committee considered a report from Members’ Services which summarised the Executive’s response to comments which the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee had given on reports submitted to the Executive on 21 October 2009.

The report was produced to create a dialogue between the Executive and the Finance & Audit Scrutiny Committee, ensuring that the Scrutiny Committee was formally made aware of the Executive’s responses. The same arrangement applied previously to the Executive and the Audit & Resources Scrutiny Committee.

It was pointed out that one of the Executive’s responses was to note the Committee’s comments. Officers agreed to check whether this reflected the minutes of the Executive’s meeting.

RESOLVED that the report be noted.

78. REVIEW OF THE WORK PROGRAMME

A report from Members’ Services detailed the Committee’s work programme for the year.

Members noted that a Budget Improvement Programme (BIP) looking at financial and budget management and staffing would cover a review of Finance requested by this Committee twelve months ago. Officers clarified

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arrangements for the management of BIP following the BIP Manager's appointment to a new post.

Members were reminded about a finance training session which was scheduled to take place on Monday 16 November 2009.

RESOLVED that the work programme be approved.

(The meeting ended at 7.45pm)