

Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Strategy & Resources Committee held at the Oakwood Centre on Wednesday 26 March 2014 at 4.00 pm

Present: *Councillors K. Baker (Chairman); J. Cheng; K. Haines; L. Hayward; C. Lawley; D. Mills; S. Outen; E. Rowland*

Also present: *Councillor M. Holmes*

Officers present: *D. Mander, Town Clerk; A. Bunn, Leisure Services Manager; L. Matthews, Committee Officer*

Wokingham BC Councillor M. Haines was also present.

80. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor P. Challis.

81. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest made by Members.

82. **BULMERSHE LEISURE CENTRE**

The Chairman introduced Report No. SR 10/14 which provided information on Wokingham Borough Council's proposal that the Town Council consider an early surrender of the Bulmershe Leisure Centre lease, with the intention of transferring the management of the centre to C-Salt/Leisure Connection if this was agreed. The report proposed that the Council enter into negotiations. Agreement to the final terms would come back to the Committee for approval. As agreed by the Chairman, a written submission from Councillor Challis on this agenda item, who was unable to attend the meeting, had been circulated to all councillors prior to the meeting, with printed copies available at the meeting.

Councillor Lawley believed that the 2015 lease end would allow a more considered and planned process than an early surrender. On behalf of Councillor Gilder, he also drew the meeting's attention to the variety of small clubs using the pool to provide swimming and water sports activities for young people and special needs groups. The centre presently had junior rate charges for clubs made up of young people and he was concerned that these groups may be prevented from continuing; Loddon Valley and Carnival pools had no such rate.

In response the Chairman referred to the submission from Councillor Challis which challenged the benefit of a early surrender, and confirmed that he believed that negotiations now would allow a planned and considered approach and that items such as the matter raised regarding junior rates and pricing would be included in negotiations.

Councillor Lawley expressed his concern that willingness to negotiate early would weaken the Council's position and that, as the Council had borne the costs of running the centre for years when the Borough Council had not wanted to take it over, negotiations should aim for a nil cost changeover. He was concerned that employees know what will happen and when and the need to maintain customers' use of the pool during this period. He also asked if the Vineyard Church had been aware of the possible early release of the centre when it agreed to run the youth club at the centre.

The Chairman did not believe that discussions taking place now on the lease, also referred to in the submission from Councillor Challis, meant that the Council's influence was reduced. He agreed that employees were important and reported that he had already held three meetings with staff at the centre and would continue to meet with staff as often as

was needed. The report's proposal, if agreed, would allow the Council to open negotiations and identify a potential changeover in a practical, feasible and timely manner. On the matter of the youth club the Chairman said he had met with the leader of the club and informed her that the venue may need to change and that this had not seemed to be an issue, there were other venues that could be considered for the club. Councillor Mills believed that considering this matter earlier than the deadline of the lease end meant the Council was in a stronger position in terms of negotiation.

In terms of the future of the centre, the Chairman reported that the Borough Council was putting together a leisure strategy for the borough, which would be published in June. This would include the vision for the centre and could mean a new, modern facility. Councillor Hayward believed this could be very exciting and referred to the report in respect of dilapidations which would not be due if the centre was rebuilt.

Councillor Rowland referred to the Wokingham Borough Council's Executive report dated 30 January which indicated that the Town Council would like to give up the lease before 2015. She understood that this was an error and a misunderstanding, however, many residents had learned about the matter this way and this had created misinformation in the public arena. She was concerned that comments from an Executive Member about the need for £100K more income would mean increased prices at the centre.

The Chairman said he thought it was unrealistic to believe that residents read Executive reports. The press had covered this and he had made it clear that no decision had been made by the Town Council. With regard to comment about an increase in centre income the Chairman said that he had not been present when the decision had been taken by the Executive and that this has been denied and does not appear in the minutes.

Councillor Outen said that he was sure that all agreed that a new facility at the site would be good. He agreed that good information to employees and customers was important in this situation. In response to a question the Town Clerk confirmed that notice required to employees under TUPE was understood to be four weeks.

Councillor Lawley referred to the correspondence to and from Wokingham Borough Council on the matter of the wording of the Executive report regarding Bulmershe Leisure Centre, a copy of the Town Clerk's letter of complaint on this matter had been provided with Councillor Challis' written submission. He expressed his concern that as a result of the report to the Executive, the Town Council would be negotiating from a weak position and proposed the following motion, which was seconded by Councillor Rowland:

'This Council regrets that Wokingham Borough Council has been given the false impression that this Council has already agreed to the early surrender of the lease for Bulmershe Leisure Centre when in fact the opportunity to make this decision had not come before Members'

On being put to the vote this motion was lost.

The Chairman then put the recommendation set out in Report No. SR 10/14 and it was unanimously

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That the Council enter into negotiations on the terms for an early surrender on the lease on Bulmershe Leisure Centre in line with the proposals set out in Report No. SR 10/14.

83. **PUBLIC TOILETS WORKING PARTY**

Members considered Report No. SR 11/14, the report of the Public Toilets Working Party meeting on 20 February 2014 which recommended that the Council proceed to a tender process for a public toilet in the town centre.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ That a tender process for the provision and installation of a public toilet at the town centre, as proposed in Report No. SR 11/14, be undertaken.

84. **WAR MEMORIAL AND CIVIC SPACE - FUNDING**

The Chairman proposed and it was agreed that Report No. SR 12/14, which had been circulated to all councillors before the meeting, be considered at the meeting on the grounds of urgency in order to progress the war memorial and civic space project to meet the completion deadline of July 2014.

Members considered the report which set out the funding arrangements, including the agreement the day before that Section 106 funding of £68,000 had been agreed by Wokingham Borough Council from the developers contributions in respect of the Sandford Farm development. It was noted that the funds are unlikely to be paid over to the Town Council to meet the project programme deadline. The report proposed that the Council use funds from the general reserve to fund the civic space installation costs which would be replenished on receipt of the Section 106 funding.

RESOLVED:

- ◆ To approve the allocation of funds of up to £55,400 from the general reserve to fund the installation costs for the civic space in which the war memorial will sit and that, on receipt of the Section 106 funds of £68,000, these be allocated to refund the general reserve and the special projects earmarked reserve accordingly.

The meeting closed at 4.45pm
