

16 JANUARY 2009

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held at Appletree Court, Lyndhurst on Friday, 16 January 2009.

- p Cllr L R Puttock (Chairman)
- p Cllr A E J Shotter (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

- p G C Beck
- p W H Dow
- p J A G Hutchins
- p Mrs P Jackman
- Mrs M McLean
- p J Penwarden
- p A W Rice TD

Councillors:

- p W S Rippon-Swaine
- p R F Scrivens
- p Mrs B Smith
- p M S Wade
- p S S Wade
- e Mrs P A Wyeth

Officers Attending:

Ms M Stephens, and for part of the meeting, P Curran, Mrs D Holmes, Mrs A Righton and Mrs R Rutins.

32. MINUTES.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2008, having been circulated, be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

33. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

No declarations of interest were made by members in connection with any agenda items.

34. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.

No issues were raised during the public participation period.

35. ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION FUND – “PROMOTING PARTICIPATION” – APPOINTMENT OF WORKING PARTY (REPORT A).

The Committee considered the activities to be undertaken with the funding provided by the Ministry of Justice to encourage participation in the electoral process and to assist Electoral Officers to fulfil their statutory duty to promote participation.

The sum allocated to the Council amounted to £8,448 and had to be spent within the current financial year. Participation rates were low nationally as well as locally amongst young voters aged 18-21. It was therefore suggested by officers and endorsed by the Committee that the fund be focused on increasing electoral participation in this age group.

Members expressed the view that the low numbers of young people registering and voting might be as a result of them leaving family residences to enter further education. They also felt that if this was the case, that postal voting should be encouraged with this age group.

Some members also expressed the view that many young people between the ages for 18-35 had limited understanding of the importance of voting, whilst others were apathetic to the political process in general. Members therefore suggested that some research be undertaken into reasons behind low voter turnout and residents' involvement and understanding of the democratic process.

The Committee heard from the Democratic Services Manager that the Electoral Commission had published extensive research into public involvement and interest in the political process, including the age profiles of voters. The research clearly showed the lack of engagement by younger voters was a national issue.

The Electoral Commission was running a student registration campaign which targeted further education students. The campaign highlighted quick and efficient ways of registering and differing methods of voting.

The Committee were of the opinion that with a limited budget, work should be focused on younger voters and agreed that sixth form colleges within the District should be engaged to promote registration.

Members were informed that all secondary schools and sixth form colleges had been sent Electoral Commission promotional material and offers of further information and contact. Only one response had been received.

Some members expressed the view that it was the duty and role of councillors to form contacts within schools and promote the work of the Council and democracy. Members suggested that in order to help councillors form and maintain relationships with local partners, that a workshop on establishing links and greater involvement in schools be arranged.

Members asked that a progress report on activities should be given when appropriate.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That campaigns to increase voter registration in sixth form colleges in the district be initiated; and
- (b) That a progress report be given to members at a future Committee meeting.

36. CORPORATE CONSULTATIONS – INCLUDING CITIZENS’ PANEL AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S PANEL (REPORT B).

The Committee reviewed the Citizens’ Panel and Young People’s Panel consultations undertaken in 2008/09 and discussed possible topics for questionnaires to be considered for input into the programme for 2009/10.

Some members of the Committee queried whether the small number of young people currently serving on the Young People’s Panel was truly representative of young people across the district. The Committee was informed that the Council was making a concerted effort to recruit new members to the Panel and would be undertaking a robust recruitment process with eight of the nine schools in the District.

Officers also informed members that the Council was developing a Young People’s website as well as ‘Forest thoughts’, a comments and views webpage, which would provide greater opportunity to recruit new members to the Panels.

Officers informed the Committee that in June 2007 a survey of residents’ voting habits and understanding of local presentation had been carried out. The results of this survey would be re-circulated to members.

RESOLVED:

That the corporate consultations conducted in 2008/09 be noted.

37. REVENUE BUDGETS 2009/2010 (REPORT C).

The Committee considered the revenue budgets for 2009/10.

In considering the changes to the employee costs, members welcomed the newly appointed Licensing Enforcement Officer and were pleased to hear of the progress being made in enforcement. The Committee heard from the Enforcement Officer that visits had been made to a large number of licensed premises across the district with the Police and Environmental Health. Proactive work had been undertaken to retrieve overdue licence fees and discussions generally regarding compliance with licence conditions. Regular contact had also been made with taxi and private hire proprietors.

Members thanked the officer for his work to date.

RECOMMENDED:

That the revenue budgets for 2009/10 be recommended to the Cabinet for approval.

38. DELEGATIONS OF POWERS TO OFFICERS.

RESOLVED:

That all powers currently delegated to the Licensing Officer be delegated to the Licensing Enforcement Officer.

CHAIRMAN

(GPLC160109)