



LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY COUNCIL

Annual Parish Meeting

Report of the Annual Parish Meeting held in St Thomas' Church Hall, Bedford Road, Letchworth on Wednesday 28th April 2010.

Present: 18 Councillors, 10 other Electors.

Cllr Ritchie welcomed all present, and outlined the procedure to be followed.

Cllr B Carr gave an oral presentation on the activity of the Council since the elections of 2009, illustrated by projected Powerpoint slides.

- 1 The previous Council had approved a budget for 2009-10 which required a precept of £516,000.
- 2 63% of the budget was taken up by running costs.
- 3 On 4th June 2009, 22 of the 24 Councillors were elected on a mandate to close down all Town Council activities as soon as legally and morally possible, in a sensible, caring and tidy manner, leading to a non-spending Town Council.
- 4 On 17th June a new structure was approved. There are three Committees which report directly to the Council, the General Purposes, Policy and Resources (the Personnel Committee) and the Risk Assessment Panel.
- 5 Also at the meeting on 17th June, the Aims of the Council were agreed to be: To close down all the Council activities as soon as legally and morally possible, leading to a non-spending Council so that its dissolution may then be sought.
- 6 The General Purposes Committee set up various Working Parties to address different aspects of the Council's activities, and a Finance Sub-Committee.
- 7 The Long Term Plan is to:
 - a. Establish a minimum spending Council
 - b. Continue to meet statutory requirements
 - c. Complete the term of office until mid 2013
 - d. Be re-elected on the same mandate
 - e. Apply to NHDC for a Governance Review with a view to dissolving the Council
- 8 On 5th October 2009, the Council adopted a Transition Plan to meet this overall strategy.
- 9 On 18th November 2009, a new organisation the LCDA, applied for a Judicial Review of the Council's decisions in respect of the Transition Plan, Staff and Premises. On 9th December 2009, the LCDA applied for an urgent injunction, together with a costs capping order and without giving security for costs.
- 10 All these applications were rejected by Mr Justice Mitting. In his judgement, he stated:

The object of the claim is to frustrate the lawful activities of a democratically elected council by judicial order

I do not regard it as fair and just to impose upon the defendant an irrecoverable cost burden to resist what appears to be a weak or hopeless claim.

The fundamental premise of the claimants' argument – that the defendant is conducting an unlawful non-statutory winding up of the Council – is simply wrong.

11 Since 14th January 2010, a new organisation has been in place.

The Organisation has been set up to meet the minimum statutory requirements.

It is designed for minimum spending.

Unpaid volunteer Councillors are acting as Town Clerk (Ian Mantle) and Responsible Finance Office (Peter Groves)

12 All six staff were made redundant as of 14th January 2010. There is currently an unresolved dispute about the redundancy terms. The date for the Employment Tribunal is yet to be established.

13 The Offices in Leys Avenue have been closed since 12th January 2010. Currently, the termination of the lease is still being finalised.

14 The Precept for 2010-11 is zero. This means that the Council Tax payers of Letchworth had a reduction in their Council Tax for the coming Council Year.

15 Meetings are held at various locations available at the date and time of the meetings.

16 Notices of meeting are posted at the Library, the Tourist Information Office, a Poster Board in Garden Square and on the Web Site.

17 The Web Site has been reorganised, thanks in particular to the hard work of Cllr Heaton, to show:

The latest news

Minutes of meetings

Notice of meetings

Contact details

18 In Summary, the Council has achieved three objectives:

To close down all Town Council activities

To require a zero precept for 2010-11

To create an organisation to meet minimum statutory requirements

Questions were then invited from those present.

- 1 Cllr Johnson asked whether the Parish Meeting had been advertised in the Comet. The Clerk confirmed it had appeared prominently in the previous week's edition.
- 2 Mrs Gross asked what were the minimum requirements. The Chairman stated that these were:
 - To hold at least four meetings each year, together with the Annual Parish meeting.
 - To have in place a proper system of Financial Control.
 - To be audited each year.
- 3 Mr Moore asked what the Council were proposing to do with the approximately £300 000 currently in the Bank Account. Cllr B Carr confirmed that there were a number of on-going issues relating to the staff and premises, which could require the Council to make additional payments. It was therefore prudent at this stage to retain the money in the Bank Account until all outstanding issues had been resolved. The amounts involved were significant, being in total in excess of £200 000. The Council hoped not to need to levy a precept again next year, but at this stage, it would be premature to decide this issue.
- 4 Mr Hodgson asked why it had been necessary to get advice from three lawyers. Cllr B Carr clarified that this was because the questions related to three different areas, and in each case, the advice came from a specialist in the relevant area.
- 5 Mr Hodgson also asked about the amount that had been spent on legal advice. Cllr Switzer gave the information as at the last Finance Sub-Committee, and it was then clarified that figures previously provided to Mr Hodgson included an amount paid since that meeting, and which had not yet been reported to the Sub-Committee.
- 6 Mr Newell asked how much was in contention. Cllr B Carr confirmed that it was in the region of £130 000.

The meeting closed at 8:45 pm.