

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 22 SEPTEMBER 2020 – REMOTE MEETING VIA ZOOM

PRESENT

The Deputy Mayor – Councillor Rushton
Councillor Brady
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart
Councillor Hawley
Councillor Jackson
Councillor McLoughlin
Councillor Perkin
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Salt
Councillor Sheldon
Councillor Yates

Councillor Harper was also in attendance

Councillor Hall confirmed that the first part of this meeting was not open to the public. Councillors were to receive an update from Churches Charities and Local Authorities (CCLA) representative, Mark Davies.

Councillors approved this approach.

26. TO RECEIVE A PRESENTATION FROM MARK DAVIES- RELATIONSHIP MANAGER, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, CCLA

Mark Davies gave a brief overview of CCLA. This organisation was established in 1958. There are currently 750 public sector clients; the company is owned by the clients.

The fund that Biddulph Town Council is currently involved with was established in 2011; there are 600 clients, with 400 town and parish councils. Mark noted that interest rates were down, these are unprecedented times.

Biddulph Town Council invested £300,000 in February 2018. The interest rates peaked at 0.8% and are currently 0.1196%. This Fund is low risk, spreading investment over 30 banks. Investors have daily access; if contact is made before 11.30am, funds can be released by 3pm.

Investments consider risk, liquidity and yield. There is a fee of 0.08%.

Mark cautioned that if the Town Council's income exceeds 500EUROS, it might not be possible to access the Financial Standards Compensation Scheme.

Councillor Yates noted that the value of cash is eroding away; holding cash is costly.

Mark Davies advised that the CCLA Property Fund had a yield of 4.5%; a long-term view was necessary, 5-years plus. CCLA has 78 commercial properties. There are 150 principal authorities and 100 town and parish councils who invest in this Fund.

Mark advised that exposure to retail is minimal; 38% of the Fund is linked with logistics.

Councillor Hart was concerned that commercial retail was not a good option; these were interesting times.

Councillor Hall thanked Mark Davies for his input; further investment would be considered at a future opportunity.

The meeting to be opened to the public.

27. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

i) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests: Councillor Sheldon in anything pertaining to Biddulph in Bloom.

ii) Other Interests: None.

28. APOLOGIES

The Mayor - Councillor Jones
Councillor Davies

29. MINUTES

To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 July 2020 (approved at the Town Council meeting on 14 July 2020)

The minutes were confirmed.

30. TO CONSIDER CIVIC ALLOWANCES (MAYOR, DEPUTY MAYOR AND TOWN CRIER) AND TO AGREE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2020-21 PAYMENTS

The Chief Officer updated Councillors that allowances would normally be paid after the Annual Meeting of the Town Council. There had been no review of these figures for ten years.

These amounts had not been paid this year; Councillor Davies had agreed to do a review. Councillor Davies had fed back that they had done a lot of the catering themselves. Councillor Davies had not had the opportunity to have a Mayoral Ball. Money remaining at the end of the term was fed into the Mayor's Charity Account and was distributed to charities.

Councillor Davies had advised the Chief Officer that the allowance for the Deputy Mayor is not necessary, if you have an active Mayor. The thought had been to increase the Mayor's allowance by £500, and reduce the Deputy Mayor's allowance by the same figure. If the Deputy Mayor had to undertake more duties, through ill-health of the Mayor, for example, additional funds could be paid.

The Chief Officer noted that the Town Crier's allowance had also not been reviewed. He had advised that these funds are used for accommodation when staying away to represent the town. In addition, the regalia is cleaned. The Town Crier has just purchased a new regalia at a very significant cost. The Chief Officer advised that Councillors had previously noted that they would consider the cost of the regalia. The Town Crier has not asked for these additional funds; he loves the role.

The Chief Officer noted that Councillor Davies' proposal seems logical. It is very difficult to benchmark these roles and to put a figure on the activities that are undertaken.

Councillor Hawley felt that the Deputy Mayor's allowance could roll forward, if this was unspent.

Councillor Rogers wondered whether this should be reviewed quarterly.

Councillor Jackson agreed with Councillors Hawley and Rogers; the allowances should be left the same for now. Councillor Jackson proposed that this should be considered again in March 2021 and that a 50% contribution should be made to the Town Crier's regalia. This was seconded by Councillor Perkin. Councillor Rogers noted that the Town Crier's regalia was his 'chain of office'. This proposal was agreed.

31. TO CONSIDER ONGOING SUPPORT FROM THE DISTRICT COUNCIL HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISOR IN 2020-21, NOTE ATTACHED

Councillor Jackson had some concerns about this proposal and would prefer it to be considered within the Confidential section of the agenda; seconded by Councillor Hawley and agreed.

32. TO RECEIVE MAY JUNE AND JULY 2020 BANK RECONCILIATIONS, ATTACHED

Councillor Hawley wondered whether people could be encouraged to pay in their cheques quickly, so that there were not so many unpresented cheques.

Councillors Hart proposed to accept the bank reconciliations; seconded by Councillor Jackson and agreed.

33. TO APPROVE THE WEBSITE ACCESSIBILITY POLICY, ATTACHED

The Chief Officer advised that there was a piece of legislation that impacted on public sector bodies, which required the website to be accessible. There is an acknowledgement that this can be ongoing. We are required to highlight aspirations and how we will move towards that.

The Events and Partnerships Officer had attended a course to advise on this. This would need to be reviewed every year.

Councillor Hawley wondered whether the current issues with the provider should be included within the Policy.

The Chief Officer noted this Policy was more about the documents and the look of the website. This should not be a lot of work for the existing provider.

Councillor Jackson cautioned against the use of acronyms.

It was agreed to accept this draft Policy, with amendments as necessary.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, s1, the Council is to determine which items, if any, should be taken with the public excluded.

It was agreed to return to the following item:

31. TO CONSIDER ONGOING SUPPORT FROM THE DISTRICT COUNCIL HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISOR IN 2020-21, NOTE ATTACHED

The Chief Officer had circulated the email received from David Owen at Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

The proposal was agreed.

34. TO CONSIDER THE TOWN CENTRE HIGHWAYS DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL, ATTACHED

The Chief Officer presented a proposal from Amey.

The Committee required clarification of expectations.

35. TO CONSIDER PROVISION OF IT IN LIGHT OF NEW INFORMATION

There was consideration of the quotations and agreement reached.

36. TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE ON STAFFING ISSUES

A verbal update was received.

It was agreed that the next meeting would be November; additional grant applications would be considered then. The Chief Officer would do more advertising.

The meeting closed at 7.27pm.

Signature

Date