

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 24 NOVEMBER 2020 – REMOTE MEETING VIA ZOOM

PRESENT

The Mayor- Councillor Jones
The Deputy Mayor – Councillor Rushton
Councillor Brady
Councillor Hall
Councillor Hart
Councillor Hawley
Councillor Jackson
Councillor McLoughlin (arrived towards the end of item 48)
Councillor Rogers
Councillor Salt
Councillor Sheldon (arrived at the end of item 44)
Councillor Yates

Councillor Harper was also in attendance

37. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

i) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests: Councillor Jones is the Treasurer of Lifeline; Councillor Harper is the Chair of Lifeline.

ii) Other Interests: Councillors Hall and Hart had given District Council funds to the Biddulph Bowling Club. Councillors Jackson and Brady are Board members at the Biddulph Youth and Community Zone. Councillor Yates had made contributions to the Green Tree House. Councillor Salt's mother coordinates the Poppy Appeal in Biddulph. Councillor Jones is a member of the Royal British Legion. Councillor Hall is a member of the Rotary Club of Biddulph. Councillor Sheldon worked closely with Brown Lees Community Association.

38. APOLOGIES

Councillor Perkin

39. MINUTES

- a) The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2020 (approved at the Town Council meeting on 13 October 2020) were confirmed.
- b) The Minutes of the meeting of the Emergency Planning Working Group meeting held on 5 November 2020 were received.

40. TO RECEIVE AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2020 BANK RECONCILIATIONS (ATTACHED)

Councillor Hawley wondered whether those who had not presented cheques could be chased; the Chief Officer would do this.

The reconciliations were received.

41. TO RECEIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE EXTERNAL AUDITORS FOLLOWING THE CONCLUSION OF THE ANNUAL AUDIT 2019-20

Councillor Hall thanked the staff for another successful conclusion to the financial year. Councillor Hawley proposed that the recommendations should be accepted; seconded by Councillor Jones and agreed.

42. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON CORONAVIRUS PROJECTS

The Chief Officer noted that she had applied for £2500 from Staffordshire County Council to support current and future activities around the Coronavirus response; no report had been received yet. This funding would support the Town Council and other local organisations.

43. TO CONSIDER FEES FOR 2021-22 (CURRENT 2020-21 FEES ATTACHED) IN ADVANCE OF BUDGET SETTING IN JANUARY 2021

The current fees had been circulated. Councillor Harper felt it would be in bad taste to increase any of the Town Council fees this year, given the level of unemployment. Councillor Jones agreed with this approach.

Councillor Jones stated that there had been a 5% increase on burial fees in the previous year; these should be frozen this year. Councillor Hart agreed.

It was agreed to recommend that there should be no increase in fees in 2021-22.

44. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON AMEY HIGHWAYS DEVELOPMENT WORK

The Chief Officer reminded members that they had requested more detail around the potential Amey project; this had been provided via email. The Chief Officer queried whether there were other questions and whether this was a project that Councillors were now happy to move forward.

Councillor Jones felt this was an expensive project, but he had no issues with the content of the email.

Councillor Rogers felt the money could be better spent.

Councillor Jackson reminded members that this was for exploratory work; the Town Council would be committing itself to following through with the improvements.

Councillor Yates felt that the Town Council could not move forward with town centre work without this project. A list of tasks that can be done independently was needed, rather than a whole project cost.

Councillor Hart felt this was 'crunch time'; the Town Council had built up funds to complete tasks such as this.

Councillor Hawley agreed with Councillor Yates; there should be itemised projects.

Councillor Jones felt the Town Council should commission Amey to do the work.

Councillor Yates stated that tangible, deliverable projects would be needed, or opportunities would be missed.

There was a vote; all were in favour of commencing the project with the recommendations above. Councillor Rogers abstained from the vote.

45. TO CONSIDER AN ADDITIONAL PAYMENT OF £75 TO THE BIDDULPH BRANCH OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION TO COVER ADDITIONAL POPPIES PROVIDED

Councillor Hall felt it had been a horrendous year for the Poppy Appeal; any help would be positive. Moved by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Jackson and Agreed. Councillor Salt abstained from the vote.

46. TO APPROVE EON ELECTRICITY QUOTATIONS FOR THE REPLACEMENT OF LIGHTING (ATTACHED)

There was discussion about the Robin Hill site; Councillor Jones noted that this was an unadopted road.

The Chief Officer noted she was seeking clarity on the Town Council responsibilities from EON, but there appeared to be agreement that unadopted sites would be maintained by the Town Council.

Councillor Jones proposed that this work is completed subject to confirmation that these sites were the Town Council responsibilities; seconded by Councillor Hart.

Councillor Jackson noted that there was a budget for this; the work should be done.

It was agreed to approve the work at Robin Hill.

Councillor Harper noted that there was a safety issue at the John Street site. Councillor Rogers proposed that this work should be completed; seconded by Councillor Hart. Agreed.

47. TO CONSIDER NEXT STEPS WITH REGARD TO CCLA INVESTMENT FOLLOWING A PRESENTATION AT THE LAST MEETING OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Chief Officer reminded members that they had received a presentation from the CCLA Investment Manager at the previous meeting. It was important to manage the reserves appropriately. Some funds were not currently protected in the Natwest account.

Councillor Hawley felt it was appropriate to wait until April; he was concerned about the Property Fund option.

Councillor Salt had arrived late, but was concerned about any potential investment in fossil fuels or arms. The Town Council should make ethical investments.

Councillor Hart felt that markets were volatile. Decision-making should be on hold to see how the pandemic affected the economy.

Councillor Yates stated that there was also uncertainty about Brexit. The Chief Officer should consult with the SMDC Chief Financial Officer.

Councillor Jones seconded this proposal. It was agreed to wait before making further investments and to revisit this in the Spring.

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.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

48. TO APPROVE THE REVISED VOLUNTEER POLICY (ATTACHED) INCLUDING PROPOSALS FOR REASONABLE REIMBURSEMENTS

The policy was approved..

49. HEALTH AND SAFETY

a) To consider the role of the Responsible Person within the Town Council

It was agreed that the Chief Officer should be the Responsible Person for the Town Council

b) To receive verbal feedback following a visit from the Health and Safety Officer

The Chief Officer provided verbal feedback in relation to the Health and Safety Officer visit.

50. STAFFING

a) Confirmation of overtime and on-call arrangements for Caretaking staff

It was agreed to consider this again at the next meeting.

b) Verbal feedback on one-to-one discussions with staff and annual appraisals

A verbal update was provided.

51. GRANTS

Applications were considered and funds allocated accordingly.

The meeting closed at 8.16pm.

Signature

Date