

# **MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 15 JUNE 2021**

## **PRESENT**

- The Mayor – Councillor Rushton
- Deputy Mayor – Councillor Garvey
- Councillor Brady
- Councillor Hall
- Councillor Harper
- Councillor Hart
- Councillor Hawley
- Councillor Jackson
- Councillor Jones
- Councillor Perkin
- Councillor Rogers
- Councillor Salt
- Councillor Yates

## **1. ELECTION OF A CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR**

Councillor Harper nominated Councillor Hall as Chair, Councillor Hart seconded. There were no other nominations. Councillors voted to elect Councillor Hall as Chair.

Councillor Harper nominated Councillor Perkin as Deputy Chair; Councillor Hart seconded the nomination. There were no other nominations. Councillors voted to elect Councillor Perkin as Deputy Chair.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

### **a) Disclosable pecuniary interests and dispensations**

Councillor Rogers declared an interest as an employee of a company that quoted in item 18.

### **b) Other interests**

Councillor Jones declared an interest in item 17 as chair of the Biddulph Grange Country Park.

### **3. APOLOGIES**

Councillor McLoughlin's apologies were received. He viewed the meeting remotely.

### **4. MINUTES**

- a) The minutes of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting held 27 April 2021, and approved at the Annual Meeting of the Town Council on 4 May 2021, were confirmed.
- b) The notes of the Emergency Planning Working Group meeting held on 13 May 2021 were approved.

### **5. TO NOTE THAT THE BANK RECONCILIATIONS FOR APRIL, MAY AND JUNE 2021 WILL BE PRESENTED AT THE JULY FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING (FOLLOWING CONCLUSION OF 2020-21 END OF YEAR ACTIVITIES)**

Councillors received with no further comment.

### **6. TO RECEIVE A COPY OF THE JOINT PANEL ON ACCOUNTABILITY AND GOVERNANCE PRACTITIONERS' GUIDE (MARCH 2021) - ATTACHED**

The Chief Officer advised that this document is used to guide policies and strategies in managing finances transparently and in line with best practice guideline.

Councillors confirmed receipt.

### **7. A) TO RECEIVE THE INTERNAL CONTROL MONITORING REPORT COMPLETED BY COUNCILLORS PERKIN AND HAWLEY (ATTACHED)**

Proposed by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Rushton. Councillors voted to receive the internal control monitoring report.

### **B) TO CONSIDER PROGRESSION OF RECOMMENDATIONS, PARTICULARLY IN RELATION TO:**

- **ONLINE BANKING OPTIONS**

- **COUNCILLOR TOWN COUNCIL EMAIL ADDRESSES**

Councillor Hawley stated that a small number of recommendations were made, but that no major concerns arose. In addition to the above, a recommendation was also made that salary payments be made via online banking/transfer.

Councillor Perkin stated that there were 'no red flags', and all recommendations made were in line with best practice guidelines across the country. Online banking options and Councillor Town Council email addresses were the most pressing issues, the latter being required to minimise the risk of GDPR breaches.

Councillor Jones said that he understood that the issue preventing online banking was due to approval methods required and standing orders. Councillor Hawley said that other bank accounts may need to be considered to facilitate online banking, and charges may be incurred but are likely to reduce the workload involved in payments substantially.

Councillor Hawley thanked Councillor Perkin for his assistance in the internal control monitoring, echoed by the Chair.

Councillors voted to investigate options with regard to the above recommendations.

**8. TO NOTE THAT THE INTERNAL AUDIT HAS BEEN COMPLETED (ITEMS TO BE COLLECTED ON 11 JUNE 2021).**

**QUERIES HAVE BEEN ANSWERED AND INITIAL FEEDBACK IS:**

- The Council's governance arrangements are documented clearly in their Policies and Risk management strategies.
- Future financial commitments are identified & managed through the budget process & reserves are adequate.
- Records presented for audit are in good order & referenced clearly.

**FORMAL REPORT TO BE SENT BY EMAIL, WHEN RECEIVED.**

Councillors noted that the internal audit has been completed.

**9. TO RECEIVE THE DRAFT ANNUAL GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2020/21 PART 3 (ATTACHED). THIS WILL BE FORMALLY APPROVED AT THE TOWN COUNCIL MEETING ON 22 JUNE 2021**

Councillor Hawley asked if the tick boxes needed to be completed. The Chief Officer stated that this will be completed at the Town Council meeting on 22 June 2021.

Councillors confirmed receipt of the draft documents.

**10. TO APPROVE THE PRINCIPLES IDENTIFIED IN THE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT FOR THE WELCOME BACK FUNDING**

Councillor Jackson asked if the requirement for quotes applied to the contract as a whole or to individual activities undertaken. The Chief Officer said that her understanding is that the requirements are followed for each activity.

Councillor Jackson also raised concerns about how restrictive the funding was particularly around preventing any permanence of items funded.

Councillor Yates noted that the timescale given were very tight.

Proposed by Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Hart. Councillors voted to approve the principles outlined in the Service Level Agreement for the Welcome Back Funding.

**11. TO RECEIVE MANAGEMENT INFORMATION IN RELATION TO THE RECEPTION CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVISION**

The information was presented by Councillor Hall and the Chief Officer. The Chief Officer said that the aim is to identify any trends, though this is limited at present due to reduced opening hours; this information isn't widely publicised due to the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions.

Councillor Rogers enquired if the Town Council reception could sell tickets for events in the Town.

Councillors received the information presented.

**12. TO RECEIVE A DRAFT COPY OF THE 2020-21 ACTION PLAN REVIEW (ATTACHED)**

Councillor Hall outlined that the points highlighted in green are to be included in the 2021-22 action plan.

The Chief Officer gave an update that there had been a number of delays due to the Covid restrictions, and some items couldn't be completed such as the development of a Business Improvement District. However, she felt that a significant amount had been achieved with the number of assets taken on and the expansion of the team. Current priorities include the development of the market and market square and work with community groups, supporting their return as restrictions ease.

Councillor Hart said that he had spoken to a number of members of the public about the market, and they had all been pleased with the new layout which doesn't require a road closure.

Councillors received the information presented.

### **13. TO CONSIDER PRIORITIES FOR THE 2021-22 ACTION PLAN; A DRAFT TO BE PRESENTED AT THE JULY MEETING**

The Chief Officer outlined that the work within the action plan is usually generated by Committees, and actions agreed at Committees form the basis of the action plan.

Councillor Salt said that the St John's Road roundabout continues to be an issue with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and requested this be considered.

### **14. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON A CHANGING PLACES BED AND USAGE OF THE OLD WHARF ROAD TOILET BLOCK**

The Chief Officer said that a number of actions had taken place with regard to the use of the Wharf Road Toilet Block as a Changing Places facility. Staff have undertaken training, specialist contractors have visited to develop a specification and discussions and meetings had with the grant awarding bodies. The hope is that half the block can be used for the Changing Places facility, and the other half can be used for storage.

Councillor Hart asked if the Town Council had applied for the Disabled Facilities Grant, which the Chief Officer confirmed would be part of the bid.

Councillor Salt asked if the suggestion of using the space for cyclists facilities was still being considered. The Chief Officer confirmed that this is the idea, though access to the block is an issue that may need to be considered.

Councillor Harper asked if water refill fountains could be installed. The Chief Officer gave an update on the Refill scheme which is being pursued.

**15. TO CONSIDER WHETHER THE TOWN COUNCIL SHOULD COMPLETE AN APPLICATION FOR THE LOCAL COUNCIL AWARD SCHEME [Local Council Award Scheme \(nalc.gov.uk\)](http://nalc.gov.uk)**

Councillor Hall and Councillor Hart both expressed their support for applying for the Local Council Award Scheme as did Councillor Jones and Councillor Jackson. Councillor Hawley said he supported the principle, but wanted to ensure that this doesn't impose a significant workload on Town Council staff. Councillor Perkin said that the Town Council already work towards best practice, and so feels that it would be a very positive move, with minimal work required.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the reason for applying is partly to support applications for funding and demonstrates credibility and transparency within the Town Council.

Councillors voted in support of the application.

**16. TO APPROVE THAT A CLASSIC CAR EVENT WILL TAKE PLACE ON SUNDAY 12 SEPTEMBER, SUBJECT TO ANY RELEVANT RESTRICTIONS IN PLACE AT THE TIME**

Councillor Jackson asked if costs will be incurred at this stage of organising the event, should potential restrictions require the event to be postponed or cancelled.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the preliminary work does not come with a financial cost other than officer time; there are advantages to requesting road closures early. The website would continue to be updated, to advise people if there was a cancellation.

Councillor Rogers said that he had attended a number of car shows that had been well attended and people had been asking about the Biddulph Car Show.

Moved by Councillor Harper, seconded by Councillor Perkin. Councillors approved the classic car event as set out on the agenda.

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

## **CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

### **17. BIDDULPH GRANGE COUNTRY PARK VISITOR CENTRE**

To note that interviews were completed on 24 and 25 May following consideration of Expression of Interest documents (previously shared with all Councillors). Interviews were undertaken by Councillors Jackson and Jones, Sue Fletcher and the Chief Officer. A partner has been selected.

The new café manager, rent, purchase of kitchen equipment and phase 1 work was approved.

### **18. TENDERS AND QUOTATIONS**

**a) To approve a contractor to complete drainage activities at the Biddulph Grange Country Park Visitor Centre**

A quotation was approved.

**b) To approve a contract to complete grass cutting and maintenance at Springfield Road**

A tender was approved.

**c) To approve a contractor to undertake a lengthsman scheme**

A tender was approved.

**d) Town Hall Kitchen Upgrades**

The purchase of kitchen equipment was approved.

**e) Biddulph Grange Country Park Visitor Centre Ceiling.**

A quotation was approved.

**f) Town Hall quotations – access control and CCTV**

A quotation was approved.

**g) Town Hall quotations – gas servicing**

A quotation was approved.

**h) Town Hall quotations – air conditioning**

A quotation was approved.

**i) Additional item if permitted by the Committee – sanitary bins.**

A quotation was approved.

**19. THE CHIEF OFFICER TO PROVIDE UPDATES IN RELATIONS TO**

**a) Aldi bus route, including access to Staffordshire County Council Land.**

An update was provided.

**b) Purchase of Sainsbury's Land at Station Road**

An updated was provided.

**c) Development of leases with tenants at the Town Hall**

An update was provided.

**20. GENERAL ISSUES**

**a) To receive the email from Councillor Sheldon in relation to Biddulph in Bloom funding (attached)**

Councillors received the email from Councillor Sheldon.

**b) To receive a verbal update from the Chief Officer in relation to the AMEY High Street Options Appraisal Work.**

The Chief Officer updated that she is due to meet AMEY representatives this week and plans to link the work with the High Street initiatives being undertaken by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council.

**c) To gauge Councillors' view on the purchase of allotment site within the town; the Chief Officer to advise about potential opportunities.**

It was agreed the Chief Officer to investigate and gather further information.



## **21. STAFFING**

- a) To note that a resignation has been received from a caretaker**

The information was noted.

- b) To consider recommendations from the Chief Officer in relation to future recruitment**

It was agreed that the Chief Officer will investigate employment options.

- c) To note that all staff have been completing online learning modules, resulting in reviews of working practice.**

It was noted a wide variety of Health and Safety training had been undertaken by all staff and a review of lone working practices will be undertaken.

The meeting ended at 8pm.

Signed..... Date.....