

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2021

PRESENT

- The Mayor – Councillor Jones
- Deputy Mayor – Councillor Rushton
- Councillor Hall
- Councillor Hart
- Councillor Hawley
- Councillor McLoughlin
- Councillor Perkin
- Councillor Rogers
- Councillor Sheldon
- Councillor Swift
- Councillor Yates

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

a. Disclosable pecuniary interests and dispensations

None declared.

b. Other interests

Councillor Jones declared in interest in Item Number 5 as Chairman of the Friends of Grange Country Park.

66. APOLOGIES

None received.

67. MINUTES

The Minutes of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting on 26 January 2021 (approved at the Town council 9 February) were confirmed.

68. TO RECEIVE JANUARY 2021 BANK RECONCILIATION (ATTACHED)

The bank reconciliation from January 2021 was received.

69. BIDDULPH GRANGE COUNTRY PARK VISITOR CENTRE:

a. To receive quotations for electrical work (to be tabled)

Councillors agreed to discuss this item under confidential items to allow for further discussion.

b. To agree requirements and a process for identifying appropriate tenants for the Visitor Centre (draft expression of interest form attached)

The Chief Officer outlined that the draft expression of interest form provided had been considered previously. The Chief Officer stated that there has been a number of enquiries about the Visitor Centre, and sought direction from the Council on how to progress and assess suitable tenants.

Councillor Jones noted there are two spaces at the Visitor Centre – one space which was previously a café, and the space at the back which is a workshop space or potential artisan space. Councillor Jones said he had no issues with the form as it stands and will consider offers as and when they are submitted.

Councillor Rogers suggested the space could be used for seasonal events and activities which change through out the year.

Councillor Yates said that the Countryside Officer sometimes uses the space at the back and also wondered if the Staffordshire Wildlife Trust would be interested in using the space. He would also like to see seasonal use.

Councillor Hart said the space could host a rustic rural business venture.

Councillor Jackson stated he was quite happy with the form but was not sure how the opportunity would be advertised and then applicants shortlisted.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the opportunity would be advertised via social media and in the Chronicle and was open to additional suggestions from the Committee. The Chief Officer asked if the Visitor Centre management should sit under the Recreation and Amenities Committee and whether there should be Friends of Grange Country Park involvement in choosing tenants.

Councillor Jackson said he was happy for a smaller group to consider the Visitor Centre.

Councillor Hawley suggested that we outline what we would like to happen, for example a café, seasonal events and express this when seeking applications.

Chief Officer stated that this information will be included in the introduction, and will include the aim of attracting visitors, encouraging innovation and supporting start-up business.

Councillor Salt suggested a refill shop; this fulfils the green economy need. Councillor Salt was aware of a not-for-profit craft and wood project for people with disabilities based in a workshop in a country park, and felt there is a need for this Biddulph.

Councillor Jones felt the conversation was looking too far ahead, and this conversation should focus on how people express interests. He wanted the Centre to be an asset to the park and support the park. Councillor Jones would like the applications to be steered towards the green economy or green credentials.

Councillor Jones moved to use the current format for expression of interest and Councillor Perkin seconded. All in favour.

70. LENGTHSMAN CONTRACT

a. To receive the 2019-20 list for tasks undertaken

The Town Council received the list of tasks undertaken.

Councillor Jones said that the Lengthsman had been very helpful and they have done a good job. He thanked the Lengthsman for his work. Councillor Yates and Councillor Hart also echoed this thanks.

Councillor Yates felt that a lot of jobs should have been carried out by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council and Staffordshire County Council. He suggested that we highlight this and potentially invoice the relevant authorities for costs that fall within their duties.

Councillor Hart noted that the Lengthsman had been responsive and carried out work to a good standard. Councillor Hart said that the Lengthsman had stepped in where responsibility was ambiguous.

Councillor Yates clarified that he is grateful that the Lengthsman and Town Council had been proactive in addressing issues, but did not want responsibilities that fall within other organisations to be passed to the Town Council.

b. To approve the specification for the Lengthsman contract (commencing 1 June 2021)

Councillor Jackson moved to approve the specification, Councillor Perkin seconded. Councillor Hart said that he is happy with the document. All in favour.

The Chief Officer had sent a copy of the specification to the County Highways Team for input. If both the Town Council and the Highways Team are happy, the tender documents will be sent out in the next couple of weeks.

71. AUDIT

- a. Internal control - Item requested by Councillor Chris Perkin (two documents attached) Councillors are requested to confirm the attached form will be used going forward to record the areas covered on an internal check and note any areas which omitted from any specific internal check.**

Councillor Perkin has requested that the Committee approve the attached form to assist the management of financial risk and best practice. Councillor Perkin clarified it is not an internal audit but a standard document to ensure best practice.

Councillor Jackson had no issues, but suggested that titles be used rather than individual Councillor names. Councillor Hawley said the title would be the Monitoring Councillors. Councillor Hawley thanked Councillor Perkin for his work and said this ensures that future Monitoring Councillors are aware of how to carry out the role.

Councillor Hawley moved to accept the form. Councillor Jackson seconded with amendment to titles. All in favour.

- b) Internal audit – To note that Elizabeth Thompson has confirmed that she will complete the internal audit report at the end of the financial year, and to agree the focus of this activity (Audit Requirements document attached)**

Councillor Hart moved and Councillor Perkin seconded. All in favour. There were no further requirements for the Internal Auditor.

72. APPROVE THE REVIEWED POLICIES ATTACHED:

(new sections are in red, words that have a strikethrough will be removed)

- a. Dress and Appearance Policy**

Councillor Salt said that section 3.2 sat uncomfortably with her, as she felt that 'too short,' 'too tight' and 'too low' were directed towards women and felt the phrase 'drew untoward attention' and hinted at victim blaming. Councillor Yates echoed this.

The Chief Officer stated that it was not gender specific, and acceptability is always subjective. She had sought employment advice and the section could be reworded to 'no crop tops, cut off shorts, see through clothing or areas of the body not usually exposed at work'.

Councillor Salt said she felt this was a fairer.

Councillor Jones moved, Councillor Perkin seconded to accept the amended policy. All in favour.

b. Harassment and Bullying Policy

Councillor Salt said that she was happy with this and was pleased that the solicitor has reviewed the document. Councillor Hawley asked for clarity about why the solicitor suggested a couple of alterations. The Chief Officer clarified that it was a stronger and clearer for victims of bullying.

Councillor Hawley moved and Councillor Hart seconded to approve the reviewed policy. All in favour.

c. Drug and Alcohol Policy

Councillor Jones moved to accept the new policy; Councillor Perkin seconded. All in favour.

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

73. TO CONSIDER FREE USE OF THE TOWN HALL BY THE BIDDULPH FESTIVAL COMMITTEE FOR EVENTS THROUGHOUT THE SUMMER

Free use in 2021 was approved.

74. TO APPROVE THAT TWO WEEKS ANNUAL LEAVE CAN BE CARRIED FORWARD BY STAFF IN 2021-22, FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR

The carrying forward of annual leave was approved.

75. TO APPROVE THE DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL QUOTATION FOR EMERGENCY LIGHTS REPAIRS AND/ OR REPLACEMENT AT THE TOWN HALL (DOCUMENT TO FOLLOW)

It was agreed quotations would be sought and circulated.

76. TO APPROVE A QUOTATION FOR WASTE MANAGEMENT AT BIDDULPH TOWN HALL AND TWO BURIAL SITE (TO BE TABLED), COMMENCING 1 APRIL 2021

It was agreed to bring the issue back to the March committee meeting.

77. QUOTES FOR THE VISITOR CENTRE

A quote in relation to electrical work was approved.

The meeting ended at 7:00pm

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