

# **MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 25 JUNE 2019**

## **PRESENT**

- The Mayor - Councillor Davies
  - Councillor Brady
  - Councillor Hall
  - Councillor Harper
  - Councillor Hart
  - Councillor Jackson
  - Councillor Perkin
  - Councillor Rogers
  - Councillor Sheldon
  - Councillor Yates
- 
- Councillor McLoughlin was also in attendance

## **1.19 ELECTION OF CHAIR AND DEPUTY CHAIR**

The Mayor called for nominations for the election of a Chair. Councillor Rogers nominated Councillor Hall; seconded by Councillor Hart. There were no other nominations and Councillor Hall was elected.

Councillor Hall called for nominations for the election of Deputy Chair. Councillor Rogers nominated Councillor Jackson; seconded by Councillor Harper. Councillor Jackson did not want to accept this nomination.

Councillor Rogers nominated Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Hart. There were no other nominations and Councillor Perkin was elected.

Councillor Harper requested that the minutes record the Committee's gratitude to Councillor Jackson for the work he had done as Deputy Chair of the Finance Committee previously; all agreed.

## **2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

### **a) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests and Dispensations:**

Councillor Sheldon - Biddulph in Bloom.

Councillor Davies - Citizens Advice.

Councillor Rogers - former Treasurer of the Festival Committee.

It was noted that any interests would be identified as the Grants were considered.

**b) Other Interests:**

None.

### **3. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from:

Councillor Adams

Councillor Hawley

Councillor Jones

Councillor Salt

### **4. MINUTES**

To **confirm** the Minutes of the meeting held on 16 April 2019 (signed at the Town Council meeting on 11 June 2019).

Proposed by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Perkin and agreed.

### **5. TO NOTE THAT AN ANNUAL FINANCE REPORT WILL BE COMPLETED FOR 2019/2020 FOLLOWING RECEIPT OF ANY EXTERNAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS, INCORPORATING INTERNAL CONTROL AND INTERNAL AUDIT RECOMMENDATIONS.**

The Chief Officer noted that she had previously prepared a Finance Report at this point in the year, to agree the actions that should be completed over the coming year. The Chief Officer proposed to postpone this until September, following completion of any external audit recommendations.

It was agreed that this was an appropriate action.

## **6. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS FROM INTERNAL AUDITOR**

To receive the final recommendation from the Internal Auditor (attached).

The Chief Officer noted that she would seek advice on the valuation of Town Council land; she had had a long discussion with the Internal Auditor on this issue. The Burial Ground, for example, had no development potential and therefore a nominal value. Springfield Road, however, may have a commercial value. The Town Council must review its approach to valuation of land. This would be undertaken over the coming year and feedback would be provided.

It was agreed that this was an appropriate action.

## **7. TO APPROVE THE AUDIT OF MAYOR'S CHARITY ACCOUNT 2018-19, TO BE TABLED**

The Chief Officer presented a breakdown of income and expenditure relating to the Mayor's Charity Account. This was the first time this had been presented for approval. The Chief Officer queried whether the format was acceptable.

Councillor Harper noted that the largest contribution was the 'Knype Pool Race'; this Town Council owes a debt of gratitude to those that organise this. A 'thank you' letter should be sent; this was agreed.

The Chief Officer noted that the current Mayor, Councillor Davies, had agreed to monitor the expenses incurred during the Mayoral year to ensure that the allowance was sufficient.

Councillor Rogers wondered whether Councillor Jones could be asked to do this too; in his experience, the allowance for the year in which he was Deputy Mayor had supplemented the expenses from the Mayoral year. The Chief Officer agreed to ask Councillor Jones to undertake this monitoring activity.

It was agreed that this income and expenditure review was sufficient to enable an understanding of expenses over the year.

## **8. TO REVIEW THE INVESTMENT STRATEGY AND CONSIDER FURTHER INVESTMENT IN CCLA TO MANAGE RESERVES EFFECTIVELY**

The Chief Officer circulated the most recent leaflets from CCLA, for information. This also included details of the Property Fund. The Chief Officer explained that CCLA offered a level of protection as the funds invested by the Town Council were spread across a number of institutions, which reduced the level of risk in managing the Town Council's reserves.

The Chief Officer noted that there was still a significant amount of money in the Natwest Reserve Account; the Committee should consider other investments. Mark from CCLA could come and speak to Councillors to discuss options, if this was felt to be appropriate. It was agreed that this would be a good idea.

The Chief Officer stated that there were no amendments to the Investment Strategy, but this had been reviewed in line with current priorities. This was approved.

**9. TO RECEIVE A SCHEDULE OF POLICIES THAT ARE TO BE REVIEWED AND DEVELOPED; THIS WILL FORM PART OF THE WORK PROGRAMME FOR THIS COMMITTEE, TO BE TABLED.**

The Chief Officer tabled a list of current policies and their review dates, and development dates for those not currently in existence. This was accepted as part of the workload for this committee.

**10. TO APPROVE STAFFORDSHIRE PENSION FUND CONTRIBUTIONS FOR 2019/20**

**EMPLOYEE CONTRIBUTION:**

| Contribution bandings 2019/20 |              |             |               |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
|                               |              | main scheme | 50/50 section |
| up to                         | £ 14,400.00  | 5.50%       | 2.75%         |
| £ 14,401.00                   | £ 22,500.00  | 5.80%       | 2.90%         |
| £ 22,501.00                   | £ 36,500.00  | 6.50%       | 3.25%         |
| £ 36,501.00                   | £ 46,200.00  | 6.80%       | 3.40%         |
| £ 46,201.00                   | £ 64,600.00  | 8.50%       | 4.25%         |
| £ 64,601.00                   | £ 91,500.00  | 9.90%       | 4.95%         |
| £ 91,501.00                   | £ 107,700.00 | 10.50%      | 5.25%         |
| £ 107,701.00                  | £ 161,500.00 | 11.40%      | 5.70%         |
| £ 161,501.00                  | or more      | 12.50%      | 6.25%         |

**EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION: 24.6%**

It was proposed to accept this by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Davies, and agreed.

## **11. TO CONSIDER THE DEVELOPMENT OF A 2019/20 ACTION PLAN BASED ON KEY THEMES IDENTIFIED IN APRIL 2019**

The Chief Officer noted that themes for 2019/20 had previously been agreed, and asked whether the Committee wished to develop a strategy or to postpone this until the Neighbourhood Plan was approved. That being the case, would an A3 action plan be appropriate, as had been the case in previous years?

It was agreed that the Chief Officer would develop an action plan and present this for consideration at the next Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting.

## **12. ITEM REQUESTED BY CLLR HART- DUE TO INCONSISTENT GRASS CUTTING WITHIN THE TOWN, THE TOWN COUNCIL SHOULD INVESTIGATE THE FEASIBILITY OF A CENTRALISED GRASS CUTTING CONTRACT FOR THE TOWN**

Councillor Hart introduced this item, noting that grass cutting within the town was 'spasmodic'; he had been receiving a lot of complaints. Grass cutting was inconsistent, and the quality of cutting was shambolic, in places. There is no coordination between the District and County Councils. The Town Council grass cutting was being done to an excellent standard. Your Housing are also involved in grass cutting within the town. It would be helpful to find out when cuts took place, who cut where and what the cost is.

Councillor Hart wondered whether the Town Council could facilitate one contract for Biddulph. This would cut down the numerous complaints that were received; 'we could do better'.

Councillor Hall reiterated that the Town Council would need the funds from the other organisations.

Councillor Sheldon felt that if all the grass cutting is in one specification, it would be better for the environment and the town. Councillor Sheldon noted

that Biddulph in Bloom also do some grass cutting; this is very fragmented. The District Council currently mow more than the County Council. The County Council are now saying that the sight lines are the first duty; road safety is the priority not how the verges look. In other areas, other authorities are growing wildflowers in their verges, which are then harvested for bio-fuel.

Councillor Jackson felt that the County Council hadn't operated effectively for some time; it was more obvious this year. He had requested that Your Housing provide information at the coming meeting. Councillor Jackson had also asked Councillor Flunder to look at this; the District Council is the missing part of the jigsaw. The Town Council should investigate who is responsible; this would be a drawn-out affair, and then negotiation would take place.

Councillor Hall noted there were various ways to take this on. Councillor Jackson agreed; the Town Council could issue a contract and monitor this. It was ludicrous that there were so many different timescales; there must be some economies of scale.

Councillor Sheldon noted that Biddulph in Bloom often fill in the gaps where one organisation stops cutting and another starts.

Councillor Yates felt it would be good to have this under control and coordinated by one organisation. There should be more focus on wild flowers, bees, pollinators, etc. This should be accompanied by notices to show what was being done. Councillor Sheldon noted that this would have to be done properly.

Councillor Hall noted that the Committee should be mindful of the workload of Officer, but felt that investigations should be undertaken.

This was proposed by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Davies and agreed.

### **13. APRIL AND MAY BANK RECONCILIATION**

To receive details of the April and May 2019 bank reconciliation.

Documents had been circulated with the agenda. Councillor Davies queried why the VAT remained the same; the Chief Officer noted that VAT was reimbursed quarterly.

This was received.

#### **14. TO CONSIDER MEMBERSHIP OF AN IT WORKING GROUP, DISCUSSED AT THE APRIL FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING**

Councillor Hall noted that it would be beneficial if this Council could move towards paperless activities. Discussions were needed to establish whether there were any efficiencies.

Councillor Davies felt that there should be a cost analysis of working towards reduction of paper.

Councillor Perkin agreed; there is a significant environmental impact of using so much paper. The image of the Town Council is also important; security and remote attendance are also important considerations.

The Chief Officer noted that there were also a number of connectivity issues. The photocopier could not be installed onto the network and the purchase of the new Finance software had required a laptop and wifi connection. The Town Council business is expanding, and the County Council systems have limitations.

Councillor Yates felt that the Town Council should avoid IT duplication with the District Council.

The Chief Officer queried whether a Working Group was required. Councillor Jackson noted that this should be offered to all Councillors.

Councillor Hall noted that the installation of wifi had been passed at the District Council; wifi should be included in the workload of this Group.

Councillor Hart hoped that it could be avoided that Councillors had more than one email address.

Councillors Hall, Perkin, Brady and Davies wished to be part of the Working Group; all Councillors would be invited to attend.

Councillor Sheldon would like instructions when this work was completed.

This was agreed.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Chair to move:-

“That, pursuant to Section 100A(2) and (4) of the Local Government Act, 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting in view of the nature of the business to be transacted or the nature of the proceedings whereby it is likely that confidential information as defined in Section 100A (3) of the Act would be disclosed to the public in breach of the obligation of confidence or exempt information as defined in Section 10 I (1) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act would be disclosed to the public by virtue of the Paragraphs indicated.”

## **CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS**

### **15. TO APPROVE SALARY LEVELS FOLLOWING ANNUAL APPRAISALS, WITH EFFECT FROM 1 JULY 2019:**

- CHIEF OFFICER TO RISE FROM NEW SCP 37 TO 39
- OFFICER TO RISE FROM NEW SCP 25 TO 26
- EVENTS AND PARTNERSHIPS OFFICER TO RISE FROM NEW SCP 14 TO 16, WITH APPROVAL TO CARRY OUT A REVIEW OF THIS ROLE INVOLVING GAUGING SALARY LEVEL

It was agreed that new salary levels would be in place from 1 July 2019.

### **16. GRANTS**

- a) TO CONSIDER THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A TOWN COUNCILLOR GRANTS SCHEME

It was agreed that the sum available should be £250. This process would be formally approved in September.

- b) TO CONSIDER THE ANALYSIS OF 2018/19 GRANT EVALUATIONS

It was agreed to accept the report; any grants allocated to those that had not completed an evaluation would be provisional on condition that this form was received.

- c) TO CONSIDER GRANT APPLICATIONS FOR 2019/20 (paper copies received prior to the meeting)



Grant applications were considered and funds allocated.

The meeting closed at 7.40pm

Signature .....

Date .....