

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 4TH SEPTEMBER, 2018

Present: Councillors S Cudlip (Chair) and R Arthur, E Bell, Mrs J A Bell, Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs K Brace, S P Colborn, D Cummings, Mrs V Cummings, Mrs S Forster, Ms R M Gratton, G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy, D McKenna, Mrs S Pratt, T Shepherd, B Taylor, Miss L Willis.

Apologies: Councillors Mrs B E Allen, K Shaw.

Prior to commencement of the meeting the Chair advised members of this Committee and members of the public that in line with the amendment to 'the public bodies (admission to meetings) act 1960', which came into force in August, 2014, parts of this meeting may be recorded by photographic, video and audio means.

1. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members were reminded prior to the start of the meeting of the need to disclose any interests, prejudicial or personal, in accordance with the Code of Conduct.

2. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 26TH JUNE, 2018

RECOMMENDED the Minutes of this meeting, a copy of which had been previously printed and circulated to each Member, be approved and signed as a correct record by the Chairman.

3. PAYSHEET NUMBER 4 – JULY 2018/19

a) Expenditure – July 2018

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) that all payments in Paysheet Number 4 – 2018/19 be approved, it being noted that the direct debits, Bacs, Online and Debit Card payments including Imprest expenditure amount to £234,331.53 being the total sum authorised under this Paysheet;

A Member queried a payment to Emily's Nurseries and stated that it had been previously agreed that plants would be sourced locally from Shaw Trust. The Acting Town Clerk stated that he would look into this and report this back to the Parks and Events Committee.

A Member queried the costs of the First Aid at the Carnival and felt this to be expensive. It was noted that there has to be a certain number of ambulances and personnel which covers the 3 days of the Carnival weekend which is legislative and has to be provided and that is the costs.

- (ii) that the BACS authorisation sheet be signed by three Members and the credit transfers be actioned immediately; an
- (iii) that the Clerk's Imprest Account be reimbursed the sum of £3,286.00 for Civic Expenditure and authority be granted for this to be signed by the Chairman and Responsible Financial Officer.

b) Income – July 2018

RECOMMENDED the summary sheet showing the range of income received by the Council during the current month be accepted.

c) Bank Balances – July 2018

RECOMMENDED the report of the Finance Officer a copy of which was circulated, be approved.

4. PAYSHEET NUMBER 5 – AUGUST 2018/19

a) Expenditure – August 2018

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) that all payments in Paysheet Number 5 – 2018/19 be approved, it being noted that the direct debits, Bacs, Online and Debit Card payments including Imprest expenditure amount to £103,069.33 being the total sum authorised under this Paysheet;
- (ii) that the BACS authorisation sheet be signed by three Members and the credit transfers be actioned immediately; an
- (iii) that the Clerk's Imprest Account be reimbursed the sum of £1,121.88.00 for Civic Expenditure and authority be granted for this to be signed by the Chairman and Responsible Financial Officer.

b) Income – August 2018

RECOMMENDED the summary sheet showing the range of income received by the Council during the current month be accepted.

c) Bank Balances – August 2018

RECOMMENDED the report of the Finance Officer a copy of which was circulated, be approved.

5. AUDIT REPORTS

a) Internal Audit Report – Civic Expenses Audit

It was noted that the Town Council were given a substantial assurance for this audit.

RECOMMENDED the report of the Internal Auditor be approved.

b) Mayor's Policy

The Chair stated that the Internal Auditor had made proposals for a Mayor's Policy but there was some factual errors contained in the report. The Chair requested that this item be deferred until the Chair and Vice-Chair could meet with the Internal Auditor to discuss this matter further and then report back to this Committee. The Chair noted that the Town Council already have significant controls in place.

A Member stated that the £1k allowance paid to the Mayor at the beginning of the Mayoral term is used for clothes. Most people would not have ball gowns or suits in their everyday wardrobe so these need to be purchased. The Mayor needs to look smart as they are representing the Town. The Member stated that also the Mayor has to use a lot of their own money to purchase raffle prizes and gifts and refreshments throughout the year. It is not cheap being the Mayor.

Within the report it was noted that there is an allowance to be used towards raffles and tickets which is also incorrect. Tickets are included within the Mayors allowance.

A Member questioned whether previous Mayors had handed in receipts for clothing etc. It was noted that the Mayor does not have to provide receipts as they need to keep them for their own records for tax purposes.

The Finance Officer stated that the Internal Auditor had visited another Council who had a Mayors policy and questioned whether Seaham Town Council had one. He is not saying that the Town Council have to have that particular policy it was only a suggestion. A Member stated that if the Auditor is suggesting this then the Town Council should adopt a policy.

A Member requested that as the Chair and Vice-Chair are from the same political party then could there also be a representative from the other party be present at the meeting with the Internal Auditor. It was noted that this wasn't a political meeting but a representative could be nominated to attend.

RECOMMENDED that the Chair, Vice-Chair and member of the Seaham Community Party attend a meeting with the Internal Auditor to discuss this policy further and that they report back to a future Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting.

6. APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS

a) East Durham Community Transport

RECOMMENDED that a grant is not payable to East Durham Community Transport as this is a Peterlee based operation.

b) Seaham Elite ABC

A Member stated that two County Councillors have been asked for money towards the cost of a boxing ring. It was noted that Seaham Elite are looking for alternative accommodation as they don't think that the Co-op Building will be suitable.

It was noted that the Town Council would generally be supportive of an application for grant but requested that Seaham Elite reapply once they have sourced suitable accommodation.

RECOMMENDED that a letter be sent to Seaham Elite ABC asking them to reapply for a grant once they have suitable accommodation.

c) Girl Guiding Seaham Division

It was noted that the Girl Guides Seaham Division had requested a grant of £4,520 to pay for a new roof at Dillon House. Members noted that this was more than the annual budget that the Town Council has for grant donations.

A Member suggested that Officers could signpost the Girl Guides to the AAP where they could apply for a grant.

A Member stated that the lady who runs the Girl Guides does a fantastic job for Seaham and he stated that he felt the Town Council should give the organisation the grant.

Another Member felt that the Town Council should make a contribution and then the AAP may match fund. It was also noted that there are other community groups who offer this type of funding. The Member suggested a contribution of £1000 which was seconded by another Member. A further Member proposed giving the full grant which was also seconded. The Chair then stated a vote would have to take place. Following an incorrect count of votes a recount was requested and the Chair requested that the recount would be a named vote.

Members in favour of paying the full grant of £4,520 – 10 Members, namely Councillors B Taylor, D Cummings, Mrs V Cummings, S Colborn, Mrs K Brace, Miss L Willis, R Arthur, G Hepworth, Mrs S Pratt, Ms R M Gratton.

Members against giving the full grant of £4,520 – 7 Members namely Councillors D McKenna, Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs L Kennedy, E Bell, Mrs J A Bell, T Shepherd, Mrs S Forster.

A Member stated that they would have to look at the Town Council's policy regarding donations and how they deal with individual requests. There is a fixed amount of money in the Council's budget for donations. It was noted that there would be an overspend on the budget donations and this would need to be addressed at the Budget Sub-Committee meeting.

A Member noted that the Girl Guides would not now be able to apply to the Capital Fund now. A further Member questioned whether more than one quote had been requested for the new roof as the Council need to know that they are getting value for money.

RECOMMENDED that a grant donation of £4,520 is made to Girl Guiding Seaham Division of £4,520 for the cost of a new roof at Dillon House.

7. MAYORS CIVIC BALL COSTS

It was noted that this had been included on the agenda as there was false information being circulated in the community via leaflets from Seaham Community Party stating that the Civic Ball costs £20k. The Chair stated that if Councillors have done this then they should apologise to other Councillors and the Town Council and remove these leaflets as they are bringing the Town Council and other Councillors into disrepute and if this has been done by Councillors they need to make assurances that this will never happen again and that all leaflets are destroyed.

The Finance Officers report states that the Civic Ball cost £2,252.29. A cheque was received from Gerlingen of £1,696.93 which the Town Council donated directly to the Mayors Charity Account which has been the case in previous years so that this could be shared amongst the Mayors chosen charities. If this cheque had not been donated to the Mayor's Charity Account the Civic Ball costs would near enough break even.

A Member stated that they will look into this and bring an explanation back to the next meeting.

RECOMMENDED that this item be added to the next Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting.

8. TOWN HALL - CATERING TENDER

The Town Hall Working Party had started work on the tender documents in March of this year and had time lined for the document to be finalised this month. The document has been vetted by the Town Councils Solicitor and the Working Party are seeking approval of the document to start the tendering process. A Member noted that on page 17 of the document the word 'to' has been omitted and should be added.

It was agreed that Officers will contact the Sunderland Echo, post on social media and post around various catering establishments in the town.

All completed tenders will be returned to the Finance Officer.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) the word 'to' should be added to page 17 on the tender document.
- (ii) Members approve the tender documentation and for the tendering process to commence.

9. EXTERNAL AUDITORS NOTIFICATION OF COMPLETION OF THE AUDIT OF THE ANNUAL RETURN FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2017/18

Councillor S Cudlip declared an interest and took no further part in the discussion or voting thereon:

RECOMMENDED that the audit of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return for the year ended 31st March, 2018 be accepted.

10. RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RECOMMENDED in view of the confidential nature of the item to be discussed it was agreed to exclude the Press and Public in accordance with the requirements of the Public Bodies Admissions to Meetings Act 1961.

11. APPOINTMENT OF TOWN CLERK

A report from the Appointments Panel was shared with the meeting. The Chair apologised to Councillor Mrs K Brace who was not named on the report but who was part of the original Appointments Panel but could not attend the interviews due to being on holiday.

The Chair informed Members that the position of Town Clerk had been offered and the contract was currently being drawn up by Durham County Council. A letter of offer will need to be sent and signed by the Mayor so the candidate can hand in their notice to their current employer. They currently have a 3 month notice period but the candidate did say they would try and negotiate this with their current employer.

A Member stated that the Appointments Panel should be thanked

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information and accept the report from the Appointments Panel.

12. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDED that there are no press opportunities from this meeting.