

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 30TH OCTOBER, 2018

Present: Councillors S Cudlip (Chair) and R Arthur, E Bell, Mrs J A Bell, S P Colborn, Mrs S Forster, G N Hepworth, Mrs L Kennedy, B Taylor, R Whitehead,

Apologies: Councillors Mrs B E Allen, Mrs G Bleasdale, Mrs K Brace, D Cummings, Mrs V Cummings, Ms R M Gratton, D McKenna, Mrs S Pratt, K Shaw, Miss L Willis.

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 2nd OCTOBER, 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 – OCTOBER 2018/19

a) Expenditure – October 2018

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) that all payments in Paysheet Number 7 – 2018/19 be approved, it being noted that the direct debits, Bacs, Online and Debit Card payments including Imprest expenditure amount to £201,336.23 being the total sum authorised under this Paysheet;

A Member raised a query regarding a payment to the Travel Weekly Magazine. The Finance Officer stated that this was for the advertisement for the Town Hall Catering Contract for expressions of interest.

- (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 £1,772.00 for Civic Expenditure and authority be granted for this to be signed by the Chairman and Responsible Financial Officer.

b) Income – October 2018

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

c) Bank Balances – October 2018

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

4. APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS

a) Great North Air Ambulance Service

A Member stated that the Town Council should support this application but unfortunately there is no money left in the budget due to the whole budget being given to one organisation. Another Member stated that it is an unfortunate position regarding the budget but stated that the Town Council should still support various charities that apply. It was noted that the Town Clerk is currently working on a Grants Policy which will be taken to a future meeting for discussion.

A further Member stated that the Town Council should also not make rash decisions about spending money on Big Screens for sporting events.

RECOMMENDED that a grant of £500 be approved for the Great North Air Ambulance Service.

5. AUDIT REPORTS

a) Internal Audit Report – Allotments – Full Assurance

RECOMMENDED the report of the Internal Auditor be approved.

b) Audit Report – Events (Catering Arrangements – Substantial Assurance

RECOMMENDED the report of the Internal Auditor be approved.

6. MAYORS CIVIC BALL COSTS

A Member stated that there are three major errors within the Seaham Community Party leaflet which has been distributed recently to residents in the Denehouse Road area by two Members who are members of the Budget Sub-Committee and the Dawdon Working Party.

The first error is regarding the Civic Ball costs and Member expenses relating to £20k and the leaflet then also references to £14k for the cost of the Civic Ball. A Member stated that those figures are false statements. There is also reference made to spends of £7.7k on Councillors cars and mobile phones. It was discussed at the recent Budget Sub-Committee that there are only three Officers who have mobile phones and these amounts are limited to £20 per month. Any Councillor using their own car for Town Council business can claim mileage but this is strictly controlled.

The leaflet also states that there is a proposed £1 million spend on the renovation works at Dawdon Park on the pavilions along with a £26k per annum loan repayment. This is also a false statement as there is no loan and it is known by both Members that the maximum spend is hoped to be around £500k. A Member stated that the leaflet doesn't say £20k just for the Mayors Ball.

A Member stated that the Town Council have a media policy which states about controlling false statements by Councillors. The two Councillors concerned are responsible for distributing this literature where there are three areas which are untrue. This is misrepresenting yourselves, the Town Council and other Councillors and it is regrettable that reference has to be made to this.

A County Councillor mentioned that within the leaflet it mentions that there are six County Councillors who cannot account for where money has gone. The AAP keep records of County Councillors spending and he noted that he was at a loss to understand this narrative in the leaflet.

A Member raised the issue that a pre-election Labour Party Leaflet stated that someone in the Seaham Community Party had been accused of benefit fraud and wanted to know who they were referring to.

The two Members concerned were asked if they accepted that the three issues raised from the leaflet were false. Both Members did not accept this. A Member stated that as the two Members did not agree to this he then asked all Members if they were happy for this to be raised as a formal complaint. A Member stated to take it to the relevant authorities but there will also be a counter complaint raised from Seaham Community Party as they are still being approached by members of the public asking questions about who was accused of benefit fraud.

A Member questioned the Media Policy and asked whether this was because the two people concerned were bringing the Town Council into disrepute and asked about Members who had gone onto Social Media complaining about the elected Mayor and noted that the Policy cannot be used as and when it suits people to do so.

A Member stated that this discussion was regarding the current leaflet which is being distributed only and asked if this could stop being distributed and that the statements made within the leaflet are amended.

Another Member stated that the leaflets were re-distributed due to public comments made that the Seaham Community Party were going to have Hawthorn Square knocked down, that they would get rid of the Mayor and other things which were untrue. Another Member asked if he could make a point. The Chair stated he could if he stuck to the leaflet.

The Member stated that personally he would discontinue putting out the Seaham Community Party leaflet if the three line statements on Facebook on the Easington Constituency Labour Party site about Seaham Town Council and how Seaham Community Party would sabotage the Dawdon Welfare Park refurbishment are taken down along with other statements put out by the Labour Group as no one has been charged with benefit fraud from Seaham Community Party who is on the Town Council and all of the other issues involved in this. If you want tit for tat we will give you tit for tat. The Chair stated that Members should refrain from mentioning that again and as Chair of this meeting he would not accept any more information like that on that particular item.

A Member asked again if this leaflet would still be distributed to residents in the town to which one Member stated that it would be.

A Member questioned whether anyone had spoken to the Finance Officer to obtain the correct figures. A Member stated that the figures they had were given to them by the former Town Clerk prior to the election.

A Member stated that there is a policy in place and this issue needs to be investigated to see if there has been any breaches made and should be referred to the Monitoring Officer. The leaflet had been re-distributed as a new document rather than a pre-election document. Another Member stated that he maintained that it was still a good leaflet.

It was agreed and seconded that the leaflet should be referred to the Monitoring Officer for investigation.

A Member stated that he took issue with the pre-election Labour Party leaflet and felt this should also be investigated. A vote was held for the Labour Party Leaflet to be reinvestigated:

For: 4

Against: 6

A resolution was made for the re-distribution of the Seaham Community Party Leaflet to be investigated by the Monitoring Officer:

For: 6

Against: 4

RECOMMENDED that the Seaham Community Party Leaflet is investigated by the Monitoring Officer.

7. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDED that there are no press opportunities from this meeting.