

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 7<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER, 2014**

Present: Councillor Mrs S Forster (Presiding)  
and Councillors B Allen, B E Allen,  
M R Baird, E Bell, Mrs J Bell,  
Mrs G Bleasdale, B. Burn (Snr),  
B Burn (Jnr), R Meir, Miss S Morrison,  
K Shaw, C Snowball, B Taylor  
R Whitehead and K Younger

Observers: Ms W Berry, Ms J Brennan

Apologies: Councillors Mrs H Cahill, S Cudlip, I Paul

**1. SEAHAM TOWN HALL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT VIDEO**

Prior to commencing the business of the meeting a short video montage presentation produced by the Deputy Town Clerk was viewed which highlighted the significant improvements which this project has made to a virtually derelict building reinventing it into Seaham Town Hall, a premier community facility for the benefit of the Town for generations to come. The Chair acknowledged the scale of the achievement and the commitment of all concerned.

**2. 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.

**3. MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 9<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, 2014**

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.

**4. RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RECOMMENDED in view of the confidential nature of all the items to be discussed at this meeting, the formal resolution be hereby passed to exclude the press and public from the meeting pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act, 1961.

**5. SEAHAM TOWN HALL CONSTRUCTION PROJECT**

The Chair welcomed to the meeting the architect for the project, Mr John Elves and Mr Pete Tighe, Quantity Surveyor/Construction Law Expert from PTM LLP who were in attendance to inform Councillors on the current status of the project, the final account and to answer any questions. The Chair also welcomed the Town Council's Internal Auditor, Mr Gordon Fletcher who was also in attendance to answer queries previously raised by Members relating to his recent report on the

project. Mr Elves began by thanking the Deputy Town Clerk for producing the recently viewed video. He highlighted the difficulties experienced during the project and various reasons for delay. He indicated that the building is now practically complete with only snagging items left to deal with by the contractor.

Mr Tighe introduced himself and gave a brief history of his involvement in the project since late 2013/early 2014. He had been commissioned to review the finances and contractual procedures of the project. At present a difference of opinion exists between what the contractor values the final account to be and what Mr Tighe has valued the work completed. All Members had been provided with a copy of a letter received by the Town Council from the contractor which contained a without prejudice offer to resolve the issue in order to prevent legal action. In discussion Members recognised the difficulties experienced over many months by Mr Tighe in unsuccessfully trying to obtain relevant detailed information from the contractor and they requested clarification from Mr Tighe on a number of technicalities with regard to the contract and how it had been managed. Members acknowledged that there had been very difficult aspects of the contract to manage and that Mr Elves had worked to the best of his ability under very difficult and challenging conditions in order to deliver the Town Hall. Members agreed that it may be necessary to go to adjudication in order to resolve the potential dispute over the contract final account. Members also expressed a need for all additionally claimed costs to be suitably evidenced prior to payment and agreed that Mr Tighe should respond to the letter requesting the relevant information. At this point Mr Elves and Mr Tighe left the meeting.

It was mentioned that there had been concerns raised with regard to the recent audit report and Mr G Fletcher the Internal Auditor was in attendance to respond to those concerns. Mr G Fletcher gave a brief overview of the work completed and gave justification for his approach to the issue. He explained who he had spoken to and who he had not spoken to and why. He reiterated his findings and concerns with regard to non provision of key information by the contractor which he saw as a fundamental problem. In discussion, Members gave consideration to a number of questions raised with regard to the work conducted and agreed that it would be beneficial for the Town Hall Working Party to look at the issues experienced during this project in order to make recommendations based on lessons learned.

At this stage the Chair thanked Mr G Fletcher and the members of the public who had withdrew from the meeting for this item were invited back into the meeting.

**RECOMMENDED:**

- i) The Council note the information provided and accept the responses provided as final answers to all questions previously raised;
- ii) Mr P Tighe be authorised to respond to the contractor in line with Members instructions;
- iii) The Council be prepared to defend itself accordingly with regard to any potential dispute with the contractor.

**6. AUDIT ISSUES**

**a) Internal Audit Report-Risk Management**

The Committee considered the findings of the Internal Auditor in relation to the work undertaken in examining the Town Council's Risk Management arrangements, a copy of which had been previously circulated.

RECOMMENDED the Council accept the report.

**7. PAYSHEET NUMBER 6 - 2014/2015**

**a) Expenditure**

RECOMMENDED:

- (i) that all payments in Paysheet Number 6 – 2014/2015 be approved, it being noted that the direct debits, BACS, cheques, debit card and online payments also including Imprest expenditure amount to £155,343.56 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;
- (iii) that the cheques relating to suppliers not being paid by BACS be signed by three Members and the payments be released immediately; and
- (iv) that the Clerk's Imprest Account be reimbursed the sum of £1,998.91 for Civic Expenditure, and authority be granted for this to be signed by the Chairman and Responsible Financial Officer.

**b) Income**

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

**8. BANK BALANCES**

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

**9. APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS**

**a) Durham Miners' Association**

Prior to the consideration of this item, Councillor R Meir declared an interest and took no part in the discussion or voting thereon.

The Committee considered correspondence from the Durham Miners' Association on behalf of the Boldon Colliery Miners' Community Banner Group offering the Town Council the opportunity to purchase a new book written by Dave Temple entitled "Boldon Colliery – A Proud Heritage". In discussion Members decided not to purchase a copy.

RECOMMENDED the Council do not purchase a copy of the new book.

**b) The Great North Air Ambulance Service**

The Committee considered an application from the Great North Air Ambulance Service who sought a grant towards their continuing costs in the operation of this very important service.

RECOMMENDED that a donation of £100 be given to this organisation in recognition of the work the organisation carries out.

**c) Murton Theatre Group**

The Committee considered an application from the above organisation who sought support in the form of an advertisement in the programme for their production of 'Hello Dolly' which is to be performed at Peterlee East Durham College in October, 2014.

RECOMMENDED the Murton Theatre Group is advised that the Council is unable to offer a grant on this occasion.

**10. PROVISION OF REFRESHMENTS**

RECOMMENDED the Council note the information now reported.

**11. VISIT COUNTY DURHAM INDUSTRY CONFERENCE 2014**

The Committee considered details of the half day conference to be held in Chester-le-Street on Tuesday, 4th November, 2014.

RECOMMENDED the next two Councillors from the appropriate rota be authorised to attend this event as the Council's representatives, and such attendance rank as an approved duty for payment of appropriate allowances; the bookings would not be made until places were confirmed by Members wishing to attend.

**12. PRESS OPPORTUNITIES**

After consideration the Committee decided that no item from the meeting presented a press opportunity.