

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 9th FEBRUARY, 2021

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

Apologies: Mrs L Kennedy.

Officers: P Fletcher (Deputy Town Clerk)
Mrs J Knight (Finance Officer),
Miss A Rountree (Minute Taker).

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.

F14/21 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. Such interests must be submitted to the Town Clerk prior to the meeting.

F15/21 ACCEPTANCE OF AMENDMENT

RECOMMENDED that Members accept the amendment to the standing orders to incorporate the new regulations from the Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings (England and Wales) Regulations 2020, to conduct virtual Council meetings.

F16/21 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 12TH JANUARY, 2021

RECOMMENDED that the minutes of the last meeting were agreed at the last Full Council meeting held on 26th January, 2021 and were signed by the Chairman as a true record.

F17/21 PAYSHEET NUMBER 10 – JANUARY 2021

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) Paysheet 10-January 21 the expenditure being £180,952.95 was noted and Members endorsed the action taken.
- (ii) Members note the income received into the Councils bank account.

- (iii) Members note the information provided regarding the bank balances held by the Council at the month end.

F18/21 **APPLICATIONS FOR GRANTS**

a) Great North Air Ambulance

Members discussed a grant application received from the Great North Air Ambulance of £200.00 towards the cost of being able to continue to deliver their life saving care. A Member proposed that a grant of £400 is given and this was seconded. A further Member stated that the Great Air Ambulance had requested £200 and the Town Council should donate that amount. This item then went to a vote.

To award a £400 grant – 8 votes

To award a £200 grant – 6 votes

It was therefore agreed that a grant donation of £400 be awarded.

RECOMMENDED that a grant of £400.00 be awarded to the Great North Air Ambulance towards the cost of the service being able to continue to deliver their life saving care.

F19/21 **QUARTERLY BUDGET**

The Finance Officer stated that the Town Council had made savings over the last year regarding the cancellation of events, however the Town Council had also lost a lot of income and there would be approximately £20k surplus at year end.

A Member questioned whether this information had been relayed to the public as this was agreed at a previous meeting. The Finance Officer noted that there was going to be an article placed in the Seaham Today magazine, however she wished to discuss the magazine article further in the meeting as this was an agenda item.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

F20/21 **ANNUAL REVIEW AND AUDIT OF RISK ASSESSMENTS**

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

F21/21 **AUDIT REPORTS**

a) Budget Setting/Monitoring – Full Assurance

A Member congratulated staff on receiving a Full Assurance.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

b) Corporate Governance – Full Assurance

A Member raised a point regarding due diligence which he was referring to the leases for the café and the Town Hall Catering contracts and felt that these matters should be brought to the attention of the Internal Auditor.

Members agreed to discuss this item further on the agenda.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information provided.

F22/21 INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN

The Finance Officer stated that 4 items for audit were on hold until next year due to the current pandemic.

RECOMMENDED that Members note the information.

F23/21 RESOLUTION TO EXCLUDE THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

RECOMMENDED in view of the confidential nature of the following items which relate to issues of a commercially sensitive and confidential nature Members agreed to pass the formal resolution to exclude the press and public from the meeting pursuant to the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act, 1960.

F24/21 DUE DILIGENCE

Following on from the earlier discussion in the meeting the Deputy Town Clerk stated that he would be happy to contact the Internal Auditor regarding the two issues of the café lease and the Ramside contract.

A Member noted that it has been well documented that the contractors were operating prior to the contracts being finalised and requested that the Internal Auditor provides a report with recommendations to prevent the same mistakes occurring in the future.

RECOMMENDED that the Finance Officer contacts the Internal Auditor to provide a report regarding the contracts for the café and the catering contracts.

F25/21 STAFF TRAINING

Members were informed that a member of the administration team had requested to apply for a training course and was seeking Council approval.

RECOMMENDED that the training course be approved.

F26/21 CAFÉ LEASE

The Finance Officer stated that the tenant has responded to the Town Council's Solicitor and has requested a cap of £200 per month for the electricity bills for the cafe. Within the contract it states that this will be free for the first 6 months and the tenant has only operated for 2 months to date due to the current pandemic. The Finance Officer requested that the 4 months unused time be extended once the café can reopen and then she will review the costs of the electricity.

A Member questioned whether there had been any correspondence with Ramside Catering regarding a plan to move forward with bookings once it was safe to do so. The Deputy Town Clerk noted that this had not taken place as at a previous meeting it was noted that the Town Council were not moving forward with any plans to reopen the Town Hall at present.

Members felt that it would be beneficial to open discussions with the Ramside and to start preparing a recovery plan.

The Finance Officer stated that Officers can contact the Ramside's representative who deals with the Town Hall bookings to see what ideas the Ramside have and also to look at risk assessments. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that a zoom meeting could be arranged.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) the first 4 months once the café has reopened the electricity will be included in the rent and then charged from this period onwards at a cap of £200. The Finance Officer will review the costs and report back to the Town Hall Working Party.
- (ii) Officers to contact Ramside Catering to arrange a zoom meeting to discuss a recovery plan going forward.

F27/21

SEAHAM TODAY MAGAZINE

Members were provided with a report outlining the costs to the Town Council and also what the income for the publisher is in relation to advertising fees.

The Finance Officer stated that the magazine is currently published 4 times per year and suggested that this could be reduced to twice per year to reduce the costs.

Following discussions, it was also suggested that this maybe something that the Town Council could produce themselves internally. A Member questioned how much it would cost for the Town Council to produce the magazine. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that Officers could provide this information as the Town Council had previously produced their own magazine.

It was also suggested that the February/March edition be cancelled as there was not much information to provide at this current time.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) Officers to provide Members with the costs to produce the magazine internally and bring this back to a future meeting.
- (ii) The February/March edition of the magazine to be cancelled.

F28/21

STATIONERY FOR HOME SCHOOLING

The Deputy Town Clerk stated that he had posted on Social Media and the Councils website to request support for the above from local businesses but unfortunately had not received any responses.

The Deputy Town Clerk suggested that the Town Council donate the value of £500 worth of stationery to Seaham Youth & Community Centre and Dawdon Community Centre who could distribute the stationery to families in need.

A Member felt that this was an appropriate suggestion but noted that the children could potentially return to school following the half term holiday this month. Members agreed to wait for the outcome of the Government announcement and agreed that if the children do not return after half term then the £500 worth of stationery will be provided to both community centres for distribution.

A Member stated that at a previous meeting it was agreed that Officers would contact local businesses directly to request financial support to assist with this matter. The Deputy Town Clerk stated that he had requested support via social media but would email businesses directly in the area to see if they can offer any support.

RECOMMENDED that:

- (i) If following the half term holiday, the school children are to remain at home, Officers to purchase £500 of stationery for both Seaham and Dawdon Youth & Community Centres to distribute to families in need.
- (ii) Officers to contact local businesses directly to see if they are able to offer any financial support to purchase stationery for local school children.

F29/21

PRESS OPPORTUNITIES

RECOMMENDED that there were no press opportunities arising from this meeting.