

St Austell Town Council




To: All Members of the Staffing Committee

Dear Councillor

You are summoned to attend a **Remote Meeting of the Staffing Committee** to be held using **Zoom** on **Friday 22nd January 2021** at **9.30am**.

Due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, Members of the public are entitled to join the meeting for items 1 – 6 only



David Pooley
Town Clerk

18th January 2021

Tel 01726 829859
e-mail: david.pooley@staustell-tc.gov.uk
Website: www.staustell-tc.gov.uk

AGENDA

1. Apologies for Absence

2. Declarations of Interest

(Purpose: To receive declarations of disclosable pecuniary and other non-registerable interests in respect of items on this agenda).

3. Minutes of meeting held on 7th August 2020

(Purpose: To agree that the minutes of the above meeting be signed as a correct record).

**Pages
1 to 6**

4. Matters to note

A verbal update from the Town Clerk on the actions taken since the last meeting.

Note: No decision may be made under this agenda item.

5. National Pay Negotiations

(Purpose: To receive an update on the national pay negotiations for the year commencing 1st April 2021). (Verbal update).

6. Rural Market Towns Group (RMTG)

**Pages
7 to 10**

(Purpose: To consider appointing the Town Clerk to an Officer Steering Group of the Rural Market Towns Group).

7. To consider excluding the press and public.

Under Section 1 (2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, it is proposed that, because of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the business specified for the following item:

Items 8-9 are confidential because they contain sensitive staffing information.

8. Update on Staffing Matters

**Pages
11 to 16**

(Purpose: To update members on a number of staffing matters and changes since the last meeting). (Report attached).

9. Staff Sickness Absence

**Pages
17 to 18**

(Purpose: To provide Members with details of staff sickness absences for the period 1st April 2020 to 18 January 2021). (Report attached).

10. Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed.

MINUTES of a REMOTE MEETING of the ST AUSTELL TOWN COUNCIL STAFFING COMMITTEE held on FRIDAY 7th AUGUST 2020 at 9.00am.

Present:

Councillors: Bull, French, Lanxon, Palmer and Styles (Chair).

In attendance:

David Pooley (Town Clerk), Sara Gwilliams (Deputy Town Clerk).

S/19/12) Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jones.

Councillor Bull advised that she needed to leave the meeting within an hour

S/19/13) Declarations of Interest

The Town Clerk declared an interest in minute number S/19/08 and Agenda Item 8 (Staff Development Reviews).

The Deputy Town Clerk declared an interest in minute number S/19/08 and Agenda Item 8 (Staff Development Reviews).

S/19/14) Minutes of meeting held on the 28th June 2019

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Staffing Committee held on Monday 28th June 2019 should be approved and signed as a correct record.

Councillor French abstained from voting on this item as he was not present at the meeting

S/19/15) Matters to Note

The Town Clerk advised that he had nothing further to add.

S/19/16) National Pay Negotiations

The Town Clerk advised that the National Pay Negotiations are progressing and that the National Employers have offered an increase of 2.75% on all pay points which will probably be the final offer. He added that he had provided for a 2.5% pay increase during the budget setting round, backdated to April.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

S/19/17) To consider excluding the press and public

It was **RESOLVED** that under Section 1 (ii) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting for the remainder of the business of the meeting in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

S/19/18) Staffing Review

The Town Clerk advised that although the loss of income due to Covid19 is worrying, the Council's budget is not as concerning as first thought due to the income received through the Government's furlough scheme and the announcement from Cornwall Council that they may be able to offer hardship assistance to qualifying Town and Parish Councils later in the autumn. He added that until all the details are known, a cautious approach is being taken with regard to staffing levels.

Management and Administration

The Community Projects Officer and Mayor's Secretary/Administrative Assistant were both furloughed with effect from the 24th March 2020 until 15th June 2020. The Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Operations Manager remained working albeit from home.

The Town Clerk advised that the Community Projects Officer had resigned during the furlough period due to personal reasons which had resulted in staff budget savings. He added that as most funding streams are geared towards Covid19 initiatives at the present time and under Government guidelines no community initiatives are allowed to take place, he recommended that this post be frozen until the end of the year.

The Mayor's Secretary/Administrative Assistant came back to work on the 15th June 2020 and is working well.

Grounds Maintenance

The Town Clerk explained that just before lockdown, a Grounds Maintenance (Waste) Operative was recruited on a 1 month temporary basis. This position was terminated after the one month, which coincided with lockdown, due to budgetary and operational concerns.

The waste function is currently carried out by a contractor Monday, Wednesday and Friday which suggests that a full-time waste operative is not necessary. It is suggested that the post is frozen until the year end at which time consideration should be given to advertising for a grounds maintenance operative who would be required to carry out waste duties as well as general grounds maintenance work.

All grounds maintenance staff were furloughed with effect from 24th March 2020 and returned on a phased basis, with a full complement of staff back working during the week commencing 18th May 2020.

In order to keep the essential services such as grass cutting going when the risk from Covid19 was at its most stressful, two grounds maintenance staff were brought back to work during the week commencing 20th April 2020. An honorarium was suggested for both members of staff by way of recognition of their loyalty at a very difficult time.

The Clerk advised that he is mindful of the need to plan for the future and that now might be a good time to take on another Apprentice(s) to help with resource issues and assist with succession planning. He added that SABEF has indicated in the past that they might be able to assist with the funding of an Apprentice and the Government has recently announced incentives to employers to take on

Apprenticeships. The Clerk advised that he would like to consider the opportunities available, speak to the Grounds Maintenance staff about their capacity for taking on one or two Apprentices and then bring a report back to the Staffing Committee to consider.

Members raised the following:

- Support for training an Apprentice(s);
- The need to budget for the retention of an Apprentice(s) after their training should they be suitable;
- Support for an honorarium to be paid to postholders TC7 and TC18 by way of a gesture of appreciation for their work during lockdown.

It was **RESOLVED** that:

1. The post of Community Projects Officer (TC19) be frozen until the financial year end;
2. The post of Grounds Maintenance (Waste) Operative (TC21) be frozen until the calendar year end;
3. Postholders TC7 and TC18 be paid an honorarium of £350 each as a gesture of appreciation for working through a difficult and stressful time whilst colleagues were furloughed;
4. The Town Clerk explore funding sources and operational arrangements for employing either one or two Grounds Maintenance Apprentices.

Library

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the library staff were all furloughed during lockdown and that they are now all back at work, working reduced hours under the Government's Flexible Furlough Scheme operating a "click and collect" service. Future phases of opening the library service are being explored with Cornwall Council, which includes the gradual opening of the computer suite.

Members expressed their gratitude to the Senior Library Assistant and the Deputy Clerk for their excellent management of the library during the pandemic.

Councillor Lanxon arrived in the meeting

The Town Clerk reiterated his interest and left the meeting

*The Deputy Town Clerk reiterated her interest and left the meeting***

Councillor Bull left during the next item

S/19/19) Staff Development Reviews

The Committee reviewed the Staff Development Reviews for the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and Operations Manager. They particularly thanked the Town Clerk for his excellent performance during Covid 19, the Deputy Town Clerk's management of the library and the Operations Manager's operation of the grounds maintenance service during the pandemic. The need to continue to build relationships with Cornwall Council and professional training opportunities were noted.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the regrading of postholders TC2 and TC3 from spinal column point 30 to spinal column point 31 with effect from 1st August 2020.

The Town Clerk returned to the meeting

The Deputy Town Clerk returned to the meeting

S/19/20) Staff Sickness Absence

The Deputy Town Clerk outlined the sickness absences for all members of staff and explained the background to the high level of sickness shown for two members of staff.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report.

S/19/21) Pension Fund Discretions

The Clerk explained that it was good practice to review the Pension Fund Discretions regularly and explained each discretion identified by Cornwall Council.

It was **RESOLVED** that the following approaches to the discretions identified by Cornwall Council are confirmed:

- i. Shared Cost Additional Voluntary Contributions (AVC). *St Austell Town Council will not contribute to an employee's AVC.*
- ii. Early Payment of Retirement Benefits – Waving Actuarial Reduction. *St Austell Town Council will only allow the waving of actuarial reductions for early retirements where it is deemed to be in the interests of the employer both financially and operationally.*
- iii. Early Payment of Retirement Benefits between aged 55 and 60 – transitional provisions regulations. *St Austell Town Council will not "switch on" the 85 year rule for early retirement.*
- iv. Early Retirement on Compassionate Grounds. *St Austell Town Council will not permit early retirement on compassionate grounds.*
- v. Flexible Retirement. *St Austell Town Council will only permit flexible retirement where it can demonstrate that it is in the interest of the employer both financially and operationally. Similarly, it will consider waiving any actuarial reduction only where it can be demonstrated that it is in the interest of the employer.*
- vi. Increase of Pension by Employer. *St Austell Town Council will allow employees made redundant to have the option of converting any compensation payment in to additional pension. The Council will not purchase additional pension under any other circumstances.*
- vii. Transfer of Service into the LGPS. *St Austell Town Council will not extend the 12-month time limit for employees to request Cornwall Pension fund to investigate the option of transferring any pension benefits from previous employments into the Cornwall Pension Fund.*

- viii. . Deadline to elect for a shared cost APC after unpaid leave. *St Austell Town Council will not extend the 30 day deadline for a member to elect for a shared cost APC upon return from a period of absence from work with permission with no pensionable pay (otherwise than because of illness or injury, relevant child-related leave or reserve force service leave).*

It was further **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be designated as the person who will receive and deal with stage 1 formal complaints under the Internal Dispute Resolution Procedure (IDRP) for pension matters.

S/19/22) Date of Next Meeting

To be confirmed.

The meeting closed at 10.37am.

From: David Inman <david.inman@sparse.gov.uk>
Sent: 29 December 2020 16:33
To: David Pooley
Subject: Rural Market Towns Group - An Officer Steering Group. A PERSONAL INVITATION

Dear David,

Many thanks for showing interest in the **Rural/Market Town Group (RMTG)**.

We have recently reached 150 members and the number of town and larger parish councils coming forward to join has been strong and has exceeded our expectations. We are glad that the first meetings held in November this year (one for councillor representatives and one for clerks) have also been well attended.

However, we recognise we will need a consistency of assistance from people who are involved directly with local councils to ensure this grouping is as successful as we would all like it to be. Meetings with a general Clerks Advisory Panel from across the whole RMTG membership will continue to be helpful and we certainly want to keep going with that forum, to which as shown we can attract up to 50 Clerks. However, it would also be good to intersperse that forum with work from a smaller, tighter, inner group able to tackle the 'nitty gritty areas' and ensure consistency. These are areas a large meeting simply cannot cover.

We feel having an input from this tighter RMTG Officer Steering Group would help to ensure that up to date and relevant topics are discussed that benefit members. We are therefore writing to 18 Rural Market Town Group Clerks from across section of locations across England, including of course St Austell, and who also constitute a cross section of size of local council, with a view to forming such an Officer Steering Group. We would like to use this group as a sounding forum to take officer's opinions on our work as we move forward and to also to keep a stream of current issues continually flowing.

It might be helpful to indicate the way we are currently thinking:-

At the Councillor Representative meeting the suggestion was made that we constitute a process where RMTG members could share views with each other on issues or maybe exchange best practice. We agree with this thought and we are investigating practicalities and the costs of that but this is definitely something we would like to tackle in one way or another. We will discuss with the proposed Rural Market Town Officer Steering Group how best to create a process so that we can have easy inter discussion across the Group.

We recognise that you will not exactly be looking for extra work, so if you were inclined to join up for this venture, we would seek to keep your input within reasonable bounds. Just so you are aware what we would be asking of you, **please see a list of suggestions of what this group could cover below**. Please note that we would always welcome input from yourselves as well as relevant colleagues from your council.

- **Best Practice**

We feel the Group can assist all its members by the establishment of an active role in facilitating a Rural/Market Town best practise sharing. In our experience that process won't necessarily happen or happen consistently unless that forum is 'assisted'. We would hope

that Steering Group members could play a role starting threads from time to time and maybe inputting occasionally to keep the threads flowing

- **Sharing Concerns**

It is of course the other half to the Best Practice equation. We think the role here for involved Clerks might simply be one of keeping a watchful eye out for areas where the Group might like to consider issues that may be of common concern. From time-to-time Group members might like to contemplate whether or not to commence a thread here with a view to seeing if the topic concerned is picked as being common concern by others.

- **Providing Local Council Experience**

We must confess that none of the RSN Officer team have particular recent experience of operation at Local Council level. Having an Officer Steering Group for local councils will therefore considerably assist the RMTG operation and its targeted service.

- **A Revitalising Rural Role**

We anticipate that the Revitalising Rural campaign and document will be an evolving document in need of constant revision and updating, to ensure it is 'current'. While not all areas will be of particular local council interest there will be areas that a group of clerks acting as a sounding board can very clearly assist. This will be of considerable value to the Rural Market Town Group and the RSN argument as a whole.

- **Overview Consultation**

Having a group from which we can take the temperature about how RMTG is operating and from which we will be able to test out thoughts will be of clear value.

- **Surveys**

In keeping the Revitalising Rural documents current it is important that through surveys, polls and consultations, we seek to harness the consensus view from the various groups within the RSN (and across those Groups). To have a group like this where we would be more likely to achieve a higher rate of participation would be really useful to us. The surveys will be short and straightforward, sent directly to you via email (via Survey Monkey).

It's probably best we make the point clear from the outset that RSN as an advocacy group working to ensure that rural areas get proper service consideration we do not seek to be taking any 'side' on any conflict areas between local government tiers or their respective actions, however well-intentioned the comments might be. Within our Principal Council Membership, we do not take a position in supporting County or Unitary Councils in anything which would be detrimental to the interest of District/Boroughs (or vice-versa). Maintaining a rural argument with Government and its Agencies will always involve spanning these tiers and that means we always remain neutral. Indeed, it would be impossible for us to run a membership organisation (which is based on subscription) were we to operate otherwise. We will have to apply the same ground rules for the RMTG.

RSN undertake 9 free to members seminars annually (held virtually). We have a growing reputation for these events. These seminars are spread across a range of rural topics. Numbers allowing, you are entitled to attend as many of these as you wish from their advertisement in the Bulletin – the 2021 programme is in the events section of the website if you want to put the dates in your diaries. However, as a thank you if you choose to be involved, we will ensure that you get specific notification of when bookings can be made for the three seminars chosen by your grouping as the most allied to town council work and we will be giving you some priority within the RMTG Group and therefore return value for assisting us.

For your information, please see the list of RMTG members also approached to join the Rural Market Town Officer Steering Group:

Alnwick Town Council (North East), Bicester Town Council (South East) Bridport Town Council (South West) Buckingham Town Council (South East), Caistor Town Council (East Midlands), Cirencester Town Council (South West) ,Corsham Town Council (South West), Early Town Council (North West), Faringdon Town Council (South East) Halstead Town Council (North West) Newport Town Council (West Midlands), Penrith Town Council (North West), Penrith

(North West), Saxmundham, Uttoxeter Town Council (West Midlands), Westerham Town Council (South East), Wisbech Town Council (South East).

Thank you for your consideration of this. We very much hope this invitation will be of interest to you. It would be helpful if you could let me know reasonably early on whether this is something you might be willing to contemplate and therefore run over your council in some way, or whether it's something you don't want to contemplate at all!

If you consider a phone conversation would assist you at all please feel free to ring me.

We look forward to hearing back from you on this one.

Kindest regards,

David

David Inman
Director
Rural Services Network
Twitter @RSNonline
Email: david.inman@sparse.gov.uk
Mob: 07792 106 133
Tel: 01822 614530 (Home)

The Rural Services Network seeks to provide a voice for rural communities by representing rural services, networking between rural service organisations and establishing and broadcasting best practice in rural service provision. It comprises SPARSE Rural, the Rural Assembly, the wider Rural Services Partnership and the RSN Community Group. The organisation works with Rural England, a stand-alone CIC research group.

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