

MINUTES of a REMOTE MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 9th NOVEMBER 2020 at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Bishop, Brown, Cohen, Jones, Lanxon, Oxenham, Palmer, Styles (Mayor) and Walker.

Also Present: Councillors Bull and Pearce.

In attendance: David Pooley (Town Clerk), Sara Gwilliams (Deputy Town Clerk).

F/19/94) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Colwill, French and Rees.

Councillors Palmer and Walker both advised that they needed to leave the meeting early

F/19/95) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

F/19/96) Dispensations

There were no requests for dispensations.

F/19/97) Minutes of meeting held on 21st September 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 21st September 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/19/98) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that he had nothing to add.

F/19/99) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/19/100) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk referred Members to the Budget Monitoring Report for the half year from 1st April 2020 to 30th September 2020 and drew Members' attention to the following:

- Car Park income £82,000 below budget
- Library and toilet income both below budget
- Other grant income £64,000 (£8,000, Section 106 and £55,000 Job Retention Scheme)

It was noted that the additional income had reduced the overall deficit by £55,000.

Other savings include the freezing of two posts and the cautious letting of contracts over the last few months. Contract costs are slightly over budget due to some annual payments being paid in full early in the new financial year, but these will even out towards the end of the year.

The Clerk advised that his primary concerns at the present time are the car park income and the outcome of the hardship funding application to Cornwall Council which should be known later this week.

During discussion, Members raised the following issues/concerns:

- The Town Council's eligibility under the Government's job bonus scheme
- The underspends on the Training and Maintenance budgets
- The potential to obtain funding direct from the Government

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

F/19/101) Medium Term Plan and Budgets 2020/21 and 2021/22

The Clerk advised that this has been one of the most uncertain budget rounds in the 40 years that he has been setting Council Tax due to the difficulty in predicting car park and other income levels.

He outlined the process for producing a budget and highlighted some of the key assumptions as follows:

- No growth in any service area
- £25,000 for the election in May funded from reserves
- £11,000 for Climate Change
- Deletion of the Project Officer Post
- Assumption that the library costs will remain the same
- Business Rates and running costs for Poltair Café
- Deletion of Waste Operative Post
- Funding for 2 x Apprentices (partially funded by SABEF)
- Replacement of the urinals in the men's toilets
- No funding for ASB initiatives
- No further devolution

The Clerk stressed the difficulty in predicting car park income as it very much hinges on how long the lockdown will last, how confident the public are to return to the high street and the offering in the town centre to encourage people back. There is also uncertainty with regard to the Council Tax base and Council Tax Grant figures both of which will not be known until the end of November. The outcome of the Town Council's hardship funding bid to Cornwall Council should be known within the next few days.

The Clerk advised that the latest budget predicts car park income next year of £200,000 which is £95,000 less than originally predicted and after allowing for anticipated expenditure and savings, equates to a 13.64% Council Tax increase for the 2021/22 financial year. He suggested that due to the many unknowns at the present time, it would be sensible to delay the final Council Tax setting until January 2021 when things may be a bit clearer.

During discussion, the following issues/concerns were raised:

- The sustainability of YPC at The House
- The cost of elections
- The need to make provision for an ASB officer

Members suggested that in order to accommodate funding for an ASB officer savings could be made from the projects/grants budget, climate change and possibly grounds maintenance.

Members expressed concern with regard to the major economic crisis that Covid19 has caused. They highlighted the number of job losses, the increase in the use of foodbanks and people's inability to pay for basic needs and felt that the proposed Council Tax increase is too high.

Members suggested that borrowing to replace expensive playground items could be an option for the future to spread the cost.

The Clerk advised that he had hoped to have no Council Tax increase this year, but the decimation of the car park income did not now allow this. He stressed that the Town Council's Council Tax is still below the average for Cornwall and that the majority of people in St Austell paid the equivalent of a Band B Council Tax.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Clerk should adjust the budget to reduce the Council Tax as far as possible while maintaining Council services and that a final decision on the Council Tax levels for the 2021/22 financial year should be deferred until January 2021 to better understand the impact of lockdown, hardship funding and the Council Tax base changes.

F/19/102) Car Parking Charges for the 2021/22 financial year

The Clerk advised that the Car Park Working Group had met and agreed that in the current climate there was very little scope to change the car park charges. The group did however feel that one area that could be changed was the reduction in the four hour charge from £4.80 to £3 in order to try to encourage a longer stay in the town centre.

It was also brought to the attention of the Working Group that the 1 hour restriction currently in place at Tregonissey Lane End Car Park was putting people off from using it as many of the nearby businesses, such as the hairdressers, required people to stay for longer than an hour. Members felt that in order to try to alleviate the general congestion in the area and assist the nearby businesses, the restriction at Tregonissey Lane End Car Park should be changed to a maximum of 3 hours with no return for 4 hours.

The Clerk advised that in the light of the minor changes proposed, there would be no need to change the Car Park Order at this time.

During discussion, Members raised the following:

- The need to look at Sunday charging at some point in the future;
- Whether a monthly season ticket could be introduced.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that:

1. The 1 hour charge remains at £1;
2. The 1 to 2 hour charge remains at £1.60;

3. The 2 to 3 hour charge remains at £3.00;
4. The 4 hour charge be reduced from £4.80 to £3.00;
5. The current hours of charging remain as follows:
 - o 9am to 7pm (Monday to Saturday)
6. The reduced charge of £1 from 4pm to 7pm (Monday to Saturday) remains the same;
7. Sundays to remain free of charge for the time-being;
8. The coach parking facilities be retained for 2021/22 and the existing charges remains at £1.50 per hour or £10 per day;
9. Season tickets to remain at £107 per quarter;
10. Season tickets be actively promoted on social media;
11. The restrictions at Tregonissey Lane End Car Park be changed to a maximum stay of 3 hours with no return for 4 hours;

F/19/103) CCTV

The Clerk advised that the re-deployable camera had been erected in the Bethel area and was being monitored by the Newquay CCTV suite in the hope that evidence can be built up to assist Ocean and the Police with the management of problems in the area.

F/19/104) Member Internal Audit Review

The Clerk advised that due to Covid19 restrictions, the Chair and Vice-Chair twice yearly Internal Audit Reviews are not able to happen at the present time but that the Town Council is still subject to inspections from External and Internal Auditors and maintains good internal controls through the separation of duties.

It was **RESOLVED** to accept that due to Covid19 restrictions, the Chair and Vice-Chair Internal Audits are not able to take place at the present time.

Councillor Walker left the meeting

F/19/105) Christmas Free Parking

Members noted correspondence from Cornwall Council and felt that the Clerk should liaise with the BID to determine a suitable day for the Christmas Free Parking that Cornwall Council has offered. Members felt that, as a gesture of goodwill, Priory Car Park should be free on the same day as well.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Clerk should liaise with St Austell BID to determine which would be the most suitable day to offer free parking and respond to Cornwall Council accordingly and make arrangements for Priory Car Park to be free on the same day.

Councillor Palmer left the meeting

F/19/106) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that due to a mixed response from Town and Parish Councils, Cornwall Council had decided to put on hold a decision about whether or not to abolish fees and charges.

She confirmed that the Library is still able to operate during this current lockdown and that the click and collect hours have been increased slightly with one computer open, for a 45 minute slot, on a pre booked basis. Masks have to be worn at all times. A printing and photocopying service remains in place and contactless payments are taken wherever possible. The staff have launched a "lucky dip" book bag for children which has been very popular after publicising it with the local schools. In line with Government guidelines, 7 library staff remain on flexible furlough and 1 staff member has been advised through official channels not to attend work due to her Covid19 vulnerability.

Arising from a question, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the 45 minute slots for computer use could be extended if required.

F/19/107) Community Governance Review

The Town Clerk advised that a special Cornwall Council meeting was held on Tuesday 7th November to consider the Electoral Review Panel recommendations, the result of which was very disappointing for St Austell Town Council. The final decision for St Austell is as follows:

- Carclaze and Boscoppa – defer for the new Council to consider if they wish.
- Gwallon Keas – To remain with Carlyon Parish
- Chandlers Walk – transfer from St Austell Town Council to St Austell Bay Parish Council.
- Porthpean Road – transfer from Pentewan Valley Parish Council to St Austell Town Council.
- Sawles Road – transfer from St Austell Town Council to Pentewan Valley Parish Council.
- Higher Trewhiddle – defer for the new Council to consider if they wish.
- Edgcumbe Green – transfer from St Mewan Parish Council to St Austell Town Council.

The Clerk advised that the net result for St Austell Town Council is a gain of 60 or 70 properties depending on the build out at Porthpean Road which would provide a small increase in Council Tax income but probably not enough to offset the reductions due to increased Council Tax Support claims.

Councillor Bull declared a minor interest by virtue of living at Chandlers Walk which is transferring by agreement from St Austell Town Council to St Austell Bay Parish Council.

The Mayor advised that he was not at the Cornwall Council meeting, but that he had listened to a recording and had been left upset, disappointed and shocked with regard to the political voting that had taken place. He said that he felt very sad for Councillors Brown, Bull and the Clerks for all their hard work over the last few years on this project which had resulted in very little gain for St Austell. He also expressed concern with regard to the number of deferrals to the new Council, including Higher Trehiddle, which he felt was pointless and avoided the issues unnecessarily.

Councillor Brown advised that he was very angry with the outcome of the CGR, and reiterated Councillor Styles' disappointment with regard to Gwallon Keas and the political voting that had taken place. For the benefit of Councillors that were not present at the Cornwall Council meeting, he outlined some of the statements made at the meeting which had adversely affected St Austell.

He expressed concern with regard to some of the officers' recommendations and advised that he intended to speak to the Chief Executive and other senior officers of Cornwall Council about the outcome of the review and the serious implications for the future of localism. He stressed the need for Towns to be able to expand in the future and that the outcome of this review, for the majority of towns, did not allow for this.

Councillor Bull expressed concern at the outcome and the inaccurate statements made by some Councillors to argue against Gwallon Keas being transferred to St Austell. She praised Councillor Brown for all his hard work and expressed strong disappointment that St Austell did not ultimately get support from all St Austell Cornwall Councillors.

Members expressed their disappointment and made the following observations:

- Officer recommendations were swapped and changed during the review.
- The Planning inspector recognised that Gwallon Keas is closely aligned with St Austell and recommended approval for this reason.
- Disappointment that the Town Council's proposals did not have the support of all of the St Austell Cornwall Councillors.
- Disappointment that not all of St Austell's Cornwall Councillors were at the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to delegate approval to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Mayor, to write to Cornwall Council expressing disappointment at the outcome of the review and the implications that this has on localism and **RECOMMENDED** that further consideration of this matter is made at the next Council meeting.

F/19/108) 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.

F/19/109) Grounds maintenance improvements

The Town Clerk outlined the current constraints with regard to grounds maintenance staff welfare accommodation, horticultural activities, grass cutting machinery and the impact that the two apprentices will have on these areas. He explained the costs

involved with regard to the purchase of a welfare hut, polytunnel and ride on mower and the benefits that these would bring. During discussion, the following was raised:

- The permissions required from Cornwall Council;
- The long term future of the Town Council at The Stable Block;
- The need to ensure that the Grounds Maintenance Team have the facilities and tools that they require to be as efficient as possible.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be authorised to:

1. Purchase a pre-fabricated welfare hut with a budget of no more than £7,000;
2. Acquire a polytunnel with a budget of no more than £650;
3. Acquire a second-hand mower with a budget of no more than £10,000.

Councillor Lanxon abstained from voting on this item

F/19/110) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 22nd February 2021.

The meeting closed at 20.17pm.