

**MINUTES of the EXTRAORDINARY MEETING of ST AUSTELL TOWN COUNCIL held on MONDAY 18<sup>th</sup> JANUARY 2021 (Remote Meeting) at 6pm.**

**Present:** Councillors: Bishop, Brown, Bull, Cohen, Colwill, French, Hanlon, Heyward, Jones, Lanxon, Leonard, Oxenham, Palmer, Pearce, Pears, Styles (Chair) and Thompson.

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

**C/19/254) Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rees and Walker.

*\*\*Councillor Palmer advised that he needed to leave the meeting by 7.30pm\*\**

**C/19/255) Declarations of interests and gifts or hospitality received**

Councillor Oxenham declared an interest in agenda item 13 by virtue of being Vice-Chair of the South East Local Action Group (SELAG) which has assisted Treverbyn Community Trust in the past.

Councillor Heyward declared an interest in agenda item 13 by virtue of running a foodbank initiative which might link up with Treverbyn Community Trust.

Councillor Jones declared an interest in agenda item 13 by virtue of his organisation working with Treverbyn Community Trust on occasions.

Councillor Palmer declared an interest in agenda item 13 by virtue of his involvement with STAK who accept assistance from Treverbyn Community Trust on occasions.

Councillor Bishop declared an interest in agenda item 13 by virtue of his involvement with STAK who accept assistance from Treverbyn Community Trust on occasions.

**C/19/256) Dispensations**

There were no requests for a dispensation.

**C/19/257) Minutes of Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020**

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 14<sup>th</sup> December 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

*\*\*Councillor Oxenham abstained from voting on this item\*\**

**C/19/258) Matters to Note**

Further to minute number **C/19/244** the Clerk advised that the first meeting of the Town Revitalisation Partnership has been scheduled for later this month.

Arising from a question, the Clerk advised that the group would need to agree on its parameters of operation before suitable projects are identified for progression.

### **C/19/259) Mayor's announcements**

The Mayor advised that he had no announcements.

### **C/19/260) Public Participation**

The Mayor welcomed Mr King to the meeting and Members agreed that Agenda Item 13 should be brought forward after the next agenda item.

### **C/19/261) Members' questions**

None.

*\*\*Councillors Bishop, Jones, Heyward, Palmer and Oxenham reiterated their interest in the next agenda item and left the meeting\*\**

### **C/19/262) Small Grants Application**

Mr King advised that Treverbyn Community Trust has been providing a foodbank service since March and that approximately 100 families a week are being provided with food. The Trust has a mobile community larder that has been to Roche, Indian Queens, Fraddon and the surrounding Clay Villages and is due to visit St Austell shortly, setting up in Tregonissey Lane End Car Park. He advised that food is obtained from the Fareshare charity in Bristol and that approximately 1 ton of food is distributed each week. Mr King explained that anyone can pick up a food parcel and a weekly food parcel request can be set up for families most in need.

Members welcomed the Trust's foodbank initiative and thanked Mr King and his colleagues for all that they are doing.

It was **RESOLVED** to grant £500 towards the Treverbyn Community Trust mobile foodbank initiative.

*\*\*Councillors Bishop, Jones, Heyward, Palmer and Oxenham returned to the meeting\*\**

### **C/19/263) Budgets 2020/21 and 2021/22**

The Clerk advised that the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020 considered a draft budget which indicated that a Council Tax increase of approximately 13.6% was required to make good losses of income and balance the Council's budget. Members at that meeting suggested a number of savings and budget cuts and asked that a draft budget delivering a more reasonable Council Tax increase be brought back. The Clerk advised that he had reviewed the budget and had made a number of amendments which had lowered the required Council Tax increase to 4.9%. The assumptions in the revised budget are:

- £10,000 provision for an ASB officer
- A general squeeze of budgets across the board
- Deletion of the Project Officer and Waste Officer posts
- Climate Change Project budget reduced to £5,000
- Contribution to reserves of £40,000 for playground equipment moved from 2021/22 to 2020/21

The Clerk advised that the savings found strip the cost centres down to basics and leave the Town Council in a very lean position with very little room for any new initiatives. The Small Grants Scheme budget is preserved at £8,000 per annum and an allowance has been made for the recurring larger annual grants (eg BID Christmas lights), but nothing new. The car park income budget has been significantly reduced in anticipation of further potential lockdowns/tier restrictions and less visits to the town centre due to a change in shopping habits. A £25,000 contribution from reserves has been included in the budget to pay for the planned May elections.

The Clerk advised that an overall budget of £1,083,000 is recommended which requires a precept of £795,350 which is a 4.2% increase and translates into a 4.9% or £6.03 per annum council tax increase from £122.95 to £128.98 per annum for a Band D property.

Arising from a question, the Clerk confirmed that the Town Council can afford to make the car park free between now and the end of March but for no longer. He added that similarly, the Town Council can afford to waive library fines between now and the end of March if Members' wished to be in line with Cornwall Council and most other Town and Parish Councils.

Members thanked the Town Clerk for his hard work in producing the budget and Cornwall Council for the hardship grant which has helped the Town Council balance its budget. Members expressed their concern for the hardship that many people are facing as a result of the pandemic but felt that on balance the recommendation suggested is the best way forward for the Town Council and should be accepted.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Approve the revised budget for the 2020/21 financial year as shown in Appendix 1;
2. Approve the original budget as attached in Appendix 1 for the 2021/22 financial year;
3. Approve the contributions to and from reserves as shown in Appendix 4.
4. Authorise the Town Clerk to submit a precept request to Cornwall Council in the sum of £795,350 (equating to a council tax increase of 4.90% to £128.98 per annum for a Band D property, an increase of £6.03 per annum or approximately 12 pence per week);
5. Approve the draft Council Tax leaflet which is attached at Appendix 5.

*\*\*Councillor Thompson abstained from voting on this item\*\**

A discussion took place with regard to Cornwall Council making all of their car parks free for the time being and whether or not the Town Council should follow suit. Members noted the Clerk's comments regarding affordability and the need for fees to be reinstated, at the latest, at the beginning of the new financial year should Members wish to make the car park free to be in line with Cornwall Council.

It was **RESOLVED** to make Priory Car Park free with effect from Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021, to be reviewed by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor on a fortnightly basis until the end of the 2020/2021 financial year at which time it should return to a full charging basis if charges have not previously been re-introduced.

*\*\*Councillor Oxenham abstained from voting on this item\*\**

Members noted the disparity of charging amongst the libraries in Cornwall and the recent switching off of the "books due back" and "overdue books" notifications by Cornwall Council in an attempt to prevent people from making unnecessary journeys. The Clerk confirmed that the waiving of library fees could be absorbed within the library budget as it is a very small income stream within the total budget.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Library fees should be waived until the end of the 2020/2021 financial year.

### **C/19/264) Code of Conduct Consultation**

The Clerk advised that in parallel to a review of the ethical standards regime by the Committee of Standards in Public Life, the Local Government Association (LGA) has produced a new model Code of Conduct to act as a guide for local Councils and Cornwall Council, having reviewed the new model, has recommended some changes to the existing Cornwall Council Code of Conduct.

Arising from a question, the Clerk confirmed that the code does not review or change sanctions as they sit outside of the Code and would be the subject of legislative changes.

A view was expressed that the draft Code is currently silent on support for Councillors harassed by external parties.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the draft changes and make no objection to the changes proposed.

### **C/19/265) Members appointed to outside bodies update reports**

Councillor Palmer provided an update on the St Austell BID which included the collection rates for the BID levy.

Councillor Lanxon advised that the Safer St Austell Group have been promoting the dangers of loan sharks and a Covid19 vaccination scam.

Councillor Oxenham referred to her SELAG update report previously circulated to Councillors.

### **C/19/266) Cornwall Councillor update reports**

Councillor Brown congratulated Cornwall Council on their communication activity and singled out the Town and Parish Council weekly bulletin as an informative read. He advised that Covid19 is still very challenging for Cornwall Council and that there is some frustration amongst Members and Officers that the NHS are still unable to release some key statistical information. He urged Town Councillors to attend the Localism Strategy Meeting next week and advised that Cornwall Council will remain with virtual meetings until at least March and possibly further if the Government extends the current legislation. Hybrid meetings have been discussed by Cornwall Council, but they would be very officer resource intensive to administer and all physical meetings, due to technology constraints, would have to be in Truro. Councillor Brown updated Members on a Planning Application in Bethel that might be the subject of a 5 day protocol in due course.

Councillors Bull, Heyward and Pears also commended Cornwall Council for their excellent communications and efficient Covid19 grants administration for businesses.

*\*\*Councillor Oxenham left the meeting\*\**

#### **C/19/267) Schedule of Payments**

It was **RESOLVED** that the Schedule of Payments for the period from 7<sup>th</sup> December 2020 to 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021 totalling £133,509.48 be approved.

#### **C/19/268) Planning and Regeneration Committee**

It was **RESOLVED** to note the minutes of the Planning and Regeneration Committee Meeting held on the 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

#### **C/19/269) Schedule of Meetings**

Members noted the proposed schedule of meetings from May 2021 to May 2022 but accepted that these dates might be subject to change depending on the Covid19 legislative restrictions.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the draft schedule of meetings.

#### **C/19/270) Dates of Meetings**

It was noted that the date of the next meeting of the Council is Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2021.

The meeting closed at 7.51pm