

MINUTES of a REMOTE MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 22nd February 2021 at 6pm.

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

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

F/19/111) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rees.

F/19/112) Declarations of Interest

None.

F/19/113) Dispensations

None.

F/19/114) Minutes of meeting held on 9th November 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 9th November 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/19/115) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that the installation of the welfare unit and polytunnel had become protracted as Listed Building Consent is still awaited from Cornwall Council.

F/19/116) Public participation

None.

F/19/117) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk advised that the car park income stands at £130,000 for the year to date which will be more or less the year end position and substantially below budget. Income of £64,000 and £63,000 has been received for hardship funding and Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme respectively and further claims under the hardship scheme will be made in due course.

The Clerk advised that he has agreed to act as banker for the Friends of St Austell Station and Climate Action St Austell (CASA) groups until they are both constituted and have opened bank accounts.

EU funding in the sum of £15,000 was successfully claimed for two town centre Information Officers for the period January to March and a further bid in the sum of £9,000 has been approved for them to continue in the town from April to June. The administration and co-ordination of their activities is carried out by St Austell BID.

Arising from a question, the Clerk advised that the Kestrel Security guards patrolling the wider St Austell area from time to time are employed by Cornwall Council and are primarily employed to provide COVID-19 advice and guidance to businesses.

The Clerk advised that the Town Council has received a large water bill of just over £3,500 from South West Water for the period 1st April 2017 to 31st January 2021 for water consumed at the Bowls Club and that due to the lack of any communication or receipt of a bill until now, discussions are ongoing about a fair and reasonable payment to be made. He advised that he will contact the Bowls Club to provide them with notice that with effect from 1st April 2021, they will be billed for the water consumed at the Club.

F/19/118) Risk Management

The Clerk referred to the previously circulated Risk Register and explained that the Council is required by the Auditors to have an in depth detailed document and suggested that the areas highlighted in red should be the risks that Members look closely at. These are:

- Insufficient staff
- Public toilets
- Non-renewal of leases
- Pandemic

Members expressed concern at the size of the document and suggested that risks below 3 could be taken out and anything above 4 left. It was noted that a heading "climate change/extreme weather" is missing from Section 16.

The Clerk advised that he would liaise with the Auditor about whether a summary document with the key risks could be produced and ratified by full Council.

It was **RECOMMENDED THAT** the Council should approve the Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register.

Councillor Oxenham abstained from voting on the Strategic Risk Register as she had been unable to view the document due to IT issues

F/19/119) Treasury Management

The Clerk advised that the Treasury Management Strategy once again assumed a low risk approach to investments and that all excess funds at the present time are with Cornwall Council in a variable rate deposit account which offers flexibility and instant access. Members noted the investment income of approximately £3,000 per annum.

During discussion, Members expressed a wish that the Town Council should invest as ethically as possible and suggested a statement to be added to the Treasury Management Strategy to reflect this wish.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Treasury Management Strategy subject to the following statement being added.

"St Austell Town Council seeks to achieve maximum return from investments that have been selected prudently. The town council will strive to invest in organisations where the activities of the organisation are, on ethical grounds, consistent with the values, aims and objectives of the town council, even though this may reduce returns. St Austell Town Council is committed to transparency about how and when

investment decisions are made, and will review and publish this policy annually to ensure that it remains fit for purpose”

F/19/120) Ellis Whittam – Annual Audit

The Clerk advised that there had been a mis-understanding in that the Audit undertaken at the beginning of the year was an interim review to look at the Town Council’s Covid19 safe arrangements and that a full review is due to be carried out shortly.

Arising from the above, the Clerk agreed to review how the Member Internal Audit of the Town Council’s governance arrangements can safely re-commence and report his recommendation to the next Finance and General Purposes Committee.

F/19/121) CCTV

The Clerk provided an overview of the CCTV service including the staffing changes to cover maternity leave. He advised that he is in discussions with the Police about the re-deployable CCTV camera and that there was a meeting on the previous Thursday with the Director of Housing at Cornwall Council regarding plans to reduce the number of emergency accommodation places in St Austell.

Arising from a question, the Clerk undertook to obtain more detail on the nature of the arrests made as a direct result of CCTV.

F/19/122) Virtual meetings

The Clerk explained that the legislation allowing virtual meetings to take place is due to expire on 6th May 2021 which, if not extended, will mean the resumption of face to face meetings. This would be a challenge due to the limited meeting space available to the Town Council. The Clerk advised that CALC is encouraging Town and Parish Councils to lobby the Government for an extension of the legislation that permits virtual meetings and suggested that the Town Council should write to Steve Double MP and the Government to emphasis the importance of allowing this legislation to remain in place whilst lockdown is being eased.

During discussion it was noted that Cornwall Council are considering hybrid meetings and the long-term environmental benefits which would accrue if legislation permitted the continuance of virtual meetings.

It was **RESOLVED** to lobby the MP and Secretary of State for an extension of the current legislation that allows virtual meetings.

F/19/123) Elections/New Members

The Clerk advised that he is pressing Cornwall Council for maps and more detail on the May 2021 elections for publication on the Town Council’s website and social media. He advised that CALC is producing some literature for Town and Parish Councils to adapt to try to encourage people to stand.

Councillor Brown advised that the Register of Electors will be made available on the 1st March and that there is resistance from some schools about being a polling station which is causing difficulties.

It was suggested that it might be easier to find people to stand as independents rather than for a party and that it could be considered discriminatory to people who are shielding if they cannot attend face to face meetings. Concern was expressed about the accuracy of the electoral roll and the need to exercise caution with regard to Council business during purdah.

F/19/124) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk updated Members on the library click and collect service. She advised that on average the library handles 4,000 books each month and that two trolleys go out into the lobby every day for customers to collect their reservations. Each trolley holds approximately 80 reservations.

In addition, two lists are received every day detailing St Austell Library stock needs prepared from the online requests made by customers. These lists contain approximately 30 requests which are found and then processed for either St Austell customers or for customers of other sites.

The incoming customer return items are usually 50-60 items per day and each item is wiped down and set aside in clean boxes to quarantine for 72 hours.

The Home Library Service is still operating and some of the reading groups are operating by Zoom. It was noted that the number of people accessing the public computers is currently quite low with an average of 6 people per week using the computers.

F/19/125) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on Monday 6th April 2021.

The meeting closed at 7.21pm.