

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 7th NOVEMBER 2022 in The Registrar's Office, Carlyon Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4LD at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Clemo, French (Chair), George, Lanxon and Pearce.

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Thompson

F/22/33) Apologies for absence

Apologies of absence were received from Councillors: Bull, Nott, Rowse and Young.

F/22/34) Declarations of Interest

Councillor French declared an interest in Agenda Item 11 (St Austell BID) by virtue of being a St Austell BID Director.

F/22/35) Dispensations

None.

F/22/36) Minutes of meeting held on 3rd October 2022

Councillor Brown queried the accuracy of minute number **F/22/22 Scheme of Members' Allowances** as it appeared to be contradicted by page 42 of the agenda where it is stated that The Cornwall Council Independent Remuneration Panel has recently commenced a review of the Member Allowances Scheme.

The Clerk advised that Cornwall Council is only reviewing Members Allowances for Cornwall Councillors but agreed for clarity that the words "*for Town and Parish Councils*" could be added at the end of minute number **F/22/22 Scheme of Members' Allowances**.

It was **RESOLVED** that subject to the above amendment, the minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd October 2022 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/22/37) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that further to minute number **F/22/31 Safety Surfacing – The Meadows**, this work has been completed along with a small section of worn surfacing at Sandy Hill. He added that Truro Road Park is expected to be the next play area to have safety surfacing replaced.

F/22/38) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/22/39) Budget update

The Clerk advised that it is a legal requirement to set a balanced budget each year and to determine a precept by the end of January at the latest.

He explained the methodology for setting the annual budget and the uncertainties the Council faces this year with regard to:

- The volatile economic situation
- Inflation
- Energy costs
- Insurance costs
- The cost increases of materials/parts and equipment
- The impact of pay awards and employer pension scheme contributions

He added that the following assumptions have been made in the draft budget:

- That the Town Council will stay at the Stable Block at least until the lease expires in 2025;
- The staffing costs will remain the same apart from funding for a Community Project Officer or Regeneration Officer for 2-3 days a week;
- The Town Council renews the library lease and continues managing the service;
- Poltair Café more or less breaks even;
- Continued funding for security guards in the town centre on a joint basis with St Austell BID.

The Clerk advised that the following have **not** been included in the draft budget:

- Pump priming for the next stage of the Town Centre Revitalisation Project
- Funding for a Neighbourhood Plan
- Growth
- Contributions towards capital projects
- Contributions towards Shared Prosperity or Good Growth Funding Applications (reserves would have to be used)
- Additional contribution to the Elections Reserve
- Additional contribution to the Play Equipment Reserve

The earmarked reserves at the end of 2022/23 are expected to be:

- Projects Reserve - £36,000
- Elections Reserve - £25,000
- Play Equipment Reserve - £420,000
- General Reserve - £360,000

The Internal Auditor has assessed the General Reserve as being on the low side, but the Town Clerk advised that its current level equates to approximately 3 months expenditure which he is comfortable with.

The Clerk advised that since the publication of the report, he had received the actual Council Tax base figure from Cornwall Council (6493.15) which changed the minimum Council Tax increase required to 8.4% instead of 9% as outlined in the report. The Council Tax for 2022/23 equates to £141.81 on a Band D property with the Cornwall average currently running at £145 for a Band D property. The budget has £30,000 contingency.

The Clerk stressed that the 9% increase recommended is the minimum increase required for a balanced budget and that each additional 1% on the Council Tax equated to £9,000 additional income.

During discussion, Members thanked the Town Clerk for his detailed report and stressed that the Town Council's ongoing budget should provide resource to assist with the continuation of the Town Centre Revitalisation Project.

The Town Clerk confirmed that funding for either a Regeneration Officer or Community Projects Officer working 2-3 days per week is assumed within the Town Council's budget and that applications will be submitted to Cornwall Council for Good Growth Funding to employ experts to bring each priority project up to "shovel ready" stage and ready to apply for large funding streams such as Levelling Up Funds. He expressed concern with regard to the bureaucracy and complexities of the Good Growth Fund and the urgent need for support from Cornwall Council.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to support the budget as drafted subject to sufficient resource being provided to assist with the continuance of the Town Centre Revitalisation Project in partnership with the Town Centre Revitalisation Partnership and Cornwall Council.

F/22/40) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk explained the income and expenditure variances regarding grants and contributions, grounds maintenance, play equipment, insurances, grants, fuel, subscriptions and repairs costs. He advised that generally expenditure is comfortably within budget and that he had no concerns with any of the variances reported at this stage.

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

F/22/41) Community Network Panels

The Clerk referred Councillors to the Community Network Review briefing and noted that Cornwall Council required responses by 18th November 2022. During discussion Members expressed concern with regard to the boundary options suggested, the competing priorities of the different towns, the limited resource of the Community Link Officers and the additional pressures that these proposals could bring. Members recognised the need and value of Community Link Officers but felt that the Community Network Panel meetings could be discontinued in their current form and single issue meetings held instead, bringing together the Town or Parish Councils affected by the issue. Overall, Members felt that the proposals suggested were too ambitious and unrealistic given the very limited capacity of Cornwall Council and Town and Parish Councils.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk should draft a suitable response to the discussion document, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair, expressing concern with regard to the proposals and a preference for single issue meetings.

F/22/42) St Austell Library

The Deputy Clerk outlined the latest activities at St Austell Library which included school visits, the co-ordination of a children's literature festival for 2023, a "Proud to Care" drop in event, warm space joint working, digital services and SALSA events. She expressed her delight with the performance of St Austell Library and the monthly footfall recorded.

The Deputy Clerk referred to a briefing note from Cornwall Council's Library Service outlining the termination of a contract with the Royal Voluntary Service to provide Cornwall's Home Library Service. She explained that as part of the devolution agreement, the Town Council agreed with Cornwall Council that the RVS volunteers for St Austell area could be based in St Austell library and a desk and telephone were set aside for them which has worked well. It was noted that the Hospital Car Service is also run by RVS volunteers from the library.

The exact client and volunteer numbers from Cornwall Council are awaited, but it is believed that approximately 32 people are receiving a Home Library Service from St Austell Library – 13 of which are within the parish of St Austell. It is believed that 8 volunteers are servicing these clients; again this is to be confirmed by Cornwall Council.

Following an officers' meeting with Cornwall Council, the following offer was put to St Austell Town Council to consider:

- Cornwall Council would review their client list and confirm the number of people living within the parish of St Austell who receive a Home Library Service;
- Cornwall Council would cover all DBS costs for volunteers either transferred over from the RVS or newly recruited up until March 2023;
- Cornwall Council will cover all mileage claim costs between January 2023 and March 2023;
- Cornwall Council will make suitable arrangements to provide a Home Library Service to those clients who are outside of the St Austell Parish boundary.

The resource implications for the Town Council are:

- Insurance for the volunteers
- Mileage claims for the volunteers
- DBS checks for volunteers
- Staff time managing the volunteers and covering sick leave

The Deputy Clerk advised that the cost implications of taking on the Home Library Service for St Austell Parish residents were believed to be approximately £2,000 per annum. The additional library staff time required to administer the service is unknown.

During discussion, Members expressed their disappointment at the stance Cornwall Council is taking with regard to the Home Library Service and the disjointed effect the new arrangements will bring, particularly as there appear to be no significant cost savings to Cornwall Council. Members however expressed their support for the Home Library Service and the Town Council continuing it for clients with the Parish of St Austell. Reassurance was sought that clients living outside of the Parish would retain a service and that the Hospital Car Service would not be affected by the withdrawal of the contract.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Council should take on the Home Library Service for those clients within the Town Council's boundary with effect from January 2023.

F/22/43) St Austell BID

It was **RESOLVED** to support the renewal of the St Austell BID and authorise the Town Clerk as Proper Officer of the Town council to vote in favour of the renewal of the BID.

F/22/44) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 20th February 2023.

The meeting closed at 7.41pm