

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 2023 in The Registrar's Office, Carlyon Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 4LD at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Clemo, Lanxon and Pearce.

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

F/23/17) Apologies for absence

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

F/23/18) Declarations of Interest

None.

F/23/19) Dispensations

None.

F/23/20) Minutes of meeting held on 26th June 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 26th June 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/23/21) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that he hoped to do the work shortly to enable the Sea Cadet legal charge to be lifted. The new photocopier has been installed and the old photocopier removed which is likely to be donated to a local charity.

F/23/22) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/23/23) Budget Monitoring Report

The Town Clerk explained a number of variances in the budget monitoring report for the year to May 2023. He advised that car park income is below budget but is showing signs of recovery following a wet August. Other budget heads highlighted:

Grants - £3,000 grant income received from Cornwall Council for a bus shelter at Holmbush. The recent grant approvals for BID security guard funding and Studio 4 has created an overspend.

Play Equipment - Following the Bethel Park refurbishment project and the Truro Road Park safety surfacing renewal the budget head is over budget. The Bethel Park project will be partially funded by CIL funding and the balance will be met from Town Council reserves. The end of year accounts will reflect the income and transfers from reserves to cover the expenditure.

Salaries - The salaries are below budget as the April pay award is still being negotiated with the Unions.

Utilities and fuel costs are slightly over budget, but savings have been made on the insurance renewal. The House, Carlyon Road rental income will be invoiced shortly and a review of the tenancy at Poltair café will be undertaken in the autumn which will include the payment of business rates.

During discussion, Members felt that it would be helpful to have a footnote on the monthly budgeting reports to provide an explanation of the large variances. Arising from a question, the Clerk confirmed that the Planning and Regeneration Committee is responsible for the Town Centre Revitalisation Project but due to the scale of some of the expenditure the full Council is required to approve large projects. A financial statement will be presented to the Revitalisation Partnership at their next meeting and circulated to a later Planning and Regeneration Committee.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the budget monitoring reports and bank reconciliation statement.

F/23/24) Budget Process 2024/25

The Clerk advised that he would like to talk to Members informally about priorities and budgets during October and two informal meeting dates of Tuesday 10th October 2023 and Tuesday 24th October 2023 (if required) have been identified. He added that once priorities have been identified he would produce a report and budget for the Finance and General Purposes Committee to consider and make a recommendation to full Council in December.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the budget timetable as set out in the report.

F/23/25) Car Park Machines

The Clerk advised that the car park payment machines are coming to the end of their life which has led to them failing fairly frequently, particularly during damp weather. Due to their age, the machines are no longer manufactured and new parts are difficult to obtain.

The existing supplier has advised that the replacement of all four machines would cost in the region of £28,000 to £32,000 but a partial upgrade of all four machines, including the installation of a contactless payment system would be £13,062.50 (£3,265 per machine). The partial upgrade would retain the main carcass of each machine with just the doors being changed which hold the inner workings. The upgrade would include a contactless payment system, a touch colour screen, new main board, new printer, new coin selector and 4G modem and supporting parts.

The Clerk advised that the Town Council has a very small budget for car park machine repairs so any replacement or partial upgrade would have to be funded from reserves.

In answer to questions, the Clerk confirmed that if the machines were upgraded they would still take cash and that the installation of a contactless payment system might have an adverse impact on the "Phone and Pay" app and the "Pay 2 Park" web based payment system.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the four car park payment machines in Priory Car Park be upgraded to the A1000 Contactless system at a total cost of £13,062.50.

F/23/26) Car Park Working Group

The Clerk advised that if Members would like to review the car park charges, he would be happy to facilitate a working group to undertake a review and make a recommendation to full Council. He added that the climate for increasing car park charges is very sensitive at the present time and suggested that it might be prudent to freeze the current charges for the 2024/25 financial year.

During discussion, it was suggested that charging could be introduced on a Sunday but overall Members felt that in the light of the ongoing economic crisis it would be prudent to keep the car park charges at the same level for the time being.

A proposal to consider charging on a Sunday was lost 1 vote for, 3 votes against.

A proposal to freeze the car park charges for the 2024/25 financial year and not convene a working group was carried 3 votes for, 1 vote against.

It was **RESOLVED** to freeze the car park charges for the 2024/25 financial year and not convene a working group.

F/23/27) Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy

The Clerk advised that the Equality Policy had been re-drafted following consideration by the Town Council and re-wording suggestions from Councillors Bull and Fox. The Clerk confirmed that the title had been changed to reflect the amendments made.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to approve the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

F/23/28) Internal Audit Checks

Members noted the Internal Audit checks carried out by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and the comments notated.

In addition, the Clerk advised that the current agreement with the Town Council's Internal Auditor is due for renewal and a quotation in the sum of £1,100 per annum for three years has been received. The Clerk added that the Internal Auditor visits the Town Council twice a year, on the quarters that checks are not carried out by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Committee and includes the auditing of the year end accounts.

During discussion, the Clerk advised that the "Cyber Essential" accreditation is desirable, but the "Gold Quality Status" is of more value to the Town Council, particularly as the "Foundation Quality Status" achieved a few years ago has expired. It is hoped that time can be found over the coming months to progress the work required to achieve Gold Quality Status.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

- (i) Note the Internal Audit report undertaken by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee and;

- (ii) Appoint Hudson Accounting for a further three year term in the sum of £1,100 per annum.

F/23/29) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that she is extremely pleased with the performance of the library which is the top performing site in Cornwall in August for all issues (books/DVD's). She added that the computers are still well used and that they had an excellent Summer Reading Challenge with 901 children signing up to the challenge. She referred to a recent incident in the library and the very professional way that the staff had handled it.

Members expressed their gratitude to the Library Manager and staff for their continued good work and the excellent performance of St Austell Library. Particular thanks was made to the staff for their excellent handling of the incident outlined.

Arising from a question, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that following the success of the Childrens' Literacy Festival she would liaise with the Library Manager about the arrangements so far for the 2024 event and the overall sustainability for it to become an annual event.

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

F/23/30) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 6th November 2023.

The meeting closed at 7.11pm.