

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 19th FEBRUARY 2024 in The Stable Block, Pondhu House, Penwinnick Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5DP at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Clemo, French, Gray, Lanxon and Young.

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

Also in attendance: Councillor Kimber

F/23/31) Apologies for absence

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

F/23/32) Declarations of Interest

None.

F/23/33) Dispensations

None.

F/23/34) Minutes of meeting held on 18th September 2023

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 18th September 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/23/35) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that the car park machines have been upgraded to take contactless payments and after some teething problems, they appear to be working satisfactorily. The payment options in the car park are cash, contactless, Phone and Pay (app) and Pay 2 Park (web app). The final cost for the replacement of the machines was £11,766, reduced from an anticipated cost of £13,000.

The children's literacy festival is taking place on 28th, 29th and 30th June and the library are involved in the event planning with Mr Simon Disney-Pollard.

F/23/36) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/23/37) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk explained the variances in the budget monitoring report for 1st April 2023 to 31st January 2024.

It was noted that the car park income is slightly down on budget, investments are up on budget and following a successful appeal, the business rates have been reduced for Priory Car Park and a backdated refund has been received in the sum of £38,000.

The Clerk advised that the demolition of the old toilet block at Poltair Park is over budget due to the unforeseen requirement to build a bat shelter and additional remedial works to the two abutting neighbouring properties. Miscellaneous grants are slightly over budget due to an increase in funding to the BID for Christmas events and security cover.

In answer to Members' questions, the Clerk advised that there could be additional re-lining works in Priory Car Park before the year end and the library's operating expenses are accounted for within the general operating expenses of the Town Council.

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

F/23/38) Earmarked Reserves

The Clerk advised that the year end is approaching and explained the latest position regarding the use of the Town Council's earmarked reserves. He added that in order to maximise the benefits of the Town Council's reserves, he would like to utilise the Community Infrastructure Funding (CIL) in the sum of £6,955 which will reduce the Town Council's use of the playground reserve.

The Clerk also advised that if as predicted the outturn of the year end reveals a budget surplus, he would like the Town Council to purchase one or two additional cameras for the town centre to compliment the existing cameras and monitoring arrangements.

During discussion, Members felt that the other areas of St Austell should not be forgotten and suggested that an additional mobile camera is purchased and located at the direction of the police in problem residential areas outside of the town centre.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be authorised, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair to:

1. Optimise the use of reserves to provide the greatest flexibility of funding in future years;
2. Apply CIL funding received from Cornwall Council to the Bethel Park project;
3. Permit funding of up to four CCTV cameras, at least one of which should be a mobile camera, should the outturn spending position allow.

F/23/39) Health and Safety Audit

Members reviewed the summary Health and Safety Report from the Town Council's consultants and noted the minor observations recorded. Members agreed it was an excellent report and asked that the Operations Manager be thanked for his hard work and the high standards consistently maintained.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report and thank the Operations Manager for the excellent report and the high health and safety standards consistently maintained.

F/23/40) Risk Management

Members reviewed the Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register.

The high risks identified were:

- Paragraph 2.1 – Inadequate staffing resource.
- Paragraph 8.8 – Failure to attract sufficient funding to deliver large scale tangible town centre improvements.
- Paragraph 9.23 – Non renewal of the lease of The Stable Block.

During discussion it was noted that the Staffing Committee is due to review the Senior Officer Management Team and that large scale funding, particularly Levelling Up Funding, is unlikely in the near future.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Approve the updated Risk Management Strategy and Strategic Risk Register and publish both documents on the Town Council's website.

F/23/41) Treasury Management Strategy

The Clerk advised that the only amendment in the Treasury Management Strategy is within paragraph 2.5 (Liquidity of Investments) which now reads:

*The Town Clerk, as Responsible Officer, will determine the maximum periods for which funds may prudently be committed so as not to compromise liquidity and may transfer up to **£100,000** between bank accounts as appropriate to take advantage of interest bearing deposit accounts while maintaining sufficient liquidity.*

The Clerk explained that investment income for the 2023/24 financial year to date has exceeded budget due to the higher interest rates seen. He added that £962,869.70 is invested on a low risk basis with Cornwall Council who have ethical investment policies in place.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report and approve the Treasury Management Strategy for a further 12 months.

F/23/42) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the library was the top library in Cornwall for issues during the month of January and explained that the number of new borrowers was very healthy and the use of the public computers is steadily increasing. The Deputy Clerk expressed her gratitude to SALSA who continue to put on many and varied events which encourage new footfall into the library. A shop watch radio has been issued to staff to help improve security. In response to a question about maintenance the Deputy Clerk explained that the Town Council is responsible for the contents of the building but the fabric of the building is still the responsibility of Cornwall Council. She added that the building has recently received a carpet clean and the Cornish studies room and computer suite have both been painted.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report and thank the Library Manager for the library's continued excellent performance.

F/23/43) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 2nd April 2024. The meeting closed at 7.15pm.