

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY 2nd APRIL 2024 in The Stable Block, Pondhu House, Penwinnick Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5DP at 6pm.

Present: Councillors Clemo, French (Chair), Gray, Lanxon, Pearce and Young

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

F/23/44) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Bull, Brown and Rowse.

F/23/45) Declarations of Interest

None.

F/23/46) Dispensations

None.

F/23/47) Minutes of meeting held on 19th February 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 19th February 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/23/48) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that the Community Infrastructure Funding (CIL) in the sum of £6,955 has been applied to the Bethel Park project and signed off by Cornwall Council as an acceptable use of the funding. He added that the year-end spending position should allow the purchase of additional CCTV cameras but due to contractor constraints, this could not be achieved before the year-end. The money will be set aside into a reserve and utilised when the contractor is available, hopefully early in the new financial year.

F/23/49) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

Councillor Lanxon arrived during the next item

F/23/50) Budget Monitoring Report

The Clerk updated Members on the income and expenditure to the end of February and highlighted the following:

Income

- Interest income. Increased interest rates have resulted in an increase in income for the year;
- Other grants and contributions. This income reflects grants for Bethel Park, Holmbush Road bus shelter and the roof top garden.

Expenditure

- Cleaning and domestic supplies. A change in administrative coding reflects an overspend, but this is offset by a reduced spend in contract payments where the payments were anticipated to be coded at the start of the financial year;
- Election Expenses – slightly higher than anticipated but within budget
- Electricity - overspend due to an increase in costs and an historic charge for The House
- Insurance – a saving on the budget due to a recent tender exercise
- Miscellaneous expenses – Bethel bus shelter (covered by a grant), unforeseen mine shaft works at Bethel Park and consultants fees for the rooftop garden project (covered by a grant);
- Miscellaneous grants – increased funding for security personnel and Christmas lights;
- Priory Car Park, Business Rates – Successful appeal on the business rates for Priory Car Park (£30,000 saved).
- Repairs and Maintenance – an increase in costs relating to the demolition and making good of the old toilet block and building of a bat house at Poltair Park.

Arising from questions, the Clerk advised that the re-lining of Priory Car Park will be carried out when the better weather arrives and that the EV charging revenue goes to Cornwall Council.

F/23/51) Asset Register

The Clerk advised that for audit purposes, it is a requirement that the Town Council's Asset Register is updated and approved as at the 31st March each year. Councillor Young advised that the location of the Deputy Mayor's Concert Badge was incorrect.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Town Council's updated Asset Register dated 31st March 2024 subject to the above correction.

F/23/52) Internal Audit

The Clerk advised that the Town Council has robust governance arrangements and explained the separation of duties within the office when processing the Council's income and expenditure. He added that the Town Council's Accounting system is linked to the Town Council's Bank Accounts and monthly bank reconciliations are carried out.

The Clerk advised that two audit checks are carried out each year by the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee which includes a spot check of transactions. The Town Council's Internal Auditor (appointed by the Town Council) carries out two audit checks per annum which includes the year end Accounts.

The last audit check is carried out by an External Auditor (appointed centrally) who verifies and approves the year end accounts and the governance arrangements such as risk management.

The Clerk advised that the Chair and Vice-Chair noted during their last spot checks that the car park income could not be reconciled for a short period of time when the new payment machines were installed.

He re-assured members that the income received during this time was not out of line with what would be expected. The Clerk also advised that the 20p toilet machines at Priory Car Park are aging and do not always accurately count the income received.

Arising from questions the Clerk advised that the Chair and Vice-Chair checks are carried out on a pre-arranged basis and that nearly all payments are made by BACS. The Clerk added that the Town Council's IT systems are monitored by a consultant and are the subject of a robust firewall and 2 back-up systems on the cloud. It is hoped that the Cyber essentials certification can be obtained in due course.

In answer to a further question, the Clerk advised that he is a Chartered Accountant (CIPFA) and CiLCA qualified, the Deputy Clerk has an HR qualification and is CiLCA qualified, the Operations Manager has a diploma in Health and Safety and the Administrative/Finance Assistant is CiLCA qualified and is studying for her Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) qualification.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the Chair and Vice-Chair Internal Audit checks.

F/23/53) Priory Car Park

The Clerk advised that the car park income is likely to be in line with budget at the year end and that the cash income received has reduced by about 25% since the contactless payment method has been installed. If this trend continues, the Town Council might be able to reduce the G4S cash collections which are currently twice a week. The "Phone and Pay" app and QR Code "Pay to Park" methods of payment have also seen a reduction in takings due to people preferring to use the contactless feature on the car park machines. The "Phone and Pay" app has a two year contract which might be the subject of a recommendation in due course not to renew if the income through this app continues to decline. Season tickets are now administered through the "Pay to Park" Exemption system which is more environmentally friendly and efficient.

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

F/23/54) Town Vitality Fund

The Clerk advised that, subject to written confirmation from the Chair of the St Austell Town Centre Revitalisation Partnership, the following funding has almost been secured from Cornwall Council:

Town Accelerator Fund = £35,000

£10,000 = Feasibility work for key worker/student accommodation

£25,000 = Feasibility work for traffic flows and signage improvements

Strategic Fund = £80,000

£15,000 = subject to permissions from the owner, development of plans for the High Cross Street site

£65,000 = capital funding for the church ground improvements and piazza

Town Delivery Fund = £25,000

A formal bid has been submitted to Cornwall Council for funding for the Poundland banners replacement. Awaiting outcome.

Arising from questions, the Clerk advised that the landowner at High Cross Street site has engaged with Cornwall Council and the highways feasibility work will include the potential to allow buses through Fore Street. The Clerk advised that following discussions with Cornwall Council, a reduced funding proposal had to be submitted which resulted in the old Fire Station and Duke Street projects being deleted from the project list. It is hoped that alternative funding will be found for these projects.

Members noted the update.

F/23/55) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the library has recently hosted events for i-Sight Cornwall, Barnardo's and a soroptimists book give away. A recent craft fayre was also well attended. Cornwall Council has teamed up with the NHS and blood pressure monitors can now be loaned from some libraries, including St Austell. The staff do not get involved with any blood pressure readings or medical assistance. The Childrens Literacy Festival is planned for three days covering 28th to 30th June and a grant application has been submitted from Mr Disney-Pollard for consideration at the next Community Committee. SALSIA is hoping to employ a gardener for a few hours each month to keep the library garden maintained and a picture competition is being organised for the newly painted computer suite. The library continues to perform well and is consistently in the top two performing libraries in Cornwall. The library has a number of volunteers assisting with the smooth running of the library and will host a number of work experience students during the summer.

Members noted the update.

F/23/56) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 24th June 2024.

The meeting closed at 7.20pm.