

MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 30th SEPTEMBER 2024 in The Stable Block, Pondhu House, Penwinnick Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5DP at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Clemo, French, Gray and Pearce.

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

Also in attendance: Councillors Hamilton and Thompson.

F/24/16) Apologies for absence

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

F/24/17) Declarations of Interest

None.

F/24/18) Dispensations

None.

F/24/19) Minutes of meeting held on 24th June 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 24th June 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/24/20) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that further to minute F/24/11 the experts have advised that the Clerk's robes are irreparable and that new robes would cost in the region of £2,000.

In answer to a question, the Clerk advised that he wore the robes approximately 3 times a year and that the public, on the whole, enjoyed seeing the Mayor and Clerk robed up for civic events, particularly for Remembrance Day.

Members' views were split with some Members expressing a view that the Clerk wearing robes at civic events is a tradition that should be continued, with other Members expressing a view that during these times of austerity, the funding required for new robes could be better spent elsewhere.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Council does not acquire new robes for the Clerk.

F/24/21) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/24/22) Priory Car Park

The Clerk advised that the car park is performing well and is likely to exceed budget at the financial year end.

He added that the budget projections are looking reasonable and that if Members are mindful to freeze the Priory Car Park charges for the 2025/26 financial year, this can be achieved through the forthcoming budget setting process.

During discussion, the following was raised:

- The unsettled weather had driven visitors to the town centre;
- 60-70% of the car park users pay £1 and stay for an hour;
- Despite the rapid decline in the use of cash, the need to retain a cash payment option;
- The need to put out a positive press release stressing the Town Council's support for the businesses in the town centre;
- The Cornwall Council devolution of car parks;
- Cornwall Council staff parking for the new offices in White River Place.

Members expressed their support for freezing the Priory Car Park charges for the 2025/26 financial year.

The Clerk advised that the current budget includes funding for resurfacing work and that the Operations Manager has organised for the middle section to be re-surfaced within the next few months.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the Priory Car Park charges be frozen for the 2025/26 financial year and that a positive press release is issued stressing the Town Council's support for the town centre businesses.

F/24/23) Christmas Events – Free Parking in Priory Car Park

A request from St Austell BID to make Priory Car Park free for four Saturdays in November/December to coincide with the town centre Christmas events was considered.

It was **RESOLVED** to make Priory Car Park free with effect from 12pm on Saturday 30th November 2024, Saturday 7th December 2024, Saturday 14th December 2024 and Saturday 21st December 2024.

F/24/24) Budget Monitoring Report

Members reviewed the income and expenditure to the 31st August 2024 and a copy of the Council's latest bank reconciliation statement. The Clerk explained variances for:

- Car Park Income
- Interest income
- Grants and contributions
- Contract payments
- Electricity
- Grounds maintenance supplies
- IT/communications
- Miscellaneous expenses
- Miscellaneous grants
- Other transport/plant
- Play equipment
- Rates

- Repairs/maintenance of premises
- Salaries/wages

It was **RESOLVED** to note the budget monitoring report for 1st April 2024 to 31st August 2024.

F/24/25) Grant Funded Projects and Cashflow

The Clerk provided Members with a review of grant funded projects and cashflows in the light of a significant increase in grant funded projects.

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

F/24/26) Procurement Policy

The Clerk advised that there was a need to update the Council's Procurement Policy to reflect the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union. Members noted the draft circulated. It was suggested that the words "community groups" should be added to the Community Engagement section of the policy.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to approve the draft Procurement Policy subject to the addition of community groups in the list of consultees in the Community Engagement paragraph.

F/24/27) Conclusion of audit

The Clerk advised that the high level independent external audit for the 2023/24 financial year had been completed and the Town Council had received a clear audit report.

Members expressed their gratitude to the Town Clerk for his excellent management of the Town Council's finances.

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

F/24/28) Code of Conduct

The Clerk advised that Cornwall Council was undertaking a review of the Code of Conduct that it and Town and Parish Councils in Cornwall use. He explained that this was purely a review of the local document and had to be considered within the current legal framework which governs the Standards regime and the sanctions permitted.

It was **RESOLVED** to feed back the following comments:

1. "mean" should read "means" on page 5 after "**non-registerable interest**"
2. In paragraph 1.4 the final line should be incorporated into paragraph (b)
3. Members felt that the £50 quoted in paragraph 2.6 was too high and would prefer a lower figure.

F/24/29) Direct Debits and Regular Payments

The Clerk advised that it was good practice and a requirement of the Financial Regulations to review the direct debits and regular payments used by the Council

from time to time. Members noted the list circulated and sought clarification on a number of creditors.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the report and approve the direct debits and regular payments listed.

F/24/30) St Austell Library

The Deputy Town Clerk provided an update as follows:

Staffing

- A vacant position of 20.5 hours has been filled with the new member of staff due to start on the 7th October 2024.
- A vacant position of 16 hours is due to be discussed alongside other matters at a forthcoming Staffing Committee.

Operational

The boiler and fire safety equipment have been serviced and quotes are being obtained for the repairing/maintenance of the fascia boards. The ceiling in the performing arts area has been repaired with the cost met jointly with Cornwall Council.

The library continues to host whole school visits, and the Home Library Service is working well with a number of volunteers assisting housebound people with library books.

The staff are due to embark on some digital champion training and a free to use Wellbeing Kiosk has been installed in the foyer until October.

The automated book renewals telephone line is due to end within the next few days as the operator has advised that they will not be making the transition from analogue to digital. The public will be contacted by e-mail or, if they do not have an e-mail, telephoned to advise them that their books are ready for collection.

Summer Reading Challenge

- 914 children signed up (target 753), 619 finishers (516 target);
- Each member of staff organised a craft session for children during the challenge which was well received;
- Over 500 clay models were made during the challenge and the Deputy Mayor and his wife spent a morning judging the models and nominating winners within each age category.

General

The library continues to perform well and is always in the top 2 of busiest libraries in Cornwall. SALSA has organised 18 events this year and found time to enter the library garden into the It's Your Neighbourhood Competition (the result is awaited).

Security – Access to and from the Library building

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that she had recently carried out a review of the current access arrangements to and from the library building with the Library Manager and three areas have been identified for improvement:

1. Children's area (exit adjustments)
2. Helpdesk area (access and exit adjustments)
3. Library garden (exit adjustments)

The adjustments required to the children's area and library garden are relatively minor, but it is felt that the help desk area requires a re-configuration to bring it up to modern staff access/exit health and safety standards. The Deputy Clerk advised that a quotation has been received for the work which it is hoped can be carried out with minimal disruption to the operation of the library.

During discussion, Members thanked the Deputy Town Clerk and Library Manager for carrying out the review and unanimously supported the adjustments proposed and the re-configuration of the helpdesk area.

It was **RESOLVED** to accept the quotation in the sum of £4,996.84 to re-configure the help desk area to bring it up to modern staff access/exit safety standards.

F/24/31) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 4th November 2024.

The meeting closed at 7.24pm.