

**MINUTES of a MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 4<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2024 in The Stable Block, Pondhu House, Penwinnick Road, St Austell, Cornwall, PL25 5DP at 6pm.**

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

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

**Also in attendance:** Councillor Hamilton.

**F/24/32) Apologies for absence**

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

**F/24/33) Declarations of Interest**

None.

**F/24/34) Dispensations**

None.

**F/24/35) Minutes of meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024**

Arising from a question, the Clerk advised that the robes are about to be despatched and should arrive in time for Remembrance Day.

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024 be approved and signed as a correct record.

**F/24/36) Matters to Note**

The Clerk advised that the Procurement Policy was approved by full Council but if the recommendations outlined in the Contract Standing Orders report due to be considered later on the agenda are approved, the Policy will need amending and re-approving.

**F/24/37) Public participation**

There were no members of the public present.

**F/24/38) Statement on Devolution**

The Clerk advised that the Mayor of Penzance recently invited all Cornish Mayors to a meeting to discuss Devolution to Cornwall and the geographical area that this could encompass.

The Clerk advised that the Town Council's Mayor, Councillor Young, was unable to attend the meeting but the notes circulated afterwards indicated that the consensus of the Mayors' present was that the principle of devolution to Cornwall is supported but only if it is devolution to Cornwall alone, or subject to the consent of the Isles of Scilly, a Cornwall/Isles of Scilly combined authority.

The Clerk referred Councillors to the draft statement and asked Members for their views.

Councillor Brown outlined discussions at the recent CALC Larger Councils meeting making reference to the concerns expressed about the governance arrangements for the Mayoral Meetings and a request from Ben McGuire MP to the Prime Minister to meet the six Cornish MP's to discuss affordable housing and a Cornish Assembly. He added that following the CALC meeting the Mayor of Penzance had amended the statement and is now seeking approval from other Town and Parish Councils before submitting it to the Deputy Prime Minister, Linda Taylor (Leader of Cornwall Council) and Kate Kennally (Chief Executive, Cornwall Council).

Councillor Brown welcomed the statement and requested that the following paragraphs be considered by the full Council by way of support for the statement.

The Town Council:

1. Welcomes the establishment of a Mayors/Clerks group for Cornwall and agrees to participate actively;
2. Resolves that any draft statements arising from the group be considered by the Council or the Finance and General Purposes Committee as appropriate;
3. Supports the draft statement as representative of the views of the Cornish Councils;
4. States that its preferred devolution solution for Cornwall is a Cornish Assembly with powers as close as possible to those of the Welsh Parliament.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that the devolution statement as outlined be supported and the paragraphs outlined above be adopted as the Town Council's policy.

### **F/24/39) Budget 2024/25 and 2025/26**

The Clerk advised that the rise in Employers' National Insurance contributions has resulted in an additional £20,000 of expenditure for the Town Council which has been taken into consideration in the latest budget calculations. The Clerk referred Members to the latest draft budget for the 2025/26 financial year (as tabled at the meeting) and highlighted the following:

- The new Library and Community Projects Officer post
- £30,000 for events
- £35,000 for the Election in May 2025
- £50,000 towards play equipment
- £10,000 for car park resurfacing
- £25,000 for pump priming for town centre projects

It is assumed that the car park income will stay the same and a slight increase in the office/depot rent after the current lease ends in autumn 2025. The budget for the security staff is assumed to stay the same and the Regeneration Officer post to terminate as at 31<sup>st</sup> May 2025.

There is still uncertainty with regard to the Council Tax base which should be announced by Cornwall Council later in November and the future of the Shared Prosperity Fund.

The Clerk recommended to Members the proposed draft budget and a Council Tax increase for the 2025/26 financial year of 9.2% on a Band D property which would maintain all existing services with no budget cuts.

During discussion, the following was raised:

- The potential to re-allocate the elections budget if there is an underspend;
- The future funding arrangements for the town centre security guards;
- The budget implications if there is a further round of Shared Prosperity Funding.

A proposal to increase the Council Tax by 9.88% did not receive a seconder.

It was **RECOMMENDED** that subject to any reasonable adjustments required following announcements with regard to the Council Tax Base and Shared Prosperity Fund, the Council:

1. Approves the revised draft budget for the 2025/26 financial year;
2. Approves a Council Tax increase of 9.2% for a Band D property paying the full Council Tax charge.

#### **F/24/40) Budget Monitoring Report**

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

#### **F/24/41) Interim Internal Audit Report**

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

#### **F/24/42) Ride on Mower Replacement**

The Clerk advised that one of the ride-on mowers is 7 years old and has recently suffered a number of age related break downs. He added that the purchase of a new mower can be found within existing budgets and that a trade in value of £7,000 against a new mower has been quoted.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be authorised to purchase a replacement mower and part exchange the old mower with a budget of up to £22,000.

#### **F/24/43) Prince Charles Park Safety Surfacing**

The Clerk advised that the play equipment at Prince Charles Park was installed in 2007/08 and has been maintained by the Town Council since 2017. Recent inspections have revealed a need to repair some areas of safety surfacing and some fittings on the activity trail which are nearing their end of life. The Clerk advised that a quotation to complete this work has been received in the sum of £21,000 from a reputable playground equipment specialist which can be met from the Town Council's playground budget.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Town Clerk be authorised to arrange for the repair of the safety surfacing and activity trail play equipment within a budget of up to £21,000.

#### **F/24/44) Contract Standing Orders**

The Clerk advised that to improve future tender processes, the Town Council's Procurement consultant has recommended some changes to the Town Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. The key changes being:

1. A proposed contract for the supply of goods, materials, services and the execution of works with an estimated value in excess of £100,000 (previously £60,000) shall be procured on the basis of a formal tender.
2. All contracts with a value of £25,000 or more be advertised on contract finder unless the responsible committee deems there to be a good reason to seek direct tenders from a least 3 identified suppliers justified on one or more of four grounds (as set out in the report).

It was **RECOMMENDED** that Members approve the changes to the Standing Orders and Financial Regulations as set out in the report.

#### **F/24/45) Holy Trinity Church Piazza Scheme**

The Clerk advised that in order to keep the completion of the Holy Trinity Church piazza scheme on track, he had, on the advice of the Town Council's procurement specialist invited 5 experienced contractors to tender for the delivery of the church piazza works. The advice received has re-assured the Clerk that the specialist nature of the works allows this approach to obtaining a suitable contractor.

The Clerk advised that the Clerk in conjunction with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor have been authorised to open and accept the most economically advantageous tender by the Planning and Regeneration Committee and that when a preferred contractor is identified a JCT minor works contract will be drafted to help control and deliver the works.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. endorse the approach taken by the Town Clerk with regard to the tender process for the Holy Trinity Church Piazza Scheme;
2. invite at least 3 local experienced contractors to quote for delivery of the church piazza scheme and the tender not be advertised on Contract Finder;
3. The contract be subject to a Joint Contracts Tribunal Ltd (JCT) minor works contract;
4. A budget envelope of £75,000 be included within the tender documentation;
5. Authorise the Clerk to arrange to open and accept the most economically advantageous tender in conjunction with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor.

## **F/24/46) St Austell Library**

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the library's staffing establishment remains at 2 full time, 6 part time staff and a vacant post of 16 hours per week which is due to be filled before the New Year combined with a community projects role. The library also has Home Library Service volunteers, 2-3 casual volunteers for general library duties and during the summer up to 3 work experience students. The hours remain 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 1pm on a Saturday.

Regular activities include Sing and Shake, Story Time, Reading and Writing Groups and whole school visits. SALSA continue to hold regular events which, on the whole, are well supported. The craft fayres are well supported with the next one on Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> November. The Freshers' Fair at the college was successful with an increase in library membership for the 16-21 age range. Since the Freshers' Fair, the on-line driving theory test is proving very popular.

There are a number of home educated children and people working from home who regularly use the library. This has resulted in the need to create more space on the mezzanine which is the preferred area of space for these two groups of people.

SALSA has received a South West in Bloom Level 4 "Thriving" award for the library garden. Unfortunately, since the last inspection, the story tree has had to be taken down due to decay which was noticed by the judges! SALSA is considering another feature for the garden.

The Summer Reading challenges went extremely well; 914 sign ups (target 753) and 619 finishers (target 516). The Deputy Mayor and his wife judged the creature clay models that some of the children made which was one of the many craft activities on offer during the challenge period.

The wellbeing kiosk installed by the Health and Wellbeing Team from Cornwall Council was popular with 178 people registered as having used it.

The banner exhibition was extremely well received at the library with 105 voting for their preferred banner option and photographs. The exhibition is moving to White River Place on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> November 2024 until Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

## **F/24/47) Dates of next meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 17<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

The meeting closed at 7.39pm.