

MINUTES of the MEETING of ST AUSTELL TOWN COUNCIL held on MONDAY 4th MAY 2020 (Remote Meeting) at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Brown, Bull, Cohen, French, Hanlon, Heyward, Jones, King, Lanxon, Palmer, Pearce, Pears, Rees, Styles (Mayor), Thompson and Walker.

In attendance: David Pooley (Town Clerk), Sara Gwilliams (Deputy Town Clerk), Steve Skinner (Operations Manager).

C/19/141) Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Colwill, Leonard and Oxenham

C/19/142) Declarations of interests and gifts or hospitality received

There were no declarations of interest.

C/19/143) Dispensations

There were no requests for a dispensation.

C/19/144) Minutes of Meeting held on 3rd February 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 3rd February 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

C/19/145) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that SABEF has carried out the wildflower planting on the A391 and deferred the Garden Festival from June to September to combine it with the Whitegold Festival. He added that Phil Mason, Cornwall Council Strategic Director for Economic Growth and Development, has promised to resume meetings about anti-social behaviour once lockdown has eased.

C/19/146) Mayor's announcements

The Mayor advised that due to the current situation, he has been indoors and not attended any functions in recent weeks.

C/19/147) Public Participation

Mrs Wendy Earl advised that she was delighted to see everybody on Zoom and thanked the Council for their continued hard work during these difficult times.

C/19/148) Standing Orders

The Clerk advised that he had tried to keep the changes to the Standing Orders to a minimum as it is the Government's intention for the virtual meeting Regulations to be revoked as soon as face to face meetings are able to resume. He recommended the changes as drafted and outlined two suggested changes by Councillor Brown with regard to paragraphs 3(i) and 3(r).

Paragraph 3 (i) A person shall raise his hand when requesting to speak and may remain seated when speaking

The Clerk advised that there may be times when people are using audio only and suggested that the following wording could be added to paragraph 3 (i).

"Those persons using audio only should make the Chairman aware that they wish to speak."

*Paragraph 3 (r) **Unless standing orders provide otherwise, voting on a question shall be by a show of hands. At the request of a councillor, the voting on any question shall be recorded so as to show whether each councillor present and voting gave his vote for or against that question.** Such a request shall be made before moving on to the next item of business on the agenda. In exceptional circumstances, where the majority of members present at a meeting (excluding a video conferencing meeting) consider it appropriate, a vote may be undertaken by a secret ballot. The Chairman of a meeting held by video conferencing shall determine the manner in which Members should vote. This may either be by a show of hands or by using electronic voting facilities as long as all persons present can see the voting of others.*

The Clerk advised that again, this paragraph did not accommodate those persons using audio only or who have a failure of the video facility during the meeting and suggested that the final sentence of paragraph 3 (r) should read as follows:

"This may be by a show of hands or by using electronic voting facilities as long as all persons present can see the voting of others or, if there are persons using audio only, a named vote may be undertaken by either the Chairman or Clerk."

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the revised Standing Orders subject to the suggested changes to paragraphs 3 (i) and 3 (r)

Councillor Brown praised the Town Council for organising remote meetings so quickly and felt that the changes regarding audio only conferencing are sensible as the failure of video IT during meetings could cause voting issues and general confusion.

C/19/149) Coronavirus Pandemic – Emergency Arrangements

The Clerk advised that he had listed the decisions which had been made under delegated procedures in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor since the Council had been unable to hold meetings. He drew Members attention to the decision to make Priory Car Park free until 30th April 2020 and advised that this arrangement had been allowed to continue into May because Cornwall Council has advised that their car parks will remain free for May and the Town Council do not have safe arrangements for the collection and counting of cash at the present time.

Arising from questions, the Clerk advised that a sub-contractor is emptying the bins twice a week at the present time and that the Town Council has made two successful claims under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS) for March and April and

that he is optimistic that further payments would be received in due course for May and June if staff remain on furlough until then.

It was suggested that the Town Council should not necessarily follow Cornwall Council with regard to whether or not the car park should remain free. The Clerk added that the Town Council could sustain one further free month in the car park whilst the furlough payments are being made but it could not extend free parking for long.

Arising from a question regarding White River Place Car Park, Councillor Palmer agreed to following this up at the next BID meeting.

It was **RESOLVED** to note and endorse the decisions made to date by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Mayor and Deputy Mayor and note that Priory Car Park would continue to be free during May.

C/19/150) Risk Management

The Clerk advised that it is good practice to review the Risk Register once a year and that the Finance and General Purposes Committee had gone through the document in detail in February. (Minute Number: F/19/62 refers). At that time, Members asked for two areas to be strengthened in relation to the risks around pandemic/epidemic and climate change and that these had been brought back in more detail for Members to consider.

Members considered the risk in relation to a pandemic/epidemic and suggested that the risks to the staff from the public and the risks to the public in a pandemic or epidemic situation could be strengthened.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the Town Council's Risk Register subject to the risks to the staff from the public and the risks to the public during a pandemic or epidemic situation being strengthened.

C/19/151) Annual Internal Audit Report

The Clerk referred Members to the report of the Internal Auditor and explained that as the Auditors' findings were relevant to the Annual Return which the Council had to submit for the 2019/20 financial year, the details were reported to the full Council for consideration prior to agreeing the Annual Governance Statement. He explained that the Internal Auditor had found no issues and made no recommendations for improvement.

Members noted the clean bill of health and thanked the Town Clerk for his excellent work.

It was **RESOLVED** that the report of the Internal Auditor be noted.

C/19/152) Annual Governance Statement

The Town Clerk introduced a report setting out the details of the Annual Return and Governance Statement which is required to be completed and sent to PKF Littlejohn LLP, the Council's External Auditors, by the 1st September 2020.

Members considered each of the questions in Section 1 of the Annual Governance Statement in detail before agreeing the following responses. With regard to Question

8 it was noted that the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic had been considered and reflected in decisions made during the completion of the financial accounting statements.

It was **RESOLVED** that the answer to each question should be as follows:

Question 1 Yes
Question 2 Yes
Question 3 Yes
Question 4 Yes
Question 5 Yes
Question 6 Yes
Question 7 Yes
Question 8 Yes
Question 9 Yes

It was **RESOLVED** that:

- the Mayor and the Clerk be authorised to sign the Annual Governance Statement in the Annual Return on behalf of the Town Council;
- The Town Clerk should advertise the electors' rights after the accounting statements have been approved in accordance with the External Audit guidance with an inspection period as recommended by the Auditors;
- The annual meetings of the trustees for Truro Road and Poltair Parks should be held after the next Council meeting in July.

C/19/153) Annual Return and Accounting Statements

The Clerk referred Members to the Income and Expenditure Account and Balance Sheet for the Town Council. He advised that a surplus of £46,808 has been made after transferring £35,690 from reserves and £78,479 to reserves. He added that £68,000 grant income had been generated in the year for projects. As a result of the small surplus of £46,808.98, the Council's General Fund balance has increased from £221,494 to £268,303 (approximately 2 months expenditure) which the Clerk advised was a little on the low side due to the increasing uncertainty with regard to the impact of the Coronavirus on the Town Council's finances.

The Clerk advised that the Accounts reflected a busy year which included the CCTV upgrade, funding for The House Youth Centre, refurbishment of Truro Road Bandstand and a new bridge at Poltair Park. In addition, the floral displays around the town were improved and the library continued to perform well.

He advised that the Reserves suggested are taking the effect of coronavirus in to account as well as recognising the commitments already agreed.

Members noted the accounting statements and the proposed contributions to and from reserves.

The Clerk explained that the Council's earmarked reserves were now as follows:

Elections Reserve	£ 25,000.00
Coronavirus Reserve	£ 90,011.00

Repairs and Renewals Reserve	£ 75,000.00
Projects Reserve	£ 59,337.77
TOTAL	£249,348.77

It was **RESOLVED** to:

- i. Approve the detailed accounting statements and transfers to and from reserves as shown;
- ii. Approve the accounting statement in Section 2 of the Annual Return for 2019/20; and
- iii. Authorise the Clerk and Mayor to sign the Accounting Statement on the Annual Return on behalf of the Town Council.

C/19/154) Budget Projections 2020/21

The Clerk explained that he had calculated some financial projections on what he believed would be the worst case scenario and best base scenario for the Council's finances with regard to the coronavirus pandemic. He explained that the worse case scenario assumed the lockdown to last for the majority of the year with very little car park and library income. The best case scenario assumes that lockdown is lifted in June with some recovery from July onwards but the car park income not fully recovering until after 2021/22. The projections assume expenditure to be largely the same as originally budgeted. He also explained that it is not 100% certain that the furlough monies claimed will be retained which could mean a loss of £35,000 income which is not reflected in the projections. He explained that minor savings could be made during the year with regard to waste management, grounds maintenance, play equipment, contract payments, grant payments and the climate change agenda but recommended that for the time being the Town Council should not incur any major expenditure and should go forward slowly and carefully until there was more certainty.

Arising from the above, Members raised the following issues:

- How the waste contract will be managed in the future
- The economic recovery of the town
- The need to be very prudent with expenditure
- The need to share information/advice with and learn from other Town and Parish Councils and CALC
- Not to make cuts too quickly whilst there is still a hope of Government funding.

It was **RESOLVED** to review the position over the next two months and provide an updated financial report to the next Finance & General Purposes Committee and full Council.

C/19/155) Coronavirus Leaflet

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the Community Link Officer has approached the Town Council about whether or not Town Councillors would be prepared to contribute towards a community leaflet drop designed for people who are not able to access on line advice or help. She advised that the total costings for design, print and distribution by the Royal Mail would be in the region of £1,300 and that if the Town Council paid half, the Cornwall Councillors would fund the balance from their

Community Chest fund. The artwork and wording would be based on a leaflet produced for Falmouth.

Councillor Bull expressed her support for the leaflet as she was aware of a lot of local elderly people who are not getting the support they need, particularly with regard to their shopping needs.

Members were supportive of the initiative and felt that the leaflet should be produced as soon as possible.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve funding in the sum of £682.50 towards a Coronavirus leaflet for the St Austell & Mevagissey Community Network area.

C/19/156) Schedule of Payments

It was **RESOLVED** that the Schedule of Payments for the period 25th January 2020 to 27th April 2020 totalling £259,868.57 be approved.

C/19/157) Finance and General Purposes Committee

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting dated 24th February 2020 be noted.

C/19/158) Community Committee

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Community Committee meeting dated 2nd March 2020 be noted.

C/19/159) Planning and Regeneration Committee

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the Planning and Regeneration Committee meetings dated 10th February and 9th March 2020 be noted.

C/19/160) Schedule of Meetings

Members considered the draft schedule of meetings and felt that although ambitious in the current climate, the schedule should be used as a guide for up and coming meetings but that the Clerk should be given the discretion to only summons meetings that are absolutely necessary.

Councillor King expressed his disappointment that the Climate & Environment Committee is not scheduled on the list and expressed a view that the Community Committee is probably not a necessary meeting. The Clerk advised that the climate change agenda is still important and that if there is business for the Climate & Environment Committee one could be scheduled.

Councillor Bull expressed a view that the Community Committee is important as it considers grant applications which in the current climate could help local community groups cope with the crisis.

Councillor Brown advised that the words "civic year" should be removed from the list as due to the non-election of a Mayor and Deputy Mayor there is no new civic year.

It was **RESOLVED** to approve the draft schedule of meetings subject to the words "civic year" being removed from the first column.

C/19/160) Dates of Meetings

It was noted that the date of the next meeting of the Council was Monday 13th July 2020.

The meeting closed at 7.46pm.