

MINUTES of a REMOTE MEETING of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on MONDAY 29th JUNE 2020 at 6pm.

Present: Councillors: Bishop, Brown, Cohen, French, Jones, Lanxon, Oxenham, Palmer and Styles.

Also Present: Councillors Bull and Thompson.

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

F/19/69) Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors: Rees and Walker.

F/19/70) Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

F/19/71) Dispensations

There were no requests for dispensations.

F/19/72) Minutes of meeting held on 24th February 2020

It was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting held on the 24th February 2020 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F/19/73) Matters to Note

The Clerk advised that further to minute number F/19/65, Poltair Café was due to open on 1st July, operating a takeaway service in the first instance. A photograph opportunity will be organised in a few weeks' time once the new tenants have settled in.

Arising from a question, the Clerk agreed to check the sign off status of the asbestos works in the library.

F/19/74) Public participation

There were no members of the public present.

F/19/75) Budget Update

The Clerk advised that he had promised to provide regular financial updates at the Council meeting on the 4th May 2020 and that the report in the agenda included the most recent projections for the current financial year. He advised that it was still very difficult to judge how some assets such as the car park would perform and to a large extent it depended on how the coronavirus pandemic progresses. He explained that car park income was usually in the order of £25,000 to £30,000 per month before the pandemic but that he was anticipating total income of approximately £130,000 in the current financial year which was a reduction of £165,000 against budget. He explained that the income for June with the £1 per entry charge had been in the region of £6,000.

The full charging regime would be introduced for July and hopefully with the opening of non-essential shops and services in the town centre from July, income levels should improve. It was difficult to estimate the speed of recovery of the town centre and a prudent approach had been taken to estimating car parking income. A lot will become clearer in the next few months.

The loss of car park income is offset to some extent by Government grants under the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. It is estimated that £48,000 will be received through this scheme.

Savings on salaries will be made by not filling two posts which have become vacant and project and discretionary spend will be restricted to the year end. It has been necessary to employ some additional contractors to help with waste and there are additional costs of signage, PPE and sanitising products and an additional vehicle has been hired temporarily to help with social distancing. The net result of these changes is that the Town Council could be in the region of £102,000 worse off than anticipated at budget time. When the Accounts were completed for the 2019/20 financial year, £91,000 was put into a reserve to help meet the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. This will be completely wiped out and a further £11,000 will be charged against the general reserve if the net result at the end of the year is as estimated.

The Clerk expressed the need for caution for the next few months and the need to hold back any large projects and new expenditure. He advised that he was seeking assistance by way of hardship funding from various sources, including Cornwall Council but there was a great deal of uncertainty about whether any such funds will be forthcoming.

In response to questions from Members the Clerk confirmed that the library and toilets would open early in July.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the content of the report;
2. Bear in mind the financial situation when considering spending decisions throughout the remainder of this year.

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

F/19/76) Budget Monitoring Report

Members noted the variance against budget for the car park income which had been explained in detail in the previous agenda item.

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

F/19/77) Re-Deployable CCTV Camera

The Clerk advised that in the last budget setting round, a budget of £5,000 was set aside for a re-deployable mobile CCTV camera and that an opportunity has arisen to trial a camera for 2 weeks. He explained some anti social behaviour issues in the Bethel area and the proposed trial and possible purchase of a camera.

He advised that the camera is more expensive than the current budget and that he had approached the 6 St Austell and Mevagissey Community Network Panel Cornwall Councillors, Ocean and the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for a contribution. The camera would be linked to the CCTV suite in Newquay and be monitored live and re-deployed to other areas as and when felt necessary by the Police and Safer St Austell stakeholders.

Councillor Brown expressed his support for the re-deployable camera and advised that he was willing to contribute a significant sum from his Cornwall Councillor Community Chest budget, subject to the Bethel area having the benefit of the camera in the first instance. Other Members were generally supportive of the camera and Councillor Bull also agreed to contribute some funding from her Cornwall Councillor Community Chest budget.

It was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Note the report;
2. Authorise the Town Clerk to secure the purchase of a re-deployable camera if the trial is successful;
3. Authorise the Town Clerk to identify additional funding of up to £3,000 to secure the purchase of a re-deployable camera in the event that the full shortfall of funding cannot be secured from other sources.

F/19/78) St Austell Library – Phased re-opening

The Deputy Town Clerk introduced a report setting out arrangements for the re-opening of the library on Monday 6th July 2020. She explained that there would initially be a click and collect service utilising the foyer area and that books will be quarantined for up to 72 hours before being placed back into circulation. A booking system will be used to make appointments for individuals with time slots linked to an alphabetic division of surnames. Fines will be waived for the first month of operation and the operating procedures will be communicated widely. The operation of the Library will be reviewed on a monthly basis and additional services introduced when it is safe to do so.

Members enquired about access to historical records and academic papers and congratulated the Deputy Town Clerk for the efforts made to open the library.

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

F/19/79) Code of Conduct

The Clerk advised that the Local Government Association has produced a revised draft of the Model Code of Conduct which is trying to promote high standards of member behaviour and to provide a basis for a better system of sanctions. The Clerk expressed concern with regard to the section on "Civility" and the suggestion that "all local authorities" should form a panel to investigate allegations of a breach instead of "the principal authority"

Councillor Brown advised that Cornwall Council had set up a Working Group of the Standard Committee to look at the consultation.

It was **RESOLVED** to note the correspondence and ask all Members to submit their individual responses to the consultation paper should they wish by the 17th August deadline.

F/19/80) Internal Audit Report

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

F/19/81) Dates of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee is due to take place on 21st September 2020.

The meeting closed at 7.16pm.