

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 19th February 2015
at the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

Present: Cllrs S Allcroft, P Allcroft, D Farrar, B Grisdale, G Mavin, S Mavin, R Roberts and A Symmonds.

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk, J Pibworth, Administration Assistant.

FP 14/34 Apologies

Councillors P Broom, G Castle, S Patience.

FP 14/35 Declarations of Interest

None.

FP 14/36 Budget update 2014/15

The Town Clerk circulated the committee budget as at 17th February 2015. This showed expenditure at £82,605 compared to £61,553 in December 2014 and includes the payments approved at the January Council meeting. This was reviewed line by line with the following highlighted by the Town Clerk:

ADMINISTRATION - currently at £34,309 (up to end of January). End of year figure will be slightly higher than budgeted due to pay award which came into effect in January 2015.

RENT - expenditure £690 which is above budget as payment has been made for 9 month period. The 7 figure which actually relates to 2014/15 is £525.

TOWN TEAM - no expenditure in 2015/16. The figure of £500 will be carried forward to 2015/16.

GRANTS - expenditure at £10,229.59 (the odd figure is due to the cost of the equipment for the Alnwick Recreational Runners that had been purchased). This leaves a budget of £200.49.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - expenditure has increased due to NNDR figure of £188.14.

Overall the actual expenditure will be slightly below budgeted figure.

RESOLVED: To receive the budget update.

FP 14/37 Grant Application - Alnwick Tourism Association

The Town Clerk reminded the committee that there was a grant application which had been bought forward for consideration from the December meeting. This was a request for funding from Alnwick Tourism Association towards the cost of printing and distributing their 2015 tourism booklet. This had been deferred until councillors had reviewed the booklet, which had been distributed with the agenda for this meeting.

Councillor G Mavin commented that it did not include all the hotels in Alnwick.

Councillor Symmonds felt it was an in-house magazine for Alnwick Tourism Association.

Councillor S Allcroft asked how they planned to use the grant. The Town Clerk advised that they wanted to use the grant to be able to distribute the booklet to a wider audience.

Councillor G Mavin felt it was a very well produced booklet but only had Alnwick Tourism Association members in it. The Town Clerk advised that it did have some attractions in it.

Councillor Farrar thought that as 99% of it was advertising based, it had no real town benefit.

Councillor G Mavin thought that this could be said of some of the festivals that the Town Council supported financially.

Councillor Roberts felt it was a marketing document for their members. She also felt that if the Town Council gave a grant they might get more requests of this nature. She also agreed that it was not a tourism booklet that benefited the town.

Councillor G Mavin proposed that the Town Council offered a grant of £200. No-one seconded the proposal.

Councillor Symmonds proposed that no grant was offered by the Town Council and this was agreed by everyone except Councillor G Mavin.

RESOLVED: That Alnwick Tourism Association be notified of the outcome of their unsuccessful grant application.

FP 14/38 Council Boundaries - response from Denwick Parish Council

The Town Clerk advised the committee that he and the Mayor had a meeting with the Chair of Denwick Parish Council after which the Town Clerk had attended the Denwick Parish Council meeting in January 2015 to discuss three issues including boundaries. He informed the Denwick councillors that as the new development, to the south of the town, would be in Denwick they may be responsible for the amenities including bins and play areas. The Denwick Parish chairman had advised that they were happy for Alnwick Town Council to approach NCC to instigate a community governance review.

Councillor S Allcroft asked what happened now. The Town Clerk advised that the Town Council should request a governance review from NCC.

Councillor G Mavin felt this was good news. He asked if the exact boundary had been discussed with Denwick Parish Council. The Town Clerk advised that the exact boundary had not been discussed but that boundaries usually follow natural features such as hedges, footpaths and streams.

Councillor G Mavin commented that perhaps the governance review would identify the boundary. Councillor Farrar felt the Town Council should identify a suggested boundary.

Councillor S Allcroft agreed that the Town Council should ask for a governance review and identify the boundary.

RESOLVED: i) To look at the possible boundary in more detail at the next meeting. ii) To recommend to Full Council that NCC be contacted regarding a community governance review.

FP 14/39 End of Year Procedures

a) Internal Audit checklist

The Town Clerk advised the committee that Norman Dunn would be undertaking the audit again this year and that it would be done in June 2015. His appointment was agreed at a previous meeting. The Full Council had previously considered his 2013/14 report and were satisfied with the content and the effectiveness of the audit. He also advised that it was a requirement that the Finance & Policy committee review the internal audit checklist. One area which the auditor will check is regarding section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972 which stipulates the amount of money local councils can spend for purposes for which they have no other specific statutory expenditure. This maximum figure for Alnwick Town Council in 2014/15, based on £7.20 per elector was £55,836.

He also advised that the current overall expenditure under s137 was around £19,300, well under the maximum limit. Councillor Farrar asked if the additional member of staff would come under s137. The Town Clerk advised that some of the function could come under s137.

The Town Clerk advised the committee that the checklist had not changed since 2014/15.

RESOLVED: i) To approve the content of the internal checklist ii) To note the effectiveness of the internal audit and the internal auditor.

b) Review of effectiveness of internal controls

The Town Clerk issued the checklist which councillors reviewed.

Petty Cash - Town Clerk advised that currently there is a £50 petty cash float at the Cemetery but that an additional float would be set up for the new office.

Wages - Councillor S Allcroft asked why only one signature was required on wages cheques. The Town Clerk advised that because the money going into the main wages account was approved monthly at Full Council only one signature was felt necessary on individual cheques.

Insurance - The Town Clerk advised that the insurance was due for renewal soon and that he would request quotes.

Councillor Symmonds reminded the committee that all the items on the Internal Controls sheet were seen on an on-going basis throughout the year.

Councillor Farrar asked if anything had changed from 2014/15. The Town Clerk advised that there had been one slight change - cheque stubs are now signed by councillors.

Councillor Roberts asked if only covered financial items were covered by the checklist. The Town Clerk advised that they were.

RESOLVED: That the internal controls are satisfactory.

c) Risk Management

The Town Clerk circulated the Assessment of Risks (March 2015) document. This gives the Category, Risk, Control Factors and New Proposals for 2015/16 (if any). The Categories covered are Financial, Legal, Operational and Business Continuity. He highlighted the following:

Financial

Additional unforeseen costs - this would only be an issue if a really large unexpected bill was received e.g. tree works at the Cemetery. He also highlighted that the level of required Reserves was linked to expenditure so they might need to be increased during 2015/16.

Drop in Income - income mainly comes from the Cemetery but Town Council have no control over the number of people being buried in any one year.

VAT Not reclaimed - VAT will be listed separately on expenditure list from March 2015.

Councillor G Mavin asked if councillors were held liable as a group, were they covered on the insurance. The Town Clerk advised that councillors would not be individually responsible.

Councillor Symmonds asked if there was a clear policy for claiming mileage. The Town Clerk advised that there was.

Legal

Failure to deal with Freedom of Information request - he advised that very few FOIs were received and that most were from sales reps researching information. Requests had included information on staffing at the cemetery and type of heating system.

Operational

Loss of key personnel - much better position since the recruitment of new staff.

Councillor Symmonds asked about the timescales for the Town Handyman being trained on cemetery equipment. The Town Clerk advised this needed to be organised.

Loss of information and data - duplicates are kept for some data and information including all minutes and agendas. Need to put a back up procedure in place for new computer in office.

The Town Clerk also advised that the internal auditor had advised that the Assessment of Risks document be taken to Full Council.

Councillor Roberts would like to see something added regarding loss of accommodation for committee / council meetings.

Councillor Roberts asked about reputational risk e.g. adverse behaviour by councillor or officers. Councillor G Mavin asked how a councillor could be sacked. The Town Clerk advised that the Code of Conduct (2012 NALC version) and employee contracts set out standards for behaviour.

RESOLVED: i) To add a line on the Assessments of Risks sheet, under Operational for Loss of Accommodation; ii) To recommend to the next council meeting that the Assessment of Risks report and action plan be approved.

FP 14/40 Asset Register

The Town Clerk circulated the current Asset Register. He informed the committee that during the external audit in 2013/2014 the council had been asked to review and tighten the information held on the asset register by the end of the financial year. He took councillors through the revised sheets which contained information under the headings - LAND & BUILDINGS; VEHICLES & MACHINERY; EQUIPMENT and CIVIC REGALIA. He also explained that he had been advised to add purchase dates and these had been added, where known.

Councillor Farrar suggested that the Insurance Value be added as a separate column on the Asset register.

RESOLVED: i) To add a column onto the Asset Register for Insurance Value; ii) For the draft Asset Register to be forwarded to Full Council for approval.

FP 14/41 Any Other Urgent Business

None.

Meeting closed at 8.25pm