

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 16th April 2015
at the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

Present: Cllrs S Allcroft, P Allcroft, P Broom, G Castle, D Farrar, B Grisdale (late arrival), G Mavin, S Mavin (late arrival), S Patience (late arrival), R Roberts and A Symmonds.

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

FP 14/42 Apologies

None.

FP 14/43 Declarations of Interest

Councillor G Castle declared a non pecuniary interest in Item 7. Alnwick Youth Hostel. Councillors Castle, Farrar and Roberts declared a non pecuniary interest in Item 8. Grant Applications.

FP 14/44 Budget update 2014/15

The Town Clerk circulated the committee budget as at 31st March 2015. This showed expenditure at £93,126 compared to £82,605 in February 2015 and includes the payments approved at the March Council meeting. This was reviewed line by line with the following highlighted by the Town Clerk:

ADMINISTRATION - currently at £42,906 (up to end of March). End of year figure will be slightly higher than budgeted due to pay award which came into effect in January 2015.

SEASONAL OPERATIVE - original budget was not for a full year as post was extended in September 2014. Originally budgeted at £5,219 the end of year expenditure will be £8,105.

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - one more invoice for 2015/16.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - expenditure will be under budget at end of year.

WILLOWBURN UNIT RENT - expenditure will be slightly higher than budgeted as the invoice is for a 13 month rental period and income has only been taken from the other people using the unit for 12 months.

Overall the actual expenditure was expected to be slightly below budget at £94,626.

Councillor Farrar asked what the Town Council's contribution was of the costs of the Willowburn unit. The Town Clerk advised it was £1,000 and was for storing gazebos and staging etc.

Councillor G Mavin asked why the budget was higher in 2015/16. The Town Clerk explained that the increase was mainly due to £21,000 for the new Project and Funding Officer post and £10,000 for the delivery of the CAPS (Community Action Plans) from the Neighbourhood Plan.

RESOLVED: To receive the budget update.

FP 14/45 Review of Council Insurance Policy

The Town Clerk advised that the current insurance policy is with Zurich Municipal and runs until June 1st 2015. If quotes were to be obtained certain areas needed to be reviewed and agreed.

Buildings - all covered on the insurance and all have a £100 excess for accidental damage and £250 excess for malicious damage.

Councillor G Mavin asked how the buildings, including the Mechanics Institute were valued. The Town Clerk advised that all valuations were historic rebuild values.

Councillor Castle advised that NCC valued the council chamber in Clayport Street at £800k yet it sold for much less. He also thought that all the buildings the Town Council either owned or were responsible for should be re-valued.

Excess -The Town advised that the Town Council needed to review which items remained on the insurance and what the level of excess should be on certain items including the Heritage Seats. Councillor Castle felt that if the excess was more than 10% of the value of an item it should not be on the insurance list.

Councillor Roberts asked if the excess counted on each claim made. The Town Clerk advised that it did.

Councillor Castle felt that not everything needed to be on the policy.

Councillor G Mavin suggested that any single item valued at under £500 be taken off the insurance list. Councillor Castle agreed with this suggestion.

The Town Clerk gave information about other areas of the current insurance cover:

Money - covered by standard clauses and covered up to £250k.

Public and Employers liability - both covered up to £10million.

Liability - covered up to 250k for liable and slander.

Fidelity guarantee - covered up to £500k.

Legal expenses - covered up to £100.

Councillor Patience commented that the Public Liability insurance seemed high. Councillors Castle advised that the Christmas Lights had the same level of coverage and Councillor Symmonds advised that the International Music Festival had the same.

Councillor G Mavin asked if the legal expenses covered councillors. The Town Clerk advised that it did.

The Town Clerk also advised the committee that he could get quotes for one, three or five years. Councillor Roberts asked if there was a difference. The Town Clerk advised there was.

Councillor Patience asked if the Town Council would be locked into the three or five years if they went with them. The Town Clerk advised that they would be.

RESOLVED: i) To get all the Town Council buildings re-valued, provided the cost was not excessive, with the decision being delegated to the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chair of the Finance & Policy Committee; ii) To stay with a £100 excess on all items on the insurance policy and delegate powers to the Town Clerk to amend the list of items for insurance; iii) To obtain up to three quotes, including Zurich, using the revised list.

FP 14/46 Council Investments

The Town Clerk advised the committee that the Town Council had invested £99,229 from the Swansfield Park endowment two years ago.

Councillor Castle asked if the play equipment at Swansfield Park was covered on the council's insurance. The Town Clerk advised that it all was.

The Town Clerk also said that he would be advising the council about the level of reserves and that the Town Council could increase their level of investment with slightly better interest. He advised the committee that several T&PCs were looking at the CCLA Property Fund

which was created for local government and was AAA rated. It already had £392mill invested in it including some very large county councils and last year the interest rate was 4.2%.

Councillor Castle asked if it was a social property fund.

Councillor Farrar felt it was just a property fund with the words Local Government in the title. He felt that the Town Council could look at more social based property funds. He asked why buildings societies cannot be used by T&PCs. The Town Clerk advised that he would make enquiries at NALC as to why building societies cannot be used. He advised that he would send the CCLA document plus NALC advice to all councillors.

Councillor Roberts felt it was important to review the fees associated with any funds and including any withdrawals made.

RESOLVED: Town Clerk to get examples of funds the Town Council could invest in and councillors to give feedback.

FP 14/47 Project and Funding Officer Post

The Town Clerk issued the draft job description using the brief agreed at the Finance & Policy meeting in December 2014. He advised that it would be an SO2 graded post and would be initially for three years. He advised that firstly the job description needed to be agreed then the recruitment processes and timescale.

Councillor S Allcroft was concerned about the 3 years period. The Town Clerk advised that would be a probationary period for the post.

Councillor G Mavin reminded the committee that the post had been adopted after the visits to Ashington Town Council. He felt that the Town Council needed to set a minimum amount of time for the post to undertake Town Council business but as the Neighbourhood Plan may not be agreed until early 2016 was not sure this would happen. The Town Clerk advised that there were already Community Action Plans that could be undertaken before the Neighbourhood Plan was agreed.

Councillor Patience also advised that a housing needs survey also needed undertaking.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council could be looking at three month recruitment period.

Councillor Patience asked what was covered under 'routine duties' in the job description. The Town Clerk advised that this could be a range of things. If they were working from the office this could include answering the phone or taking messages.

Councillor Castle asked what stage the post had got to. The Town Clerk advised that budget had been allocated for the post in 2015/16. Councillor confirmed that he felt it was important that this was taken forward. He also felt that this could be quite a significant post and that there would be enough to do to promote the town.

The Town Clerk confirmed that the Town Council would have some time to decide on projects for the post holder.

Councillor Roberts felt it was important that the job description covered the key tasks.

Councillor Farrar thought that tasks 4 to 7 on the job description could be consolidated into two items. The Town Clerk confirmed that more tasks could be added as subsidiary tasks.

Councillor Farrar felt that examples of the type of project that would be undertaken could be added to each key task in the job description.

Councillor Farrar also asked if a vehicle was necessary for the post. The Town Clerk advised that the draft job description says access to a vehicle. Councillor asked if a non vehicle owner could apply for the post. Councillor Symmonds felt occasional access to a vehicle would be needed as the post holder may need to attend meetings, conferences and events.

Councillor Castle thought that the job person specification could give essential and desirable skills.

Councillor G Mavin felt that project delivery was key to the post.

Councillor Symmonds advised that the Music Festival in 2016 would certainly need help.

Councillor Patience thought that it was important that the post holder did not get asked to do too much by event organisers.

Councillor Symmonds advised that requests should go through the appropriate line manager.

Councillor Roberts thought that it was important that the role focused on town activities and Town Council priorities.

Councillor Castle thought the job specification needed to be right first, then the reporting structure then how the functions would be managed by the Town Council.

Councillor Symmonds suggested a series of reports to the relevant committee / sub group.

Councillor Castle thought that something about liaising and networking should be added.

RESOLVED: i) To review the job description and feed back to the Town Clerk; ii) The Town Clerk and Councillor Roberts to review / draft a person specification and send final draft out to the Finance & Policy Committee for approval by the Chair.

The Town Clerk advised that there would need to be a selection panel of three people for shortlisting and interviewing. He also advised that he would bring a report to the Full Council meeting in May for approval.

Councillor S Allcroft and G Mavin volunteered to join the Committee Chair and Councillor Castle and Roberts offered to be reserves.

FP 14/48 Matters Arising from last meeting with NCC

Alnwick Youth Hostel - Councillor Symmonds explained that this item had come about as a result of a comment he made about the Town Council not having any resources in the town. Councillor Castle advised that the Youth Hostel had been set up as a separate company on the demise of the Development Trust. He also advised that the building was owned by NCC and that money from profits was given to charity and not put back into the building. He added that the Town Council could advise the Youth Hostel about charities it might support.

Councillor Patience asked if the Youth Hostel was looking for any more directors. Councillor Castle advised that they could be and that he would add to their next agenda.

Councillor Broom asked if any reserves were kept. Councillor Castle advised that there were.

Councillor Patience asked if out of season use of the hostel had been looked at. Councillor Castle advised that this had not been looked at for a while.

Councillor Farrar thought it would be helpful if the Town Council knew which charities had been supported by the youth hostel.

Procurement possibilities with other local councils - The Town Clerk advised that the idea was to look at ordering resources / consumables that could be multi purchased across several councils. Councillor S Allcroft asked if the potential numbers were known. The Town Clerk advised that he had not asked around as yet.

Councillor Castle advised that NCC only share audit services with other councils. The Town Clerk felt this could be useful if they could do this other areas, for example, if NCC use Jewsons it would be helpful if the Town Handyman could use them and get the same levels of discount. Councillor Castle suggested it would be worth approaching NCC.

Councillor Farrar suggested that the Town Council could have an informal email list that they send to when they are making orders.

FP 14/49 Grant Applications - Alnwick & District Choral Society and Thorndale House

Alnwick and District Choral Society. The Town Clerk advised the committee that they had originally applied, and been awarded, a grant for £200 towards a concert in Rock. They had returned the cheque as they were not going to be holding the concert but advised that they would be holding a concert at St Paul's on June 14th at a cost of £950.

Councillor S Allcroft said she was not sure £200 would make a big difference to them so she suggested that a grant not be awarded. Councillor P Allcroft supported this.

Councillor Roberts asked if the concert would be a 'paid' concert where tickets would be sold. The Town Clerk advised that they usually were.

Councillors voted and it was decided not to offer a grant on this occasion.

Thorndale House - the Town Clerk advised that he had received a letter, advising that they plan to take the children on a flight abroad, and were requesting a grant towards travel costs.

Councillor S Allcroft said she would like to do something but also felt that she would like to see them do something in this country.

Councillor Roberts felt that the council did not have sufficient information to make a decision at this stage. She felt that they could be sent the standard grant application form to complete and return with the necessary accounts information.

Councillor Castle advised that there was a Community Chest meeting in May and that Thorndale could approach Kevin Bartlett at NCC.

RESOLVED: i) To advise Alnwick and District Choral Society about the unsuccessful outcome of their application; ii) To ask Thorndale for further information by sending a grant application form to complete.

FP 14/50 Any Other Urgent Business

Councillor Farrar asked about the boundary review. The Town Clerk advised that he had asked NCC for maps which he would send out to the committee.

Councillor Broom asked if there was a possibility of the Town Council purchasing a sound system for the town. Councillor Symmonds advised that the Music Festival had a sound system, which they had pledged for community use. Users would have to collect, insure it and have a qualified person to operate it.

Meeting closed at 9.08pm