



Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on Thursday 16th October 2014 at the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm

Present: Cllrs A Symmonds (Chairman), D Farrar, G Mavin, R Roberts.

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

FP 14/15 Apologies

Councillors S Allcroft, P Allcroft, P Broom, G Castle, B Grisdale and S Patience.

The Town Clerk also reported that he had received a resignation from Councillor Chris Goodfellow with immediate effect from October 16th 2014.

FP 14/16 Declarations of Interest

None.

FP 14/17 2014/15 budget update

The Town Clerk circulated the committee budget as at 14th October 2014. This showed expenditure at £45,517 compared to £22,979 in July and includes the payments approved at the October Council meeting. This was examined line by line with the following highlighted by the Town Clerk:

ADMINISTRATION - currently at £20,257 and should end the year in line with the budget figure. The Administration Assistant is averaging 10 hours per week which is in line with the budget figure.

SEASONAL OPERATIVE - the post was budgeted to last until the end of October at a cost of £5,219. The Town Clerk asked the Committee if they wanted to extend the contract beyond this point and explained that the budget would need to be increased to £7,700.

Councillor Farrar asked the Town Clerk to explain the role of the Seasonal Operative. The Town Clerk explained that the post was currently two days a week and includes play area maintenance; seat maintenance programme; allotments - strimming and general tidying as well as review and maintenance all the other Town Council's assets. He also explained that he felt this was a valuable post and the staff concerned was flexible about his working pattern.

Councillor G Mavin felt it was good value for money and that the Committee should agree to increase the budget, as recommended. The Town Clerk asked if the committee felt this should be a permanent post. Councillor Symmonds suggested that this was dealt with as part of the annual staffing review process.

RENT - no expenditure as yet but predicted end of year figure will be £525 (seven month's rent for St James's)

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN - expenditure £8,518. End of year predicted figure will be £16,650 (budgeted figure of £12,000 and a grant of £4.650).

Councillor G Mavin asked how much more budget would be needed to complete the Neighbourhood Plan? The Town Clerk explained the process to the committee:

i) draft plan consultation phase just finished, ii) comments reviewed and responses made, iii) NCC evaluation and iv) referendum around May/June 2015.

The Town Clerk also explained that there were long term benefits as Towns and Parishes with an approved Neighbourhood Plan would be able to receive 25% of any Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) arising from developments in their area. Towns and Parishes without a Neighbourhood Plan will only receive 15%. He confirmed there were around 7 or 8 councils undertaking the Neighbourhood Plan process and Alnwick were 2nd to start and are 2nd in line to finish.

Councillor Roberts commented that most of the expenditure involved with the Neighbourhood Plan were staff costs and that there would be wider benefits to the Town Council through the creation of the Community Action Proposals

GRANTS - this year's grant application will be reviewed at the Finance & Policy meeting in December.

MAYOR'S CHAIN - will be about £1,500 as more work was needed.

OFFICE ACCOMMODATION - current expenditure is £1,006 mostly for office equipment. Predicted end of year figure will be around £3,000 (budget £5,000).

RESOLVED: i) To receive the budget update, ii) extend the seasonal operative post until the end of March and increase the budgeted figure iii) To review seasonal operative post as part of the staffing review for next year and consider making it permanent and allocating more hours

FP 14/18 Council Transparency Requirements

The Town Clerk gave an update on the range of new measures regarding the openness and transparency of councils' affairs being implemented by the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG). As part of these new measures DCLG have announced that regulations will make the Transparency Code mandatory (subject to Parliamentary approval) from 7th November 2014. All local councils with annual income or expenditure greater than £200k will be affected which means that Alnwick Town Council will be required to publish information.

The first deadline for quarterly data to be published is no later than 31 December 2014 and then no less than quarterly, with data published no later than one month after the quarter to which it relates. Local authorities will be expected to publish two sets of quarterly data during 2014-15 then produce and publish their first set of annual data no later than 2nd February 2015.

The Town Clerk distributed annex A of the Transparency Code document and reviewed the requirements with the committee.

Data which needs to be published quarterly:

- Expenditure exceeding £500
- Government Procurement Card transactions (does not apply to ATC)
- Procurement information

Data which is to be published annually:

- Local authority land (includes allotments and the cemetery)
- Grants to voluntary, community and social enterprise organisations
- Organisation chart
- Trade union facility time (does not apply to ATC)
- Parking account (does not apply to ATC)
- Parking spaces
- Senior salaries (does not apply to ATC)
- Constitution
- Pay multiple
- Fraud (does not apply to ATC)

Data which is to be published as a one-off:

- Waste contracts

He explained the method of publication and the star formats given in the code:

- One star data available on the web
- Two star as one star plus available as machine-readable data (e.g. Excel)
- Three star as two star plus use a non-proprietary format (e.g. CSV, XML)
- Four star all the above plus use open standards from World Wide Web Consortium (such as RDF and SPARQL2.1)
- Five star all the above plus links an organisation's data to others' data to provide context

The Town Clerk also explained that the Town Council were very open about payments it made and they all have to be approved at a full council meeting. He felt that it would not be difficult to publish all payments not just those over £500, as stipulated. The current data could be easily adapted to produce all the information requirements.

He informed the committee that there is a NALC meeting on November 4th to discuss the code and its implications.

Councillor G Mavin asked what the purpose of the code was? The Town Clerk explained that it gave local people access to local information.

Councillor Farrar moved that the Town Council do not increase the amount of information they produce with the exception of the procurement information.

The Town Clerk confirmed that, as the timescales are really tight, a report with the Finance & Policy Committee's recommendations would be forwarded to the next Full Council meeting for approval.

RESOLVED: To forward to the November Full Council meeting the recommendation of the Finance & Policy Committee that the Town Council do not increase the amount of information they produce with the exception of the Procurement Information.

FP 14/19 Grant Application process 2014/15

The Committee reviewed the Application Form and information from 2013/14.

Councillor G Mavin asked if this form was used for Events? The Town Clerk explained it wasn't as there was a separate form which came through Recreation & Amenities Committee.

Councillor Roberts commented that the Town Council asked for audited accounts but didn't always get them. The Town Clerk advised that organisations can send other financial information such as bank statements.

Councillor G Mavin felt that it was important the Town Council were able to show they wanted to support organisations but maintain accountability.

Councillor Farrar thought that the information needed to be asked for up front so as not hold up the assessment process.

Councillor Roberts felt that the document needed a financial statement.

Councillor Symmonds felt it needed to reflect sound financial management and this phrase should be added to the form / document.

The Town Clerk confirmed that it was agreed last year to put the application process onto the Town Council's website, to send a press release but not to notify previous applicants.

RESOLVED: i) To change the wording in the Grant application documents to better reflect the need for 'sound financial management' and change the wording on item 7 on the application form from 'audited accounts' to 'all significant income and outgoings for the last year' ii) To upload the revised Grant application process and form onto Town Council's website iii) To send out a press release regarding the Grant application process.

FP 14/20 Proposed Visits to Outside Organisations

The Town Clerk explained that to assist discussions about different ways of filling the gap left by the former Alnwick Development Trust visits are being arranged to other Development Trusts / Town Councils. Glendale Gateway Trust and Ashington Town Council have both been approached and have agreed to meet the Town Council. Glendale Gateway Trust are based in Wooler and have a Development Director and Assets Manager. Ashington Town Council have used a different model and have appointed their own Funding and Projects Officer. Councillors reviewed the dates offered by Ashington Town Council and agreed the afternoon of October 31st.

RESOLVED: To attend the scheduled meeting with Ashington Town Council on October 31st; ii) To arrange a meeting with Glendale Gateway Trust; iii) To review the FONDT (Federation of Northumberland Development Trusts) website for other potential Trusts to visit or useful information.

FP 14/21 Review of Council Boundaries

The committee reviewed the detailed paper put together by Councillor Farrar regarding boundary changes in light of the new development south of Alnwick. The Town Clerk showed councillors the current boundary on a map and where the new development would be situated.

Councillors felt that the first step in considering any boundary changes was to talk to Denwick Parish Council about the new development and its impact including the costs of resources.

Councillor Symmonds thanked Councillor Farrar for his work on the matter.

RESOLVED: To arrange a meeting between the Mayor, Deputy Major and Chair of Finance & Policy and Denwick Parish Council.

FP 14/22 Any Other Urgent Business

None

Meeting closed at 8.43pm