

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 22nd October 2020
at the St James's Church Centre, Pottergate, Alnwick at 6.30pm**

Present: Councillors S Allcroft, P Broom, W Grisdale, J Humphries, S Patience, M Swinbank, G Watson and L Wearn.

In attendance: P Hately, Town Clerk; J Pibworth, Assistant to the Town Clerk.

FP 20/11 Apologies

Councillors Castle and Symmonds.

FP 20/12 Declarations of Interest

The following councillors declared a non-pecuniary interest in the listed grant applications:

Councillor Grisdale – Bailiffgate Museum

Councillor Patience – Alnwick Playhouse

FP 20/13 Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting on 27th August 2020 were tabled for approval. Councillor Wearn had one correction to item FP 20/08.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Finance & Policy Meeting held on 27th August 2020, with one amendment, were agreed as a true copy.

FP 20/14 Minutes of the last meeting - matters arising not on the agenda

FP 20/08 Councillor Swinbank asked if there was any update on the possible effect of Covid on the Town Council's precept. The Town Clerk advised that it was not aware of anything but that he would check.

FP 20/09 Councillor Patience asked if was any update on the meeting schedule.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that she had swapped the dates of a couple of the committee meetings so that there was no more gap than 3 months between committee meetings.

Councillor Patience asked if there was any update on restarting physical council meetings. Councillor Wearn advised that this was not possible at the present time under the restrictions. Councillor Patience said she acknowledged that but that they had talked about reinstating physical meetings step by step. The first step being to offer some councillors the option of attending physical meetings in safe environment with other councillors joining via Zoom.

Councillor Allcroft advised that the item was discussed at the next Full Council meeting.

Councillor Humphries asked about the new flag. The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that a new Union flag and that she had asked for the price of an Alnwick Flag. She hoped that it would arrive in time to replace the Union flag when it was taken down after Remembrance Sunday.

FP 20/15 Budget Update 2020/21

The Assistant to the Town Clerk highlighted that there had been expenditure in some areas including Community Action Plan / Other Council Priorities which had included a 20% payment for the website and Advisory Group expenditure for Town Centre benches. There had also been some expenditure on room hire although some of this was for meetings held in 2019/20.

RESOLVED: To note the 2020/21 budget update.

FP 20/16 Scribe Accounts

The Town Clerk explained that the reports circulated to councillors last time which had been circulated were produced from the accounting software, written for local authorities, which the Town Council were currently trialling using current data. He advised that the approval for the expenditure of £790 a year would go to Full Council.

Councillor Allcroft agreed that it should be taken to Full Council.

FP 20/17 Banking

Councillor Allcroft advised that she and the Town Clerk had been working hard to get the Town Clerk and Councillor Wearn as signatories for the bank account as well as access to on-line banking. She confirmed that these had now been done.

Councillor Allcroft asked if the committee agreed that she could have access to the bank accounts. Councillor Swinbank asked if there were currently two signatories on cheques. Councillor Allcroft advised that there were two signatures required on all cheques and that current councillors who are signatories are Councillors Allcroft, Symmonds, Grisdale and Patience.

The Town Clerk advised that if as many payments as possible could be actioned through on-line banking this would speed up the process. He also advised that on-line access to bank statements would enable end of month accounts more quickly. He added that he proposed to remove the petty cash system at the cemetery. He added that there may be some constitutional changes needed so an Extraordinary Meeting of the Finance & Policy meeting may be required to agree the required changes to relevant Constitution and Standing Orders.

Councillor Allcroft explained that the Town Clerk wanted to leave a small amount of cash in the unused wages account to be used for purchasing fuel.

Councillor Broom said he would be uncomfortable giving staff access to bank accounts and that a debit card might be a better option. Councillor Allcroft advised that Barclays did not offer that service but that a simpler and safer process would be designed.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that officers had also looked at getting a fuel card.

FP 20/18 Grants

The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that not as many grants had been received as usual and that most had been received by email. She took councillors through the applications and the following grants were awarded:

Alnwick and District Playhouse Trust £15,000.00
Bailiffgate Museum £2,500.00
Hospice Care North Northumberland £4,000.00
Northumbrian CAB – Alnwick Office £4,000.00
Community@NE66 £1,000.00
North East Equality & Diversity Ltd £1,000.00
Community Action Northumberland £1,000.00
Lionhearts (Alnwick) £850.00
Alnwick Cricket Club £640.00
Lionheart Radio £1,760.00
Alnwick Music Society £1,000.00
Investing in Alnwick £1,000.00
Loving Alnwick £400.00

She advised that this left £850 in the grant budget which could be used for any later applications. The Town Clerk advised that if any additional budget was needed for grant this could be taken from the Council Priorities budget.

RESOLVED: To send the proposed grant payments to Full Council meeting for approval.

FP 20/19 Constitution - Update

The Town Clerk reported that the Councillor Waton had done some work on the Constitution correcting inconsistencies, especially with cross referencing, in the 2019 document. He advised that the updated version would be taken

Councillor Swinbank asked if it was worth, as in previous years, a Constitution review meeting should be held. The Town Clerk advised that as the proposed changes did not need approval it was not necessary at this stage.

RESOLVED: To produce a report on the possible constitutional changes needed and take to Full Council for approval.

FP 20/20 Any Other Urgent Business

Councillor Swinbank asked if there was any update on the budgeted apprentice and asked if this could be added to a future agenda. The Town Clerk advised that the budget had been put into 2020/21 but that Covid had made it difficult this year. Councillor Wearn confirmed that the Town Clerk had done some work with NCC regarding the apprentice. The Town Clerk advised that a qualification had been found for them to undertake.

Councillor Humphries agreed there definitely needed to be a proper scheme of work.

Councillor Swinbank hoped that this could be progressed in the Spring.

Councillor Broom asked about the council van and whether it was due for replacement. The Town Clerk advised that the van had just had an MOT with no repairs needed. It also had low mileage.

Councillor Swinbank said he would recommend an electric vehicle.

Councillor Allcroft reported that additional chargers were being installed in Alnwick. She asked if there would be a charger be put into the cemetery. The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that a charger was planned when the van was replaced with an electric one.

Meeting closed at 7.39pm