

**Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on
Thursday 25th March 2021
at the St James's Church Centre, Pottergate, Alnwick at 6.30pm**

Present: Councillors W Grisdale, P Broom, G Castle, J Humphries, S Patience, M Swinbank, A Symmonds, G Watson, L Wearn and L Wood-Mitchell.

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

FP 20/30 Apologies
Councillor Allcroft.

FP 20/31 Declarations of Interest
Councillor Wood-Mitchell declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 6, Councillor Castle declared a non-pecuniary interest in County Matters and the Town Clerk declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5.

FP 20/32 Minutes of the last meeting
The minutes of the last meeting on 3rd December 2020 were tabled for approval.

RESOLVED: The minutes of the Finance & Policy Meeting held on 3rd December 2020 were agreed as a true copy.

FP 20/33 Minutes of the last meeting - matters arising not on the agenda
FP20/25 Councillor Wearn asked if there had been any progress regarding digital phones. The Town Clerk advised that there hadn't been.

FP 20/34 Budget Update 2020/21

The Assistant to the Town Clerk reported that current expenditure was at £162,453 (total expenditure minus income).

The Assistant to the Town Clerk highlighted the main budget lines where there had been expenditure since the last meeting:

Administration - £53,047.64 (11 months salaries)

Staff Training - £309.11 (SLCC)

Mayor's Allowance - £1,000

Alnwick Partnership - £1,150 (1st payment for Town Trail app)

Subscriptions £1,549.99 (NALC and SLCC)

Office Accommodation – £10,800 (4 qtrs rent paid)

Project & Funding Officer - £25,335.19 (11 months' salary)

N.Plan/Community Action Plan/Other Council priorities Council Priorities -£26,083.40

- Neighbourhood Plan £9,740.19
- Other Council Priorities £7,054.43 (includes payments for new website £4,986, Town Hall passage painting £475 and Scribe accounts software £730);
- COVID £9,288.78 (includes hand sanitiser / gloves / boxes for play areas £2,068.42, support payments £4000 and vaccination centre works £1,273.53)

General - £1978.51 (includes £140.11 copying, £908.51 phones, stationery £607.89)

Misc - £2,429.95 (includes bank charges £291.33, annual website hosting £500)

Council Van £919.70 (fuel £292.53, MOT £70, road tax £265, service £274.17)

INCOME - The Assistant to the Town Clerk explained that Alnwick Town Football Club £12,666 loan payments for 2020/21 had been paid and that an additional £6,522.62 income had been received (including NCC support payment £4000; Local Living closing balance £568.62; Mechanics Inst management fee £1,100

Councillor Wood-Mitchell asked about the business flyers. The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that this a town centre map which had been produced instead of the annual Town Leaflet, which had not been done due to Covid.

Councillor Grisdale asked if any Town or Parish councils in the county were getting a rebate on their rent. The Town Clerk advised that he was

Councillor Castle asked about the payments to St James's and whether the Town Council would be making room bookings again. The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that St James's had not made any decisions

RESOLVED: To note the 2020/21 budget update.

The Town Clerk left the meeting.

FP 20/35 Alnwick Town Juniors FC – funding

Councillor Wearn reported that she, the Deputy Mayor and Chair of Recreation & Amenities had visited the football club facilities. She reported that the creation of a cycle / footpath were part of their planning approval but that it would also be used by the general public. She felt it was bad form that NCC had imposed this on a charity who were unable to open the new facility until the new cycle / footpath was installed.

She explained that the club were short of £20k towards the cost of the path (which had increased over the past year).

Councillor Castle advised that NCC had put a large amount of money into the facilities and had allocated £20k towards the new path. He felt that the Town Council should support the request.

Councillor Broom supported Councillor Wearn's comments and advised that during his visit traders were on site working at cost to support the football club. He was disappointed that other planning conditions for other planning applications with regard to footpaths had not been imposed and facilities had opened. He supported funding being given. Once the path is installed the facilities could open and income brought in.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the cycle/footpath would be available to the public when the club was closed. He also asked when the contractor could start work if funding was approved. Councillor Wearn advised that it will be a public right of way parallel to the temporary footpath.

Councillor Symmonds wondered if there was a potential for a loan rather a grant. Councillor Wearn advised that this would be part of the decision taken tonight.

Councillor Patience explained that she fully supported the request for funding. She reported that she had spoken to the volunteers at the club and had been very impressed. She added that it would like to the other Greenways and would be accessible to everyone. She recommended that funding was given to the football club and that it should be given as a grant rather than a loan.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk explained that all councillors who do not sit on this committee had been invited to attend or to submit comments. She advised that Councillor Harrington had submitted comments which she read out to the committee.

She explained that if councillors wanted to give financial support then the most suitable way to do this tonight would be to make a grant payment. This would be in line with current procedures through which the Town Council already support a number of local groups and give grants across a number of sectors including a £15k grant to Alnwick

Playhouse in December 2020. She added that the Town Council had not had any financial involvement in the new facilities except to act as the intermediary for the loan between NCC and the Alnwick Town Juniors Football Club.

She advised that having looked at the budget she would recommend that a grant of up to £15k could be supported. Although there was an underspend of around £23k in this committee, there were more grant applications and payments to be made this year, If more funding was suggested then her recommendation would be that this should go to Full Council for approval.

Councillor Watson reported that he had visited the new facilities and was supportive of a grant payment being made.

Councillor Castle advised the request would be slowed down if it went back to NCC.

Councillor Humphries felt it was a first class facility and should be supported with a grant of £15k from the Town Council.

Councillors agreed unanimously to give a grant of £15k.

Councillor Symmonds felt the discussions had been very useful and had helped him firm up his mind about the grant payment.

The Town Clerk re-joined the meeting. Councillor Grisdale advised that a grant of £15k had been approved.

RESOLVED: To agree the grant of £15k to Alnwick Town Juniors Football Club towards the costs of the new cycle / footpath.

FP 20/36

Grant Applications

The Town Clerk explained that five request had been received:

Loving Alnwick (Councillor Wood-Mitchell declared a non-pecuniary interest and left the meeting)

The Town Clerk advised that £1,500 had been requested towards the cost of an app which would focus around activities for children and included the Lions in Column Field coming to life. He advised that the app would be different than the Town Council supported app and that there would be a benefit to the town if the app was available.

Councillors felt that Alnwick would get additional visitors this year and the app would be very useful.

RESOLVED: To agree a grant of £1,500 once the rest of the cost is achieved with a condition that the grant is returned if the project does not go ahead.

Councillor Wood-Mitchell re-joined the meeting.

FoTE (Councillors Patience and Swinbank declared a non-pecuniary interest and left the meeting)

The Town Clerk advised that FoTE were requesting £357.20 towards the costs of their tree planting projects.

RESOLVED: To agree a grant of £357.20 be awarded to FoTE.

Councillors Patience and Swinbank re-joined the meeting.

Aln Valley Railway Councillor Castle declared a non-pecuniary interest and left the meeting)

The Town Clerk advised that they had requested £2,000 (£1,000 towards the cost of Covid related signs and £1,000 towards the cost of the information boards to enhance the visitor experience).

RESOLVED: To agree a grant of £1,000 be awarded to Aln Valley Railway for the cost of the information boards to enhance the visitor experience.

Councillor Castle re-joined the meeting.

Alnwick Civic Society (Councillors Grisdale and Patience declared a non-pecuniary interest and left the meeting)

The Town Clerk advised that they had requested £1,000 (of a total project cost of £9,200) towards the cost of digital maps. The project cost has now been achieved and the Civic Society would like the grant to enable them to expand the original project to include more work in schools.

RESOLVED: To agree a grant of £1,000 be awarded to Alnwick Civic Society specifically towards the cost of the original project.

St Michael's Parish Church

The Town Clerk advised that no grant application had been completed but that a letter requesting financial support towards the cost to install the bells. The rest of the costs are now funded and they are looking for a contribution towards the £8,000 cost of the last bell. He explained that there were potential issues with Town Councils giving funds to churches.

Councillor Castle felt it was important to ascertain that there was a wider community benefit to the bells than just to the church.

Councillor Broom felt it would be useful to have bells which could be rung.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that the other bells had been sponsored. She explained that the Town Council have been asked several times, including VE Day and the anniversary of Magna Carta, to ring bells and advised that any monies could be given on the condition that the Town Council could request bell ringing for non-religious occasions.

Councillor Patience felt it was difficult to make a judgement but that, in Embleton where she rang bells, they were rung for all sorts of occasions.

Councillor Watson felt uncomfortable giving a donation to a religious establishment.

The Town Clerk advised that it could be a legal matter as to whether the Town Council were able to give money.

Councillor Castle advised that the letter said that the church were looking for contributions from local organisations to sponsor the final bell.

Councillor Symmonds felt that the request should be supported if the bells could be rung on a range of occasions.

Councillor Humphries reported that St Paul's Church always put requests to the diocese and that the Town Council should not support the request.

Councillor Swinbank asked what could happen if the Town Council gave financial support and a member of the public had an issue. The Town Clerk advised that it may be picked up by the auditor.

Councillor Wearn felt it was a difficult decision but, in principle, she would support giving some financial help to the appeal.

The Town Council recommended that the matter was put on hold until he was able to get further information on the legality of the matter.

RESOLVED: To ask the Town Clerk to look into the legality of the request before any decision is made.

FP 20/37 Risk Management Document

The Town Clerk took councillors through the updated Assessment of Risk document which had been circulated. He explained that the table included updates on the 2020/21 actions (red text), updates on 2020/21 actions (black text) and proposed additions for 2021/22 (green text). He advised that 2 risks had been added to the document: 1) Accounts System under FINANCIAL category; 2) a new category for COVID as well as several new proposals for 2021/22.

RESOLVED: To note the updated Risk Management Document.

FP20/38 Asset Register

The Assistant to the Town Clerk issued the Asset update sheet for 2020/21 identifying new items purchased valued at £18,285.26 (to date) and items disposed of valued at £260. Councillor Watson asked that all vandalised assets were reported to the police.

RESOLVED: To receive the asset register update.

FP20/39 Annual Procedures

a) Internal Audit Checklist

The Town Clerk explained that this document is the scope of the financial audit which will take place for 2020/21 and that there were no changes to the Internal Audit Checklist this year.

RESOLVED: To approve the Internal Control Checklist.

b) Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit

The Town Clerk took councillors through the Review of the Effectiveness of Internal Audit sheet which had been circulated. He advised that in 2019/20 no significant issues had been raised. The Internal Audit for 2020/21 had begun with a day in March 2021 and would conclude in July 2021.

RESOLVED: To accept the Review of Effectiveness of Internal Audit 2020/21.

c) Appointment of Internal Auditor 2021/22

The Town Clerk advised that John Ainsworth who carried out the Internal Audit for the previous five audits was willing to do the Internal Audit for 2021/22. He advised that from 2021 this would be done in December each year.

RESOLVED: To agree John Ainsworth as Internal Auditor for 2021/22.

d) Review of Effectiveness of Internal Controls

The Town Clerk explained that this was the controls which are used by officers. He advised that a number of changes had been made due to the move to on-line banking.

Councillor Swinbank asked if, now the Town Clerk was qualified, the system for expenditure not covered under powers and duties would change. The Town Clerk advised this would also depend on a number of other factors.

RESOLVED: To accept the updated Review of Effectiveness of Internal Controls dated March 2021.

e) Risk Management

The Town Clerk advised that the Assessment of Risk document previously discussed needed to be approved and recommended to be taken to the Full Council meeting in April 2021.

RESOLVED: To approve the draft Risk Management document and recommend it for approval to Full Council in April.

<p>FP20/40</p>	<p>Review of Insurance The Town Clerk explained that the current insurance schedule was a 3-year agreement with Zurich which ends in June 2021. He explained that the last 12 months had shown Zurich to be very helpful and felt there was more criteria for selecting an insurance company other than price. He asked if councillors were happy to delegate authority to the Town Clerk to contact to insurers, get quotes and make a recommendation for approval. RESOLVED: To delegate authority to the Town Clerk to contact insurers, get quotes and make a recommendation for the selection of insurance company.</p>
<p>FP20/41</p>	<p>Review of Section 137 Expenditure The Assistant to the Town Clerk reminded councillors that this was expenditure outside the Town Council's Powers and Duties. The amount the Town Council can spend is worked out per elector and in 2020/21 this was £8.32 giving a total available Section 137 amount of just over £56k. The current Section 137 expenditure for 2019/20 is currently £27,879.32 and covered items including expenditure for civic events, some grant payments and the Project & Funding Officer's economic development work. This year all the Covid expenditure had also been added to the S137 expenditure along with the Young People Housing needs and Bus Station Feasibility. In 2021/22 the figure per elector will be £8.41. The complete list of Section 137 expenditure will be issued after the end of the financial year. The payment schedule issued for approval Full Council identifies S137 expenditure items. RESOLVED: To receive the S137 update.</p>
<p>FP 20/42</p>	<p>Any Other Urgent Business None. <p align="center">Meeting closed at 8.20pm</p></p>