

Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, St Ives Town Council, held in the Committee Room, The Guildhall, St Ives on Thursday 6 July 2017 at 7.00pm

PRESENT

Chairman – R Tulley
Vice-Chairman – C Nicholls

COUNCILLORS

Andrewes T	Glanville R
Garrod H	Symons J
Mitchell A	Williams T

IN ATTENDANCE

Councillor A Harris
Councillor J Tanner

OFFICERS

Town Clerk
Facilities Manager

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE – were received from Councillor R Henry.

F&GP1. PUBLIC SPEAKING

None.

F&GP2. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – that Councillor R Tulley be elected Chairman of the Committee for the coming year.

F&GP3. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED – that Councillor C Nicholls be elected Vice-Chairman of the Committee for the coming year.

F&GP4. MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Chairman signs as a true and correct record the Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 6 April 2017.

F&GP5. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman thanked the Town Clerk and her team for sending out the complete and comprehensive bundle of reports that accompanied the agenda.

It was noted that the end of year Finance Report (2016/2017) was not available and that as it would provide information useful to the budget setting process, it would be presented to the next scheduled meeting of this committee.

The report on the Review of Internal Controls would also be considered at the next scheduled meeting of this committee.

The Chairman welcomed newly-elected town councillor Tony Harris.

F&GP6. **DECLARATION OF COUNCILLOR AND OFFICER INTERESTS**

Councillor Williams declared an interest in the grant application from Sky High as the applicant is a personal acquaintance.

Councillor Mitchell clarified that he does not have a conflict of interest regarding the electoral review of Cornwall notwithstanding his position as Cornwall Councillor.

F&GP7. **TOWN CLERK'S UPDATE REPORT**

Members considered the update report and were pleased to note that the majority of items to action had been completed. They noted that most of the remaining items were awaiting action from other organisations.

The Town Clerk reported that contact had been made with the solicitor to be acting for the town council with regard to the Porthmeor public conveniences redevelopment and so this project would be moving forward again.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

F&GP8. **CRAZE HUNKIN TRUST - Request**

The Trustees of the Craze Hunkin Trust have recently written to the Town Council requesting that the council takes over the assets and responsibilities of the charity. They did so citing the Trust's difficulties in appointing new trustees and the Trustee's strong desire to pass the charity to a long-standing organisation that has the best interests of the parish and its residents in mind.

Members considered various options, including accepting the Trust as requested; a number of town councillors volunteering to become Trustees, possibly employing a part-time administrator; and declining the request. Members also noted the need to proceed in accordance with the requirements of the Charity Commission.

Councillor J Tanner advised that the work of the Trust was not onerous. The Trust provides housing for local people in need, had ample reserves, income is regular, the buildings are in good repair and local tradesmen are quickly engaged to resolve any problems. She reminded the meeting that town councillors have been Trustees from the outset.

Members noted that, if the town council were to take the charity on, various safeguards would need to be in place *viz*:

- running charity and town council accounts separately to maintain independence;
- funds of and income to the Craze Hunkin Trust to remain solely with the Trust;
- incorporating a provision to guarantee that the alms houses would not be sold in the future;
- the council to fulfil the role of social landlord, potentially including training;

While supportive of the general principle of taking over the charity, some councillors expressed the need to protect the council by asking for building surveys to be carried out. Councillors also expressed concern that officers are already taking on more work with, among other things, the devolution of the library. Councillor Garrood asked colleagues to be mindful of the need to ensure a separation of the roles of Trustee and councillor; and to ensure that council responsibilities were understood even if only a small number of councillors became Trustees.

RESOLVED – that

- 1) that a recommendation should be made to council that the request that the town council
 - a. assumes the roles and responsibilities of the Trust
 - b. accepts the properties currently managed by the Trust
 - c. accepts financial and other assets owned by the Trustsubject to
 - i. satisfactory building surveys being carried out
 - ii. authorisation from the Charity Commission to proceed
 - iii. successful checks on the legality of the proposal.

F&GP9. **LIBRARY DEVOLUTION**

Members considered the report. Councillor Andrewes reported that the first meeting of the Task & Finish Group had been held; and that a provisional engagement process for engaging with staff in the library and VIC is under development.

Members considered the contents of the Briefing papers and expressed concern that the recent rating valuation had increased the non-domestic rates charge on the library building. Accordingly, it was agreed to contact Cornwall Council to request that St Ives Library is included in the appeal against the valuation increases.

It was proposed that charges and fines relating to books and DVDs should stay with the town council – the Clerk will contact Cornwall Council and request that this should happen as part of the devolution agreement.

RESOLVED – that the committee:

- 1) notes the update report and the Briefing Notes; and
- 2) agrees to receive documents relating to the transfer of the library that reflects its responsibilities in the council, and to be the decision-making body in those matters listed above.

F&GP10. **ELECTORAL REVIEW OF CORNWALL**

Members were asked to consider letters from the Local Government Boundary Commission requesting views on a proposed reduction in local authority councillors from 123 to 87. Submissions are to be made by 7 August 2017, with final recommendations due to be published in July 2018. Councillors Andrewes and Mitchell asked to be included in a small group to consider the matter and make recommendations to council.

RESOLVED

- 1) that a small group of Councillors is appointed as a working group to consider the electoral review documentation and to draft the town council's response, for approval by council;
- 2) that all organisations on the council's contacts list be sent a copy of the correspondence and asked to contact the Electoral Commission if they have views on the proposal;
- 3) that a copy of the proposal is made available in the library.

F&GP11. **YEAR-END FINANCE REPORT**

It was noted that the year-end statement of accounts 2016/2017 had been approved by Council. The year-end budget v actuals report for 2016/2017 had not yet been prepared and would instead be circulated prior to the autumn budget setting process.

RESOLVED – that the year-end finance report be presented to an autumn meeting of this committee.

F&GP12. **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Town Clerk presented the finance report, setting out income and expenditure against that budgeted.

In response to questions raised, it was confirmed that bank accounts were being opened as previously agreed, a decision from the PCC was awaited on the request for funds towards a town CCTV system, and that there had been under-expenditure in the staff costs of the Services budget and the library budget, due to recruitment and devolution timescales respectively.

Legal work on the lease for the Huers Hut was due to be completed, and with regard to weddings at the Guildhall, the Town Clerk gave an undertaking to report to a later meeting on the review of income and costs associated with weddings, including staff costs.

When considering the VIC budget, it was noted that the budget has been set with a -£6,250 budget, but that the VIC managers were aware of the need to strive to minimise any subsidy in running costs over the course of the year.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

F&GP13. **FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT**

It is an important function of the Council to ensure that it conducts its business having properly assessed the risks associated with its financial management; and having used that information to minimise the identified exposure. The Financial Risk Assessment had recently been reviewed by the Clerk and was considered at the meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Financial Risk Assessment is approved and adopted.

F&GP14. **REVIEW OF INTERNAL CONTROLS**

The Council is required to review the internal financial control mechanisms that it uses to assure itself that it is operating lawfully at least annually. This assessment is underpinned by the work of the external auditors.

RESOLVED – that this item be deferred to the next scheduled meeting of this committee.

F&GP15 INTERNAL AUDIT & APPOINTMENT OF COUNCILLORS TO THIS FUNCTION

The Council has a range of financial and audit safeguards that help to ensure that it carries out its duties and responsibilities lawfully, and to protect it from fraud. In 2016/7, the councillor internal audit process was carried out by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Members reviewed the checklist circulated with the agenda and debated whether more councillors should be involved in the internal audit process.

RESOLVED – that the Committee Chairman will carry out each audit supported by one of a circulating rota of committee members who are not bank signatories.

F&GP16. NALC GOOD COUNCILLORS GUIDE TO FINANCE & TRANSPARENCY

Councillor Garrod presented a brief overview of some of the financial elements of the guidance produced by the National Association of Local Councils

F&GP17. GRANTS APPLICATIONS

Members considered four applications for grants.

Cornwall Air Ambulance

Members agreed that the Air Ambulance provided an important service that brought considerable benefit to Cornwall. It was suggested that there are usually at least two three occasions in St Ives in a year when the air ambulance attends an emergency in the parish. Councillors noted that the service is a countywide charity with significant reserves.

After discussion, it was decided not to award a grant on this occasion.

Cornwall Wildlife Trust

Members were asked to consider financial support for the maintenance of St Uny churchyard, which was described as a haven for wildlife and a good example of man using the natural environment sympathetically.

After discussion, it was decided to award a grant of £125 for the purposes as set out in the application.

Kidz R Us

The theatre group requested financial support from the council to part-fund workshops for approximately 100 local young people and 100 volunteers.

After discussion, it was decided to award a grant of £250 for the purposes as set out in the application.

Sky High Arts CIC

Councillor Andrewes declared an Interest in this item, as a friend of the applicant, and withdrew from the meeting during its consideration.

The community interest group had requested funds to be put towards a 10-week series of subsidised aerial dance classes for children and young people. Councillors noted that this was an unusual programme, and that the requested money had the potential to give an opportunity to children and young people who might not otherwise be able to participate.

After discussion, it was decided to award a grant of £300 for the purposes as set out in the application.

RESOLVED – that the award of grants as set out above be approved and implemented.

F&GP18. **RETROSPECTIVE APPROVAL FOR PAYMENT OF ISLAND CHAPEL GRANT CHEQUES**

The Clerk advised members that £350 of the donations from people visiting the Island Chapel had been top-sliced by the council and used for maintenance of the building, in accordance with the previous practice of the council. The chapel volunteers had requested that all of the money raised by donations should be given over to funding good causes, as decided by the volunteers themselves. The Clerk reminded members that there is a steadily growing income derived from the increasing number of Blessings performed there and so it was now more reasonable for the whole of the chapel volunteer funds to be directed to causes of their choice.

RESOLVED – that retrospective approval is given to the principle that all of the income from donations is allocated by the Chapel Volunteers to good causes; and that maintenance costs are met from income derived from Blessings carried out in the chapel.

F&GP19. **HOSPITALITY BUDGET**

Members considered whether an additional spend of £1,800 from Reserves should be authorised to cover a shortfall in the civic hospitality budget. The shortfall had resulted from a decision to move some of the civic functions to the Guildhall, which had not proved practicable in this year. The Mayor assured members that she had done all she could to keep costs of the mayor choosing celebrations low.

Councillor Glanville reminded colleagues that it would be wrong to take the money from Reserves at this point, and said that the matter should be reported as an overspend at year-end that could then be funded from Reserves to balance the budget.

RESOLVED – to note and approve the probability of an overspend of up to £1,800 on this budget line, and fund any shortfall from Reserves at year-end.

F&GP20. **PUBLICITY & COMMUNICATIONS**

Councillor Tulley noted an item raised at the recent meeting of Electors, where residents suggested that better communication between the council and the community would lead to greater community participation. Members debated how council activity could be communicated to parish residents. Ideas suggested included;

- St Ives Local to be contacted to publicise dates of councils
- Social media to be better-used
- Up-to-date information to be posted in the noticeboard in Royal Square) the need to replace the Perspex was noted)

- Holding community meetings around the parish

Councillor Williams asked for group emails to have councillor's email addresses removed.

It was noted that the recommendation in the report relating to marketing the council's buildings should be considered by the Facilities Committee.

RESOLVED – that the above ideas should be pursued and that the Community and Environment Committee should review the format of the Annual Electors meeting at a meeting in the New Year.

F&GP21. **APPROVAL & ADOPTION OF GRIEVANCE, DISCIPLINARY & CAPABILITY PROCEDURES**

Members considered the previously circulated policies which have been drafted using CALC templates and include elements taken from exemplar policies in use by other councils. Various amendments were agreed, including:

- changing all references to Personnel Committee to Finance and General Purposes Committee
- replacing references to Appeals Committee variously to Hearing Panel and Appeals Panel
- ensuring that the Town Clerk is involved early in the implementation of the Capability Procedure
- ensure that delegated decisions in the policies match those in the scheme of delegations.

The committee also decided to consider the tabled Absence Management Policy to the next meeting.

RECOMMENDED – that the staffing policies set out in the report and circulated prior to the meeting are approved and adopted as council policy; and that the Absence Management Policy is considered at the next meeting.

F&GP22. **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED – “That in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meeting) Act 1960 (as extended by s.100 of the Local Government Act 1972), the press and the public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following matters on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 by virtue of the paragraph specified against the item.”

F&GP23. **REVIEW OF STAFF & GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE TO ACCOMMODATE; THE TRANSFER OF THE LIBRARY & INFORMATION SERVICE; BUSINESS CONTINUITY OF CORE FUNCTIONS (Paragraphs 1,2 & 3)**

Members considered a report from the Town Clerk that raised matters pertaining to the Finance Officer post; the staffing ramifications of the library devolution; and the need to review the council staffing structure in the light of the above.

Discussion on the proposals for increasing the staffing of the finance roles included support for the proposition that this should now be considered a full-time equivalent role. Councillor Mitchell suggested that dividing the role between two officers would mean paying differential rates for more and less complicated elements of the required work and so give council better value for money. Other councillors asked whether a single officer working longer hours would give the

Clerk and council the financial support needed.

The Town Clerk agreed to consider a further suggestion that the council could commission the accounts function from a specialist company.

Councillors also agreed that advertising for the post need not be national nor involve expensive adverts in specialist publications. A question was raised over the proposed transfer of the post holder from the Support Services team to being directly accountable to the Town Clerk, with the Clerk confirming that this reflected the need for the Finance Officer to work independently and closely with the Town Clerk and the whole of the management team. Direct reporting to the Town Clerk was common to the Finance Officer role in local councils.

RESOLVED – that

- 1) an extraordinary meeting of this committee will be held on 20 July at 6.00 pm, which will consider the Finance Officer element of this report, including draft job description(s), and a report on replacing the current accounts package;
- 2) the incorporation into the staff structure of the Library Information Service staff and any associated changes to the VIC staff team be included in the staff structure review proposed;
- 3) that costs relating to VIC staff engagement as part of the Library devolution is funded from the library staffing allocation; and
- 4) that the town clerk is instructed to report to the next scheduled meeting of this committee, setting out a proposed staff structure based on the findings of the Library Devolution Task & Finish Group, the outcome of the staff engagement process and a review of the operation of staffing within the council, with review recommendations to be developed in consultation with the Chairmen of Finance & General Purposes Committee and Facilities Committee.

F&GP24. **ANNUAL REVIEW OF TOWN COUNCIL PROPERTY ARRANGEMENTS (Paragraph 3)**

Councillors considered a report on the above which noted that the lease on one property has expired, while others are overdue for a rent review. Members debated the merits of having the rents reviewed by an external expert or simply linking the rent increase to the RPI.

RESOLVED - that the Clerk should bring a report to the extraordinary meeting to be held on 20 July. *(Note: the Committee Chairman confirmed after the meeting that it would be sufficient to report to the next scheduled meeting of this committee.)*

F&GP25. **NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN REVIEW – OFFICER SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS (Paragraphs 1,2 &3)**

The Town Clerk presented a report on the Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) that asked members to consider how the on-going work related to it can be best completed in the coming months. The report recommended that the current contract with the NDP Officer is terminated and that she – and, potentially, others – are commissioned on an as-and-when basis to carry out further work on this project.

RESOLVED – that – the freelance approach to commissioning support work for the NDP review and development of the associated Action Plan is approved, and implemented by the Town Clerk in consultation with the Chairman of the NDP Review Group.

F&GP26. DEBTORS AND CREDITORS (Paragraph 3)

A report was tabled by the Clerk. Members expressed concern at the late payment of £6,500 by the Decorative Lights Association and requested that this should be pursued. Members expressed concern at other, small, outstanding debts.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted, and the £150 write off (relating to the hall booking on 8 May 2015) be approved.

F&GP27. WRITE-OFF OF PRS DEFICIT (Paragraph 3)

Members considered the report from the Support Services Manager that described how a deficit of £298.10 has accrued from non-payment of Performing Rights Society fees by hall hirers. Payment of these fees to the Performing Rights Society is a legal requirement for the town council as a venue for music and performances. The Support Services Manager's report assured members that the system for collection of the fees in a complicated system has been tightened and further shortfalls would be of a very minor nature.

RESOLVED – that the sum of £298.10, being the balance of the PRS fees paid to the Performing Rights Society less the PRS fees received from hirers to the date of 31 March 2017, is written off.

Meeting closed at 9.30 pm

Chairman