

Minutes of the Meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, St Ives Town Council, held virtually via Zoom on Thursday 28 January 2021 at 7.00pm

PRESENT

Chairman – Councillor Andrew Mitchell
Vice-Chairman Councillor Henry

COUNCILLORS

Arthur K	Harris T	Tulley R
Burton P	Messenger K	
Dale A	Nicholls N	

IN ATTENDANCE

Wells J

OFFICERS

Town Clerk Responsible Finance Officer & Corporate Services Manager

F&GP.48 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None

F&GP.49 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None

F&GP. 50 MINUTES

RESOLVED – that the Chairman signs as a true and correct record the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting held on 19 November 2020.

F&GP.51 PUBLIC SPEAKING

None

F&GP.52 DECLARATIONS OF COUNCILLOR AND OFFICER INTERESTS

None

F&GP.53 OFFICERS' UPDATE REPORT

There were no comments on the officers' update report.

RESOLVED – that the report be noted.

F&GP.54 ENERGY CONTRACT RENEWALS

The Town Clerk stated that, as many of the members present attended the 21 January Community & Environment Committee, they would be aware of the discussion and the background to this report. The C&E Committee had recommended to Finance and General Purposes Committee that, in renewing its utilities contracts, the Council consider entering

into a contract with a 100% green energy supplier. As the Finance Committee, utility contract renewals were within its remit and it could choose to renew with a traditional supplier or to consider the Committee and Environment Committee's recommendation to switch to a green tariff. The Committee would also need to be mindful of the additional cost of this decision. Detailed updated figures were attached to the report. The Committee should note that tariffs were increasing across the board as there was a lot of fluctuation in the energy market. It was estimated that the additional cost of switching to a green tariff would be between £5-£6,000 for this coming year. An energy broker was supporting the Council to negotiate the best price.

The Committee debated the principles and agreed that, as the Council had declared a climate change emergency, switching to a green supplier was the right decision to make.

In response to a member's query, the Clerk confirmed that it would not be possible confirm the final price to the Committee prior to a final decision– prices fluctuated on a daily basis and contracts were due to end in March. The Council needed to give 30 days' notice and it was therefore, necessary to contact the current supplier now. Officers have given the Committee guidance on the likely impact of the switch. Unless the final price was outside this range, she was seeking approval for officers and the Council's broker to negotiate the best possible deal.

RESOLVED – that the Council serves notice on its current energy supplier and move to a 100% green tariff for the best price which can be achieved in order to minimise the adverse impact on the 2021-22 energy budgets.

F&GP.55 DEVOLUTION REQUEST – ST IVES BENCHES

The Town Clerk set out the details of the request from Cornwall Council that the Town Council take on the repair and maintenance of all 193 benches in the parish. As part of the devolution package, the Council has already agreed in principle that it would take over the benches. However, this was within the context of a larger package. Cornwall Council had offered a one-off £10,000 dowry with the benches. This equated to £51 a bench. The attached appendix detailed approximately half the benches as needing work. In addition, the schedule was over two years old.

The Committee's views were sought. Should the Committee be minded to take on the benches now, the Clerk's advice was that this was subject to a number of caveats which were set out in the report.

Amongst the Committee there was general agreement that the benches were in a poor state and that the Town Council were in a better position to manage ongoing maintenance.

Some members felt that the likely cost of bringing them all up to a good standard was better absorbed within the negotiations of the devolution package. The request should therefore be declined at this stage. Others felt that the repair of the benches was an important community priority, which should be addressed urgently. There was a concern that the information was not up to date, for example the schedule did not include any benches in Lelant, which had a further cost implication.

A proposal that the Council defer any decision to take over the benches until the devolution package was negotiated, was not carried. An alternative proposal to take on the benches but with a series of conditions, including that they be returned in two years' time if no additional

capital funds were received was carried.

RESOLVED – that, the Council respond to Cornwall Council confirming that it was willing to take on the management and maintenance of the benches, subject to the following:

- i) This would be for a limited period of two years, unless Cornwall Council provided additional capital funds to bring them all up to a good standard of repair
- ii) Cornwall Council review the condition survey data and ensure that it was up to date and included details of all benches
- iii) The services of the bench dedications officer be retained for the same period and more information be provided on the income to be derived from dedications.

F&GP.56 **FINANCE REPORT**

The RFO&CS Manager introduced the report outlining the financial position and activities for the year to date. He advised that, unsurprisingly, income was down but this had been alleviated in part by a £70,000 payment from the Cornwall Council COVID-19 losses fund. Officers were awaiting confirmation of whether this fund would continue for a third quarter. General reserves were being maintained within guideline levels. It was agreed that the Committee should ensure that the use of earmarked reserves was kept under regular review.

RESOLVED –the Committee note the report.

F&GP.57 **GRANT APPLICATIONS**

The Clerk advised that there was only 1 grant application, from CAB Cornwall.

The Chairman advised that, although it was not a registerable interest, as Cornwall Council grants to Citizens Advice Bureau Cornwall were within his cabinet portfolio, he would not take part in the vote.

Given the concerns about an application from a national organisation and the size of their reserves, one committee member advised that he had sought further information. It had been explained that, as such a large organisation and a charity, there was a legal requirement to keep their reserves at a minimum level, which they were. Members welcomed the return of the service to St Ives. In response to a question about the delivery performance of the service, it was noted that the application set out that they had supported 174 enquiries in 2019/ 2020 in St Ives alone.

Members were advised that the Library Partnership Board agreed to better promote the return of the service on social media channels.

RESOLVED – that the Committee approved the Grant Application of Citizens Advice Bureau Cornwall for £1,000.

F&GP.58 **EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

RESOLVED - that in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the following matters by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

F&GP.59 REVIEW OF PAYROLL SERVICES

The RFO & CS Manager explained that the Cornwall Council payroll contract ended in March. After a few teething problems it had generally run smoothly but, prior to any contract renewal, officers had researched the market to identify more competitive options. He had sought quotes from three companies and shared the results of the market test on the screen. Members noted that two of the external private sector quotes were a similar price but Cornwall Council's quote was by far the highest. In addition, the preferred bidder offered an improved end to end service. Despite the benefits of working with the Principal Council, the scale of the difference in price could not be justified.

The RFO & CS Manager recommended that the Council enter into a contract with Neo People to take over the payroll for the Town Council.

RESOLVED – that the Town Council enter into a contract with Neo People to take over the payroll for the Town Council for an initial period of 12 months and the notice be given to Cornwall Council.

F&GP.60 PROPERTY PORTFOLIO UPDATE REPORT

The Town Clerk introduced the report. She explained that she would continue to provide regular updates to the Committee, given the importance of this work. It was the case that not all matters had been concluded but there had been considerable progress since the last discussion. In particular this had been assisted by the impetus brought by appointing new commercial agents and solicitors.

She drew members' attention to the final valuation table which showed the difference between the passing rents for the Council's properties and the market valuations. The Chairman extended thanks to the Town Clerk for resolving these matters as this had been a longstanding issue.

The Town Clerk confirmed that all tenants were up to date with their rents.

RESOLVED – that the Committee note the update report.

F&GP.61 TERMS OF OCCUPANCY FOR A COUNCIL PROPERTY

The Town Clerk introduced the report outlining the background to the property and recent events which had triggered the need for action.

Members expressed their deep concern regarding some of the events detailed in the report. The Committee agreed that a series of immediate actions was necessary, as set out. It was also important to regularise the tenant's occupancy as soon as possible and the Council would probably be required to cover the legal costs of doing so.

RESOLVED – that the Committee approves a series of actions, as set out in the report and authorise the Clerk to progress the preparation of a new lease as soon as possible.

F&GP.62 RETIREMENT OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICE MANAGER

The Clerk explained that in recognition of the LIS Manager's length of service, she was requesting that the Committee consider an appropriate financial contribution towards her

retirement gift. Some members of the Committee highlighted a lack of policy guidance in this area and requested that the Staffing Committee consider a long service policy at a future meeting.

RESOLVED – that the Committee agree to make a financial contribution towards the LIS Manager’s retirement gift.

F&GP.63 DEBTORS AND CREDITORS

The RFO & CS Manager introduced the report. In response to members questions, he advised as follows:

- It had still not been possible to make contact with the debtor highlighted in the last report and the recommendation was that this was now written off
- The full creditors list was taken to full Council and not the Finance and General Purposes Committee
- An invoice had been issued to StITA and payment was overdue.

RESOLVED – that the schedule of debtors and creditors is noted and write offs are actioned as necessary.

DATE OF NEXT SCHEDULED MEETING

Thursday 1st April 2021

Meeting closed at 8.35 pm

Chairman