

PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE & RESOURCES COMMITTEE MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 17TH DECEMBER 2014 AT EASTON METHODIST CHURCH HALL AT 7pm

PRESENT: Councillors Mrs S. Bradley (Chair), G. Chadwick, R. Hughes, A. Matthews, Mrs S. Reynolds and R. Wild.

Late arrivals: Cllrs. R. Nowak (7.25pm) and I. Munro-Price (7.30pm)

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs Paula Harding (Locum Clerk) together with Cllr. Ms S. Lees, two members of the public and a press representative

55 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Mr Ian Looker (Clerk) who is on sick leave and Cllr. T. Munro.

56 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr. Hughes declared a personal and prejudicial interest in all agenda items as he was a resident of Portland and therefore local Council Tax payer. Declaration forms were present for Cllrs. Chadwick, Hughes, Matthews and Wild. The remaining members present all made a verbal declaration in absence of their completed form for this meeting. The Chair accepted these verbal declarations.

57 – ORDER OF BUSINESS

It was proposed by Cllr. Bradley that Item 11(a) on the Agenda – Council budget – Confidential Report be moved to the end of the meeting in order that the Press and Public may be excluded as the report contained details of staff salaries. All agreed.

57A – PUBLIC HALF HOUR

No representations were made by those present.

58 – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 15TH OCTOBER 2014

It was noted that the bonfire event was not organised by the Town Council there was not a requirement to record it in the minute update as shown in Minute 43b(ii). All agreed

It was proposed by Cllr. Wild and seconded by Cllr. Chadwick that the minutes be formally agreed and signed as an accurate record. (Votes For: 5, Against: 0, Abstention: 1, there were 6 members present at the time of the vote.)

59 – MINUTE UPDATE AND MATTERS ARISING

a) Minute 29 – West Weares

Cllr. Matthews reported that that the contractor would not accept a payment but he would continue dialogue with them until the matter was resolved

b) Minutes 48 – Cheyne Weares

Cllr. Matthews reported that no review had been carried out to date but that he would endeavour to carry this out when possible.

c) Minute 50 – Recording equipment

Cllr. Chadwick reported that the recording equipment was purchased for £40 and not the £150 estimated.

d) Minutes 51 – Delegation of Business (Grants)

Cllr. Wild stated that the Grants Sub-Committee had a number of recommendations to be considered by this group. No further discussion took place as it was on the Agenda as item 9 (Minute 63).

- e) There are several actions to be taken by the Clerk recorded in the last minutes. It has to be reported that for the most part these have not yet been carried out due to the sick leave taken by the Clerk. Members will need to consider the importance and urgency of each outstanding item and whether an alternative action should be taken. It is hoped that the Clerk can address those remaining on his return from sick leave.

60 – FINANCIAL MATTERS

a) Payments for Authorisation

- i) In reviewing the payments Cllr. Reynolds questioned the amount due to Nick Randle Associates who carried out the Staffing Review for the Town Council as she felt this was a significant sum. Cllr. Wild added that the cost had been approved by the Council when commissioning the Review in this was in line with that tender.
- ii) Cllr. Chadwick asked whether the payments list for the hire of Easton Methodist Church Hall should be paid, now that Weymouth and Portland Borough Council (WPBC) have agreed to cover the cost of meeting venues until new premises are found for the Town Council. It was agreed by all that the payment for hall hire is to be paid until the details of the agreement are clarified with WPBC.
- iii) Cllr. Matthews said he would need to check the details of the salary payments to establish the present expenditure on salaries and expected year end figure.

It was proposed by Cllr. Matthews seconded by Cllr. Wild and **RESOLVED** that the schedule of invoices (cheque refs: 3202 – 3213) in the sum of £3643.12 including VAT be approved.

61 – BUDGET & INVESTMENT SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8TH OCTOBER 2014

Cllr. Matthews stated that some of the figures in Minute 12 had been superseded but not with material effect. The main focus of this meeting was to start the budget process and they began to consider expenditure levels.

It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick, seconded by Cllr. Matthews and **RESOLVED** that these minutes be accepted. (Votes For: 5, Against: 0, Abstention 1, there were 6 members present at this vote).

Cllr. Nowak joined the Meeting (7.25pm) – 7 members now present

62 – HUMAN RESOURCES AND IT GROUP MEETING HELD ON 23RD OCTOBER 2014

a) Confidential Report

Cllr. Matthews reported that the last meeting had focused on the core IT issues and budget matters. He had produced a Confidential Report which would be considered at the end of this meeting following the exclusion of the public and press.

b) Website

Cllr. Chadwick had been looking into website provision for the Town Council. He suggested that the current telephone providers British Telecom have a number of options regarding website hosting and that he would report back to this committee when further information has been obtained. If this was possible it would provide a potential saving on current costs.

c) Accounting/Risk software

Cllr. Matthews has looked at both Quickbooks and Sage as possible options for the Town Council but further work is required to decide whether they are too complex for a Town Council of this size. The risk assessment software still needs to be reviewed and updated when possible.

d) Back up systems

Cllr. Chadwick has instigated a Cloud system on the Clerks machine to allow back ups to be taken over the short term. Further work needs to be undertaken to develop a routine for backing up the Councils data, information and records and to ensure all office computers are compatible with that back up system.

It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick, seconded by Cllr. Wild and **RESOLVED** that the minutes of this group be accepted as a true record of that meeting.

63 – GRANTS SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12TH NOVEMBER 2014

a) Grant funding focus

Cllr. Hughes put forward the recommendation from the Sub-Committee *“that all the grant funding should be given to dementia-related groups on the Island that satisfy the Council’s grants criteria”*.

Cllr. I. Munro-Price joined the meeting (7.30pm) – 8 members were now present.

Cllr. Wild reminded members that there a smaller figure than usual for the grants payments this year of around £1000 as there had only been one fair held in 2014. Cllr. Hughes also confirmed that up to 50% of any successful grant application could be funded.

Cllr. Munro-Price was concerned that by advertising that grants were to given to dementia-related groups on the Island the Council was pre-judging where the funds would be placed and this was something he could not support as he felt all local groups should have the opportunity to put in a grant application if they wished to.

Cllr. Wild put forward an amended proposal as follows:

When the grants sub-committee advertise for grant applications to be submitted it should be clear that the Town Council is looking for applications with an emphasis on a dementia friendly or related project, but that all applications would be welcomed and considered. This amended proposal was seconded by Cllr. Reynolds.

Cllr. Munro-Price requested a recorded vote on this matter, which was granted by the Chair.

It was **RESOLVED** that the amended proposal above be adopted for the 2014/15 grant process.

VOTES FOR: Cllrs. Bradley, Chadwick, Hughes, Matthews, Nowak, Reynolds and Wild.

VOTES AGAINST: Cllr. Munro-Price

b) Interview Process

Cllr. Wild put forward the recommendation that ‘no grant interview process take place this year’. Each member could give examples where groups had been intimidated by the interview process and where groups had received grants based on the interview from which the awarding committee gained extra information from that on the paper application.

Cllr. Chadwick felt that by accepting this recommendation the committee would be setting a precedent for future years.

It was proposed by Cllr. Wild, seconded by Cllr. Reynolds and **RESOLVED** that the interview for grant applicants be dropped from the evaluation for the 2014/15 grants process. (Votes For: 5, Against 3,)

c) Presentation of Awards

It was proposed by Cllr. Wild, seconded by Cllr. Munro-Price and **RESOLVED** that the awards be presented to the successful applicants at a full Town Council meeting.

d) Funding opportunities

A recommendation was put forward from the sub-committee that 'the Council adopt the above three-pronged approach to grant support with three areas of funding opportunity'. This approach included identifying funding streams and facilitating access to these for community groups.

Cllr. Munro-Price felt that with the current staff arrangements that this would not be possible, but agreed with Cllr. Nowak that this something that the Council should seek to do in the future.

It was proposed by Cllr. Wild, seconded by Cllr. Matthews and **RESOLVED** that the Council assess funding opportunities 'as and when they become available' but could not actively facilitate the creation of a constituted body for this purpose at this time. (Votes For: 7, Abstention: 1)

64 – 2014/15 BUDGET OUTTURN

Cllr. Matthews presented the projected outturn figures for the 2014/15 financial year with the caveat that there are a small number of figures which need to be clarified with the Clerk on his return from sick leave as they differ from those projected in the Staffing Review Report presented to the last Town Council meeting.

There is currently a projected underspend of £7067 this including the budgeted amount of £3900 for the Island Caretaker which has not been spent.

Although it is proposed that a reimbursement will be made by Weymouth and Portland Borough Council towards the costs of meeting room hire, it is not known from when this will begin or for what period so has been excluded from the projections. It was noted that the Council should aim to clarify these details before the end of this financial year.

65 – 2015/16 BUDGET AND PRECEPT CONSULTATION

Cllr. Matthews presented an outline of the process undertaken so far with 3 proposed questions for the consultation document to be considered. Cllr. Reynolds asked how the Council intended to ensure that the majority of residents were aware of and responded to the consultation. Cllr. Matthews replied that promotion by word of mouth, press, multimedia and posters in shops and the library would be required.

The proposed questions for the consultation were as follows:

Q1 Should the Council this year look to introduce measures to prepare for the future? Y/N

Q2 If yes and this involves an increase of precept what range would you find acceptable. (at band D 30p raises approx. £1000). An additional _____

Q3 What would be your priority for this to be spent on? _____

Cllr. Wild proposed that Question 2 be amended as follows:

Q2) If yes and if this involves an increase of precept for 2015/16 what level would you find acceptable? (At band D 30p per annum per household raises approx. £1,000, 60p raises £2,000 etc.). An additional (indicate value) _____

It was proposed by Cllr. Wild, seconded by Cllr. Reynolds and **RESOLVED** that Question 1 and 3 remain as initially proposed and that the amended proposal for Question 2 form part of the consultation document. (Votes For: 7, Against: 1)

66 – RISK ASSESSMENT 2014/15

Cllr. Matthews presented his report on the current Risk Assessment. Members were encouraged to view the document electronically as this is colour coded.

It was proposed by Cllr. Matthews, seconded by Cllr. Chadwick and **RESOLVED** that members agreed to consider and address the **RED** issues as a priority before the next election in May 2015. This is however subject to adequate staff time being available as a number of the resolutions to the RED issues should be pursued by the Clerk and administration team.

Cllr. Chadwick suggested that the Council should consider bringing in professional expertise to carry out some mitigation of the Risks relating to policy, procedure and accountancy if these reduced the workload on the office staff and if the budget allowed.

67 – OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

Cllr. Hughes reported that the Clerk is recovering and has been doing some smaller items of work from home. It was also reported that the Assistant Clerk has recently resigned from her post and left the employment of the Council. The Administrative Assistant is happy to cover some of the Clerks duties until the Christmas break.

The Council offices will close from Christmas Eve and re-open on the 5th January when the Clerk is hoping to return to work.

The subject of replacing the Assistant Town Clerk would be included on the Agenda for the next F&R meeting in January.

It was noted that the remaining Assistant Clerk's salary for this financial year could be used if required to pay for locum staff until the Clerk is back on full duties and then until the post is filled if a vacancy is advertised.

It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick, seconded by Cllr. Reynolds and **RESOLVED** that the Council look to buy in Locum support to cover the Assistant Town Clerk (6 hours a week) vacancy until the end of February 2015. (Votes For: 7, Abstention, 1).

68 – STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Cllr. Matthews stated that the current Standing Orders for Portland Town Council are now two editions out of date and require revision as a priority. He agreed to look into the amount of work this would entail including the officer time that would be required and report back.

69 – RESTRUCTURING OF THE SUB-COMMITTEES TO WORKING GROUPS

Cllr. Chadwick reported that the sub-committees which previously reported to the F&R meeting have been restructured to working groups following the recent Town Council meeting. It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick, seconded by Cllr. Hughes and **RESOLVED** that the working groups be convened when required and given specific tasks by the F&R committee to work and report on.

70 – MEETING ELECTION COSTS OUT OF RESERVES

Cllr. Chadwick reported that the unexpected By-Election costs had been initially met from the remaining Caretaker budget as a short term measure. It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick, seconded by Cllr. Nowak and **RESOLVED** that the amount be taken from reserves to replenish the Caretaker budget and that an Election Provision reserve be created and funded from 2015/16.

71 – USING RESERVES TO FUND A NEW OFFICER SERVER COMPUTER

Cllr. Chadwick reported on the IT equipment in the Town Council offices and that a USB drive was being used as a back up although he has since initiated cloud storage for Town Council documents.

The current configuration is that there are three separate systems being operated with no link or commonality between them. This is leading to duplication and missing documents where one member of the team cannot access documents being held by others.

An initial quote received for a server system was around £4000, but it was generally felt that this may not necessarily be the most cost effective solution for the Council.

Cllr. Nowak suggested that Cllr. Chadwick continue to investigate potential IT solutions and configurations which are easy to manage and yet give the flexibility that the administrative team and officers require, including remote access capability.

Cllr. Chadwick accepted this and agreed to liaise with Cllr. Ian Munro-Price on the suitability of options as they arose. A report would be presented to the F&R committee on solutions and costings once established.

72 – EXCLUSION OF THE PRESS & PUBLIC

Agenda item 11(b) included a confidential report and the Chair requested that the Press and Public leave the meeting.

73 – COUNCIL BUDGET 2015/16 - CONFIDENTIAL REPORT

Not available to the public and included for Councillors on a separate Minute sheet.

74 – DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 14th January 2015 commencing at 7.00pm

The meeting closed at 9.10pm

SignedDated.....
(Chair)