

KEYNSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee meeting held on Tuesday
10 March 2020 at 6pm in the Key Centre, Charlton Road, Keynsham

PRESENT: Councillors C Fricker, A Greenfield, H MacFie (Chair) and
B Simmons

IN ATTENDANCE: Cheryl Scott – Town Clerk

101. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

RESOLVED:

To receive apologies for absence from Cllrs Cooper, Crouch and Biddleston.

102. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none

103. DISPENSATIONS

There were none

104. RECORDS OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Clerk advised that the Date of the next meeting in minute number 100 needed to be amended to 10th March

RESOLVED:

That the Minutes of the meeting held on 7 January be amended as per the proposal by the Clerk, confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chairman

105. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was none

106. ELECTRICAL WORKS TO TEMPLE STREET

(a) The Clerk explained the order for electrical works needed to be placed the following day in order to ensure they were finished in time for the restoration company to schedule the reinstatement work before being called away to attend the serious flooding in Wales.

(b) Companies had been asked to include for hot water supply to the kitchen to address Health and Safety issues that would arise owing to the COVID pandemic and need for hand hygiene. This would not be covered by the insurance claim as it was “betterment”.

(c) The Committee considered the quotations and felt company 2 presented best value as they would do all the work without the necessity for the town Council to further contract with a plumber to perform the hot water installation works.

RESOLVED

To award the contract for electrical reinstatement covered by the insurance claim to company 2 at a price of £5156

To award the contract for betterment items to Company 2 at a cost of £2705

107. RISK ASSESSMENT and BUSINESS INTERRUPTION PROCEDURES IN RESPONSE TO COVID19

- (a) The Town Clerk presented the risk assessment and appraised the Committee of the implications for the Council. The Committee discussed the current progress of the pandemic, the latest Government figures, the success to date of track and trace and the low level of infections currently in B&NES.
- (b) The Clerk advised that she had been purchasing supplies since mid- February and because this had been done late at night, she had used her personal credit card. As she made this decision in an emergency and there was no budget code, she was requesting ratification from the Committee and full Council for the expenditure. She estimated that approx. £2000 in total had been spent on supplies both on her personal card and the Council's bank card which would need a new cost code and would be presenting a list for ratification and reimbursement (supported by delivery notes and invoices) to full Council. Supplies were now very difficult to source, however the Council had enough for the foreseeable future.
- (c) Most staff and Councillors had been assessed as high risk, so it was important to ensure measures were taken to keep everyone safe given the infectious nature of the virus once it got out into the community. All staff had been individually consulted on their personal circumstances and their thoughts on continuing with current duties including working with young people and the public and at what point they felt they should work from home with most indicating that they would become concerned once infections were confirmed in Keynsham. The open plan office in the B&NES Civic Centre presented an increased risk and staff had been instructed on how to keep a "safe bubble" around the desks including the use of gloves when going to the toilet. The Clerk expressed concern that one member of staff made it clear they would not wear gloves and that if they were told they had to then they would no longer come into work and work from home. The Clerk requested the support of the Council in endorsing that the Clerk, as senior manager, had the authority to determine when staff would work from home and that it was not up to the individual employees themselves.
- (d) Staff meetings had already been held for Youth Workers and Admin/Groundsmen to introduce all staff to the implications of COVID, issue supplies of Hand gel, alcohol wipes tissues and gloves, a discussion on how to stay safe at work and at home and training on how to reduce secondary spread and use of the supplies including safe removal of gloves.. Guidance would also need to be issued to Councillors along with supplies.
- (e) The Clerk advised the Committee that the Council had to prepare for when the government entered the next phase of delaying viral spread which would include for staff working from home, using laptops connected to the server in the Civic Centre via a secure VPN connection. Most staff currently worked on laptops which had been acquired following the vacation of the office the previous year to enable them to work in the Civic Centre but an additional 3 were required for remaining staff, which together with the cost for VPN configuration totalled £2,379. The Committee were asked to ratify the purchase under emergency delegation as it was important to place the order and get the IT company in to configure everything before the Government introduced any lockdown measures.
- (f) The Clerk advised they had not had time to prepare a business continuity plan yet as they had focused on supplies and preparations for working from home.

The Committee commended the Clerk on her foresight in pressing ahead with the preparations.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TOWN COUNCIL

- (i) To approve the Risk Assessment
- (ii) To confirm that all Councillors and staff must inform the Clerk if they go into self-isolation as it will impact the Risk Assessment
- (iii) To ratify the purchase of infection control supplies by the Town Clerk under Financial Regulation 4.6 and that all purchase in connection with the COVID19 outbreak for health and safety be accounted for in a new budget code and money taken from reserves. (Full list of purchases to be supplied to Town Council)
- (iv) To ratify the purchase of laptops etc for working from home by the Clerk under Financial Regulation 4.6 with the capital expenditure for the laptops being taken from reserves
- (v) That implementation of Working from Home will be the decision of the Town Clerk and reflect the risk to staff of community spread once the first cases are confirmed in the local region

108. **ELLIS WHITTAM HEALTH & SAFETY AUDIT**

The Committee considered the audit from Ellis Whittam and the Clerk drew attention to the work of the recently appointed groundsman in revising a substantial number of the grounds maintenance risk assessments and assisting in addressing the previous year's recommendations. As a result, the audit this year had few recommendations in the safety action plan and the main items highlighted including hot water to the office kitchen were already in the process of being addressed as per the annotations.

RESOLVED

To approve the Health and Safety Audit

109. **UTILITIES – FUEL SUPPLIER**

- (a) The 3-year contract with Haven Power approved by the Council in early 2016 via a broker to commence on 1st April 2017 was due to expire on the 31st March. It would subsequently be rolled over with a 30-day notice period. The Clerk explained the substantial issues experienced in respect of invoicing with Haven Power, and the lack of support from the broker. She had therefore approached energy companies direct rather than choosing to go with the broker again.
- (b) Given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration, two green energy companies had been identified as Octopus and Opus however there was a substantial premium to pay when compared with for instance a British gas contract. COVID has interrupted her research and the Clerk felt that rather than make a rush decision, the Haven Power contract be allowed to roll over until she had sufficient information to bring back to the Committee to make a recommendation to Council.

RESOLVED

To roll over the contract with Haven Power and defer consideration of a new supplier to a later meeting.

110. TIMETABLE FOR YEAR END/ANNUAL RETURN

The Clerk had received communication from the External Auditors that the deadlines for Audit were being extended which meant the year end accounts and AGAR submission could be approved by both Finance and Council in June.

RESOLVED

To note the above

111. 2019-2020 FEES AND CHARGES

(a) Cemetery

in response to a question, the Clerk advised that out of parish fees were still quite high compared to other Burial Authorities, hence the recommendation to freeze for a third successive year with a 2% increase for the most part on In Parish fees. A full review of local cemeteries had been conducted last year so a 2% increase on In Parish would still mean the Council was competitive with other cemeteries.

There was discussion about how deaths from COVID might impact on the Cemetery. The main issue would be the impact on the groundsmen in respect of grave digging but the Clerk understood that Haycombe would take the majority of cases and if the burials became unmanageable, then Government could instruct all deceased be cremated.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TOWN COUNCIL:

- (i) Out of Parish fees and Baby Burial fees are frozen again this year to keep in line with other Parishes and Councils
- (ii) In Parish fees for most items are increased by 2% and rounded up to the nearest whole number
- (iii) The purchase of Casket Plots in the Memorial Garden and the interment of casket fees are increased by 4% this year to continue bringing in line with other Councils.

(b) MultiSports

Given that negotiations were ongoing with B&NES in respect of dilapidations for the termination of the lease it was

RECOMMENDED TO TOWN COUNCIL

There be no increase for 2020-2021

(c) Manor Rd

There had been a reduction in use by Fry's this year as some teams had decided not to use the facilities, however there was still a substantial number of teams still booking pitches. A small increase was recommended in the hope this would not only retain but also attract back some of the teams on the grounds that the Manor Rd pitches were not subject to waterlogging during the winter storms such as storm Denis.

RECOMMENDATION TO TOWN COUNCIL

That a 2% increase (rounded to the nearest pound) be applied to current fees for 2020-2021

112. FINANCE COMMITTEE PROCEDURE FOR MONTHLY SCRUTINY OF ACCOUNTS

The Committee considered a rota for members to conduct the bank reconciliation as per the Internal Auditors recommendations at the Interim Audit. The Financial Regulations stated that Finance Committee should perform the bank reconciliation on a quarterly basis although Town Council wanted a monthly bank reconciliation which was currently performed by the staff.

RESOLVED

That members of the Committee will perform a monthly bank reconciliation on a rota basis commencing with Cllr MacFie after Easter on Tuesday 14th April (office circumstances permitting).

113. MOBILE PHONE REVIEW

Historically the Council used to lease purchase mobile phones but the Clerk had gradually replaced phones by buying outright as SIM-free (cheapest on the internet at the time – normally from Tesco) and a SIM only contract for 3 years with EE at £10 per SIM was now coming to an end. The Personnel Committee had recommended that the Clerk and Deputy Clerk receive Council mobiles as they were currently using their personal phones and disclosing their personal numbers.

A review of current SIM only prices and suppliers was considered

RESOLVED

- (i) To purchase 3 SIM-free Samsung Galaxy A10 at a max cost of £350
- (ii) To move to Virgin SIM only contract at £7.00

114. REPORT FROM EATH COMMITTEE RE SALE OF GWR POSTERS

The Committee noted that although the EATH Committee had decided on a run of posters and postcards, the business plan/sales strategy requested previously by the Finance Committee had not been forthcoming.

RESOLVED

To defer approval until a fully costed business plan/sales strategy had been prepared to accompany the decision on numbers and types of posters/postcards to print.

115. Cllr Fricker joined the meeting

116. FINANCIAL REGULATIONS REVIEW

- (a) The regulations had been modified to incorporate changes proposed by the NALC model regulations. In addition, the Clerk had proposed some changes to some of the financial limits to better reflect the Council's operational needs. The main one was the bank transfer limit as the Council needed to transfer £40,000 per month from the deposit account to the current account to cover the BACS run and salaries.
- (b) The Clerk indicated that if, owing to COVID, everyone had to work from home, then BACS payments and purchases would be difficult to effect. Therefore, it may be that some of the financial regulations may have to be suspended in

future to enable the Council and Councillors to conduct the financial transactions from home. If meetings were not permitted there would need to be a delegation of authority to the Clerk in consultation with a specified number of Councillors.

RECOMMENDATION TO TOWN COUNCIL
To approve the Financial Regulations

117. The Chairman recapped on the decisions of the meeting for the benefit of Cllr Fricker.

118. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED:

To note that the date of the next meeting is Tuesday 28 April 2020 to be held in the **Town Council Office at 6pm**

The meeting finished at 19.38

SIGNED:..... (Chairman) Dated:

Clerk's note: All Committee recommendations in these minutes were included as separate Agenda items for consideration at the Town Council meeting of 17th March 2020.