

**DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE**

**HELD VIRTUALLY ON MICROSOFT TEAMS AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC  
AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND POLICE AND CRIME  
PANELS (CORONAVIRUS) (FLEXIBILITY OF LOCAL AUTHORITY AND POLICE AND CRIME  
PANEL MEETINGS) (ENGLAND AND WALES) REGULATIONS 2020**

**ON MONDAY 15 MARCH 2021**

Present: Councillor Peter Hollick (Town Mayor), Gloria Martin (Deputy Town Mayor), Sid Abbott (Chairman), Philip Crawley (Vice-Chairman), Wendy Bater, Matthew Brennan, Mark Cant, John Gurney, Kenson Gurney, Liz Jones, Cameron Restall, Lee Roberts, and Johnson Tamara

In Attendance: David Ashlee (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), David Brough (Senior Finance Manager), Lisa Scheder (Finance and Procurement Manager), and Ian Reed (Democratic Services Manager) and Darren Woodhouse (advising procurement of chamber sound system)

Apologies for Absence: Nil

Public Attendance: None

**49. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 18 January 2021 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chairman as soon as it was possible.

**50. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no specific declarations of interest.

**51. WELL BEING POLICY - REPORT**

The Committee was invited to approve the adoption of a Wellbeing Policy that had been circulated with the agenda. It was noted that the adoption of the policy would complement the Council's employee assistance programme and mental health training. Councillor Liz Jones led a discussion of the use of mental health first aiders in the workplace and how issues raised via the mental health and well-being policy would be dealt with through the Town Councils' staff structure.

**RESOLVED:** that the wellbeing policy as presented be approved and adopted

**52. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT**

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive and the Senior Finance Manager presented the financial monitoring report for the period ending 31 January 2021 and details relating to the Council's earmarked reserves as at 28 February 2021. It was noted that there was likely to be a potential underspend at the end of the financial year of £103,482. However, the Committee noted that the figure would reduce to under £60,000 if recommendations

elsewhere on the agenda were approved (See Minutes 53,54 and 55 ) that would be affected by further agreed expenditure. In addition, the earmarked reserves would be affected by any further agreed expenditure.

**RESOLVED:** that the above reports be noted

**53. REFERRAL REPORT – COMMUNITY SERVICES COMMITTEE 1 MARCH 2021**

The Committee considered a report that outlined recommendations made by the Community Services Committee on 1 March 2021 relating to changes to the 2021/22 Service Level Agreements relating to grants to the voluntary sector and the procurement of an electronic highways sign as referenced in the Corporate Plan 2020-23.

**RESOLVED:** i) That a Member working group be established to review current arrangements for grant aiding the voluntary sector through Service Level Agreements. The working group to comprise of Councillors Gloria Martin, John Gurney, Liz Jones and Cameron Restall. The working group to report back with recommendations to the Community Services Committee.

ii) That the current grant given to Community Action Bedfordshire (CAB) be assigned to the Bedfordshire Rural Community Council (BRCC) in light of the BRCC merger with the CAB.

iii) That the payment of the 2020/21 grant to the Dunstable Town Guides and Priory Church be deferred until both organisations have submitted required financial information to officers.

iv) That the payment of the 2021/22 grant to Dunstable Town Band be deferred until the Band is operational again and their exact financial requirements are established.

(v) That up to £20,000 from anticipated 2020/21 revenue savings be allocated for the purchase of an electronic highways sign.

**54. WORKING TOWARDS CARBON NEUTRAL STATUS 2030 – REPORT**

The Committee was reminded that it had set up a Working Group and at its first meeting it had advised the Committee that it would be appropriate to secure a specialist consultant to study greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint across the organisation and its range of services. It was further reported that the Head of Grounds and Environmental Services was preparing a consultancy brief for the baseline study of the Councils greenhouse gas emissions and carbon footprint.

**RESOLVED;** That up to £5,000 from anticipated corporate revenue savings 2020/21 be used to fund the consultancy work as detailed in the report.

**55. PROVISION OF AUDIO – VISION FACILITIES FOR COUNCIL CHAMBER**

The Committee was requested to consider the immediate purchase of appropriate audio–vision facilities for the Council Chamber in Grove House including the purchase of

speakers, microphones and supporting equipment to ensure Committees and Council meetings were enabled for recording and streaming. It was noted that the streaming and recording of meetings would ensure all electors/residents had an opportunity to access meetings and other proceedings of the Council. Where Councils made provision to record its meetings it could decide how long such recordings would be kept and how members of the public could obtain copies. This was normally provided for in a publication scheme. The Committee considered three options for acquiring recording and streaming equipment. The first option provided for one general microphone and a 'fishbowl camera' that covered one angle for meetings. The second option provided for microphones and equipment to ensure recording/streaming of meetings with racks for storage of equipment and cabling. The third option was for a system similar to option two, but it would be wireless at a cost of £19,320 inclusive of installation, setup and training for officers and Members.

It was noted that the use of the Council Chamber and the equipment by outside organisations could create an income stream. The system was portable and could be used in other venues and at events organised by the Council.

One Member expressed concern that parish/town councils were procuring equipment for recording meetings; he felt that it was more appropriate for Principal Councils because of their strategic service responsibilities.

**RESOLVED;** That the Committee agrees to choose option three to acquire speakers, microphones and supporting equipment at a cost of £19,320 and the Democratic Services Manager be asked to prepare a publication scheme for the Council as well as ensuring the Council had effective retention of documents and recordings policies

(Councillor Johnson Tamara requested his vote against the proposal be recorded).

## **56. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

CAB Management Committee – no update

Dunstable International Town Twinning Association – no update

Hospice at Home Management Committee – It had looked at the Governments' road map to plan its services going forward. The numbers of volunteers were increasing, and they were looking forward to face-to-face support.

Ashton Almshouses Charity – no update

## **57. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

**RESOLVED;** To exclude the public and press in accordance with Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1961 S1.2 to allow discussion on matters that affect the information relating to the financial affairs of a third party and matters that affect employees' remuneration and conditions of employment

## **58. BAD DEBT REPORT**

The Committee considered a report that outlined in detail the circumstances that required the provision of an events related income stream to be written off as bad debt.

**RESOLVED;** That approval is given to write-off the debt set out in Appendix 1 of the report (total amount £3,000.00 + VAT).

**59. ESSENTIAL CAR USER ALLOWANCES**

The Committee considered a report that recommended that the Council removed the payment of essential car user allowances and telephone allowances from the Council's terms and conditions of employment, consolidating existing payments into current recipient's basic salaries.

**RESOLVED;** That essential car user allowances and telephone allowances are removed from the Council's current terms and conditions of employment and that related payments received by current recipients are consolidated into basic salary payments in recompense.

As this was the last meeting of the Council year 2020/21 the Chairman took the opportunity to thank all Members for their contribution to discussions, and the members of the senior management team and staff members for their sound advice and financial expertise.

**The meeting closed at 20.15.**