

DUNSTABLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

ON MONDAY 26 SEPTEMBER 2022

Present: Councillor Liz Jones (Town Mayor), Lisa Bird (Deputy Town Mayor), Gloria Martin (Chairman), Sid Abbott, Wendy Bater, John Gurney, Kenson Gurney, Peter Hollick

In Attendance: Paul Hodson (Town Clerk and Chief Executive), Lisa Scheder (Head of Finance and Responsible Financial Officer), John Crawley (Head of Grounds and Environmental Services) and Ian Reed (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies: Councillors Philip Crawley (Vice-Chairman) and Cameron Restall

Public Attendance: Nil

142. MINUTES

The minutes of the meetings of Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 20 June 2022 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

143. SPECIFIC DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor John Gurney declared a non-pecuniary interest as a Town Council appointee and Chairman of the Board of Trustees of Dunstable Men in Sheds.

144. FINANCIAL MONITORING REPORT

The Head of Finance and Responsible Financial Officer presented the financial monitoring report for the period ending 31 July 2022. The Committee also noted details of the Council's earmarked reserves as of 31 August 2022.

The Head of Finance and Responsible Financial Officer made members aware of the current financial position the Council was in. The summary showed a potential net revenue underspend at the end of the financial year of £1,524. It was noted with satisfaction that this took into account of the £50,000 contribution from the general reserve agreed and a £33,000 estimate of the potential pay increase

The Committee also considered the external auditor's (Mazars) opinion on the completed AGAR for the financial year 2021/2022 and were pleased to note that once again no material comments had been made and that the Council's end of year accounting had been completed successfully.

RESOLVED: That the above reports be noted and the Head of Finance and Responsible Financial Officer be congratulated on her work and the Committee notes that once again the External Auditor gave the Council a clean bill of health.

145. ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL

The Committee considered a request to approve a further three months' absence from Town Council meetings for Councillor Mark Cant due to personal circumstances (Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 refers).

RESOLVED: That the request to give Councillor Cant exemption from attending meetings of the Council for the next 3 months as provided for in the Local Government Act 1972 be granted.

146. PERFORMANCE AREA REFURBISHMENT

The Committee considered a report that requested the Committee to agree additional funding to ensure the refurbishment of the performance area in Grove House Gardens. The Committee noted that at Full Council on 29 June 2020 it was agreed to release £57,000 from the reserves to pay for the refurbishment of the Clock Tower, the performance area in Grove House Gardens and the pergola in Priory Gardens. The clock tower had been refurbished with additional external funding at a cost well over the original sum of £28,000. Therefore, there was no funding available to support the works needed for the performance area remedial works. The costs to repair the structure was estimated in the region of £34,000. This included a budget of £5,000 (approximately 15%) increase on the earlier costs.

The Committee discussed possible options for its repair including environmental issues and the storage of rainwater. Also, the Committee discussed and acknowledged that a health and safety assessment was necessary to decide whether the structure was currently safe to use.

RESOLVED: That the Committee approves the provision of £34,000 to carry out the refurbishment of the performance area in the current financial year.

147. REFURBISHMENT OF MEADWAY STORE

The Committee considered a report asking for its approval to release funding of £9,908 from allocated reserves to support the refurbishment of the Meadway store currently used by the Dunstable Men in Sheds (DMiS) project. The Committee noted and acknowledged the partnership working between the Town Council and DMiS to refurbish and create a fit for purpose workshop. A full works package and specification had been submitted for tender and the lowest bid received was £36,483 including a contingency sum of £2,500 as well as fees of £3,400 which created a budget requirement of £39,893. DMiS had successfully attracted some grant funding as well as having some resources of its own. Unfortunately, there was a shortfall of £9,908

RESOLVED: That the Committee approves the provision of up to £9,908 from the ear marked Pavilion Building Reserve that would allow the refurbishment works to be carried out.

148. MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The Committee considered a report on the Town Council's marketing and communication activities.

The Committee welcomed the report and discussed issues as follows;

- A Dunstable Town Council Instagram page had been created with 100 followers being attracted in its first month
- The Town Council had over 10,000 Facebook followers which for a council of its size was impressive
- The website was continuing to see more visitors
- The noticeboards were being regularly checked
- A newsletter for staff was being issued on a monthly basis – copies of the newsletter to be circulated to Members
- Talk of The Town - the Committee was advised that savings needed to be made in the current financial year that could affect the number of pages included in each edition. Officers were encouraged to look to withdraw one of the editions and the use of more paid for advertising of local traders was suggested
- Community Showcase Window - the installation of an LED screen was welcomed

RESOLVED: That the Committee welcomes the report and acknowledges the work of the Corporate Marketing and Communications Officer.

149. TOWN CLERK ROBES

The Committee considered a report requesting the purchase of ceremonial robes and wig for the Town Clerk and Chief Executive using in year budgets. The Committee noted a number of Town Clerks throughout the country wore a wig and gown on ceremonial occasions. It was further noted that the Society of Local Council Clerks encouraged and supported the wearing of wig and robes for ceremonial duties.

RESOLVED: that the sum of £2,400 be approved from existing in year budgets.

150. HONOUR BOARDS

The Committee considered a report which sought approval to purchase honour boards to record the names of the Mayors of Dunstable and Town Clerks. The Committee noted the increase in costs from March when the boards were first discussed. The company would ensure future costs were kept to a minimum by updating the boards when they are in the area for other business. They will also install a plaque to record the unveiling of the boards by the current Town Mayor.

RESOLVED: that honour boards and supporting plaque be purchased at accost of £2,860 using in year budgets.

151. PROPOSED COUNCIL MEETING DATES FOR THE YEAR 2022

The Town Clerk and Chief Executive presented the report and sought approval for the draft calendar of meetings for 2023/24.

RESOLVED: That the calendar of meetings for 2023 be approved as well as agreeing that the next calendar of meetings approved by the Council in 2023 will be for the Council year 2024/2025.

153. REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

- a) Citizen's Advice Management Committee – Councillor Wendy Bater had attended meetings of the CAB The CAB were extremely busy. Cllr Bater would make another report at the next meeting.
- b) Dunstable International Twinning Association – Councillor Peter Hollick reported on the recent visit to the town by representatives of Porz during the Platinum Jubilee weekend held in June. He also reported on the brochure he had produced recording the Association's fifty years.
- c) Hospice at Home Management Committee – Councillor Jones reported. Volunteers were busy fundraising, identifying funding sources and supporting local people in their homes.
- d) Ashton Alms-houses Charity - Councillor Hollick advised the Committee of an installation of a new boiler. An annual inspection on 14 July had identified a number of minor repairs and painting requirements.

154. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED: In terms of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972 to exclude the public and press in accordance with Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1961 S1.2 to allow discussion on contractual matters.

155. UTILITIES CONTRACT RENEWAL

The Committee had been circulated with a report setting out options for securing a new contract for Gas and Electricity from March/June 2023. The Committee was invited to consider options relating to securing a three year deal at the moment, a one year contract or delay securing a contract and review options at the meeting in November

RESOLVED: that the Full Council be recommended to support the option to delay securing a deal until the Finance and General Purposes Committee in November subject to a caveat that if in the meantime it rapidly transpires that it would be in the Council's best interests to sign up to an immediately available deal, the Town Clerk and Chief Executive be granted the delegated power to secure the most advantageous deal in liaison with the Town Mayor

and Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes
Committee.

The meeting closed at 20.43