

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING, BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL
TUESDAY 22 MARCH 2022, 5.30PM
HELD AT BIDDULPH TOWN HALL, HIGH STREET, BIDDULPH ST8 6AR**

PRESENT:

- **The Mayor:**
 - Councillor S Rushton
- Councillor C Brady
- Councillor D A Hall
- Councillor K Harper
- Councillor D J Hawley
- Councillor K H Jackson
- Councillor J T Jones
- Councillor A J McLoughlin
- Councillor C R Perkin
- Councillor W Rogers
- Councillor H M Sheldon MBE
- Councillor N R Yates

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Mrs Sarah M Haydon – Chief Officer (Minute Taker)
- Ms Jodie Hancock – Events and Partnerships Officer
- Ms Esther Gladstone – Finance and Administration Officer

113. APOLOGIES

Apologies were recorded for:

- Deputy Mayor – Councillor J Garvey
- Councillor C Brady
- Councillor A H Hart
- Councillor W Rogers
- Councillor J Salt
- Councillor H M Sheldon MBE

114. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- a) **Disclosable Pecuniary Interests:** None
- b) **Other Interests:** Councillor Hall knew one of the applicants for the bar tender (item 127) and would leave the room for the duration of this discussion. Councillor Jackson stated that he is part of the Biddulph Youth and Community Zone Board and would not take part in any discussion in relation to item 126 or item 138. Councillor McLoughlin declared an interest in the emergency item- 139.

115. MINUTES

- a) To **confirm** the Minutes of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022 (approved at the Town Council meeting on 8 February 2022)

Proposed by Councillor Hawley; seconded by Councillor Perkin and agreed.

- b) To **confirm** the Minutes of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting held on 8 February 2022 (approved at the Town Council meeting on 8 March 2022)

Proposed by Councillor Hawley; seconded by Councillor Perkin and agreed.

REVIEW OF POLICIES

- c) To **approve** revised policies (attached):

- a) Risk Management Policy**

Proposed by Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Rushton.

Councillor Hawley noted that the Emergency Plan was emerging, and also considered risk.

Councillor Harper wondered how the level of risk for grant allocations was considered. The Chief Officer noted that there had already been agreement that the grant guidance would be revisited and would include a checklist for applicants to record that they have relevant policies in place. Agreed.

- b) Appraisal and Review Policy (including form)**

Councillor Harper queried 1.4, which considers discussion of any issues. In addition, Councillor Harper wondered about staff input into the process and the policy. The Chief Officer confirmed that all staff had received copies of these revised documents. In addition, these had been sent to the solicitor for her consideration.

Proposed by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Hawley and agreed.

- c) Stress Management Policy**

Proposed by Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Hawley and agreed.

- d) Violence at Work Policy**

Proposed by Councillor Hawley; seconded by Councillor Perkin and agreed.

d) To **approve** new policies (attached):

a) Whistleblowing Policy

Councillor Harper wondered whether the Mayor should be a contact for whistleblowing. Councillor Yates felt this role was honorary; the Chair of this Committee is an Executive role.

There was discussion about the different roles included within the Policy. The Chief Officer confirmed that this document had originated with the solicitor, who had advised that this was necessary.

In relation to adding specific whistleblowing concerns, Councillor Perkin felt that Councillor conduct, provision of facilities and data, and un-authorized purchasing were relevant to this work.

There was discussion about the role of the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) Standards Committee.

Councillor Yates also wondered whether this section should include misrepresentation of authority.

Councillor Hawley suggested that 'Councillors' should be added to 1.2.

Councillor Perkin proposed the suggested amendments; seconded by Councillor Rushton and agreed.

b) Flexible Working Policy

The Chief Officer noted that there was already a policy that supported staff to work flexibly within their current roles. This policy set out a process whereby staff can request amendments to their working pattern.

Councillor Perkin felt it was necessary to include a section on who staff could appeal to, should their application be refused. The Chief Officer would add this; appeals should be considered by this Committee.

Proposed by Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Rushton and agreed.

c) Councillor Email and IT Use Guidance

Councillor Hawley was concerned about whether the requirements set out within this document could be enforced. Councillor Jones stated that this

document is 'guidance', highlighting the important practices that Councillors should consider, but which were unlikely to be enforceable.

Councillor Perkin explained that Councillors are responsible for their own management of data.

Councillor Harper queried when Councillors were receiving laptops. The Chief Officer noted that this would be considered by the IT Working Group.

There was discussion about the use of letterhead and emails. It was agreed to insert a colon into this section, which would now read:

Town Council letterhead or emails must not be used for any communication which is not authorised by the Town Council:

Emails and letters to the public, press or external companies which relate to Town Council matters but are not official Town Council communication, must make clear that the matter is a personal communication only.

Emails or letters from Councillors or Officers must never be sent anonymously or under a pseudonym.

Councillor Hawley was concerned about anti-virus software and encryption. Councillor Perkin stated that there were free products and that this was good practice for any user of IT.

It was agreed to adopt this policy with the amendment above.

GENERAL ISSUES

e) RECONCILIATIONS FOR JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2022

To **receive** the following documents (attached):

- Current Account/ Reserve Account
- Petty Cash
- Credit Card
- CCLA
- Sum Up

Councillor Perkin proposed to accept these on-block; seconded by Councillor Hawley. Councillor Mcloughlin raised a query about I&P Lifting Gear; the Chief Officer confirmed this was a review of ladders. Agreed.

f) A general discussion about the future recruitment of Councillors

The Chief Officer noted that following a difficult year on social media, it would be important to develop information for potential Councillors that would make the role appealing. The Chief Officer was seeking approval and guidance in relation to the development of a suite of media.

Councillor Rushton thought it was important to identify that the Town Council is 'disability friendly'.

There was discussion about how this information would be circulated.

Councillor Jones felt it was important to put out some 'positive PR'. The public had their eyes opened through the Live Zoom meetings, but he was aware of at least two people who decided not to stand as a result of social media activity.

Councillor Jackson felt information should be balanced; it was likely to be more challenging to recruit Councillors because people lead very busy lives. There are lots of public spirited people; we need to entice them.

Councillor Jackson felt that the time commitment required from the Town Council is more significant than the District Council.

Councillor Perkin noted that it would be important to include information about how to apply for individuals who are not part of a political party.

Councillor McLoughlin felt that recruiting younger people was important; it should also be appealing to all sexes and those not born within the town. It was agreed that documents would be prepared and considered at a future meeting.

g) To receive an update on grants received and applied for by the Town Council

The Chief Officer presented this table:

Below is a list of income, not including income received from provision of services, e.g. room hire, burials, etc.

Received in 2021-22	To deliver	Amount
Western Power	Fuel Poverty support	£2000

Moorlands Partnership Board	Noticeboard- Halls Road	£578.40
Locality	Neighbourhood Plan development	£2350
Staffordshire County Council	Grit bin - DHP	£250
Staffordshire County Council	Knypersley Highways support- DHP	£1000
SMDC	Emergency lights contribution	£594
SMDC	Market contribution	£2000 (final gazebo due March 2022)
Funds applied for in 2022		
Veolia	Tree planting	£750
Severn Trent	Halls Road Green Space	£20,000
SMDC	Jubilee activities	£1000
Staffordshire County Council	Light bulbs (Councillor grant)	£800
Moorlands Partnership Board	Heritage Planters	£5219.64
Awards for All	Jubilee activities	£10,000

There was discussion about the Severn Trent Community Grant; the public would have to vote for this grant in order for it to be successful.

Councillor Jackson wondered whether the new Grants Officer at the Biddulph Youth and Community Zone could support the Town Council.

The Chief Officer noted that it was time consuming working up options for grant applications; the Town Council needed to identify priority projects.

Councillor Yates stated that the Town Council is often classed as a community group, and wondered whether the Town Council should have a Grants Officer to take the pressure off the Chief Officer.

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

h)

- a) To **consider** disposal of any assets, in line with the Asset Management Policy and Financial Regulations

The Chief Officer stated that there were no new items; the audit of chairs was ongoing.

b) To **confirm** approved suppliers as part of the Procurement Policy
No new suppliers were presented for approval.

In accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, s1, the Council is to determine which items, if any, should be taken with the public excluded.

CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

i) To **approve** a charge for early or late arrival at burials (to be tabled)
It was agreed to apply a £40 fee for early or late arrival, 15 minutes after or before the allotted time.

j) To **consider** a financial allocation to support:

a) Sports activity within the town

b) Arts activity within the town

It was agreed that all allocations should come through the Town Council grants scheme and go straight to the recipient.

k) To **note** that the previous internal auditor has retired; to **agree** an internal auditor for 2021-22

The Chief Officer had approached Cheadle Town Council; the Clerk had recommended their internal auditor. The Chief Officer would now exchange letters.

Councillor Hawley and Yates left the meeting at 6.44pm

l) To **receive** an update on grants paid to local organisations at the conclusion of the financial year

The Chief Officer presented an update. Proposed by Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Harper to receive the update.

Councillor Jackson proposed that the remaining £3000 from the Town Council Grants scheme should be 'rolled over' to the 2022-23 budget; seconded by Councillor McLoughlin. Agreed.

m) To **agree** a position in relation to ongoing support for the Biddulph Community Officer (Support Staffordshire)

The Chief Officer presented an update in relation to funding required by Support Staffordshire. It was agreed that the Town Council would offer a financial contribution and the ongoing provision of the room within the Town Hall for the 2022-23 period.

REPAIRS/ MAINTENANCE, TENDERS AND QUOTATIONS

n) To **approve** a provider for bar services in Biddulph Town Hall (to be tabled)

Councillor Perkin chaired this item; Councillor Hall left the room.

The Chief Officer confirmed that this opportunity had been advertised on the website and Facebook; local providers had also been approached directly.

A new provider was agreed.

Councillor Hall returned to the Chamber.

o) To **approve** the purchase of fridges and an ice machine in the bar area at the Town Hall (to be tabled)

Proposed costs were presented. The Events and Partnerships Officer confirmed that all items had a D-rating in terms of their energy usage. The Town Council bar required two fridges and one icemaker.

p) To **approve** the purchase of bar furniture for the Town Hall (to be tabled)

The Events and Partnerships Officer circulated images of potential furniture options. The 'robust', industrial option was approved.

q) To **approve** the likely costs in relation to a wedding license for Biddulph Town Hall (to be tabled)

It was agreed that the Town Council should embark on the vetting process and then re-visit this, if this was successful.

Councillor Rushton left the meeting at 7.15pm; the Committee continued to be quorate throughout.

r) To **approve** repairs to the air conditioning system within the Town Hall (to be tabled)

The Chief Officer presented a quotation from the current contractor for significant work to the pipes, which would enable the system to be commissioned. Agreed.

s) To **consider** the attached report in relation to a new finance and accounting system and to **approve** the recommendations contained within. The Finance and Administration Officer had undertaken an analysis of the current requirements and possible providers; this was presented to Councillors for their consideration. It was agreed that Scribe would be the new provider.

t) Following consideration at the Civic Events Working Group and Town and Community Committee, to **agree** Platinum Jubilee expenditure (to be tabled)

Proposed costs were presented. The Chief Officer queried whether Councillors were happy for her to apply for grants from 'Awards for All' and Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) to cover some of the cost of these activities. The Chief Officer noted that the coins would need to be ordered quickly, to ensure they could be delivered on time. It was agreed to proceed with the activities and to order the coins (with acrylic boxes) forthwith; proposed by Councillor Perkin, seconded by Councillor Harper and agreed.

u) Subject to satisfactory negotiations regarding the development of the Classic Vehicle Show logo, to **approve** the development of a new Market logo. The Chief Officer reminded Councillors about the Town and Community Committee consideration of logo development for the Classic Vehicle Show. Proposed by Councillor Perkin; seconded by Councillor Harper and agreed.

STAFFING

v) To **consider and agree** additional payments to staff for work on Bank Holidays and Weekends. The Chief Officer would bring figures to a future meeting for consideration.

ASSET MANAGEMENT

w) To **receive** an update on Staffordshire Moorlands District Council (SMDC) funding received

Following an acceptable resolution, the Chief Officer was awaiting advice as to what information the SMDC Finance team now needed.

x) To **receive** an update on tenants at the Visitor Centre. Councillors received updates on likely rental income.

y) To **receive** and update on tenants at the Town Hall
The Chief Officer advised about changes with tenants.

z) Emergency Item

Councillor Jackson proposed; Councillor Perkin seconded to accept an emergency item. Agreed.

The Chief Officer presented a quotation from Staffordshire Wildlife Trust in relation to mapping activity; the Environment and Climate Change Working Group supported the commissioning of all this activity. There were sufficient funds within the earmarked reserves allocation to fund this.

It was proposed by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Perkin to approve that all activities should be commissioned, and that this should commence forthwith. Agreed.

The meeting ended at 7:55pm.

Signed..... Date.....