

**MINUTES OF THE FINANCE STRATEGY AND MANAGEMENT
COMMITTEE MEETING, BIDDULPH TOWN COUNCIL
TUESDAY 26 MARCH 2024, 5.30PM
HELD AT BIDDULPH TOWN HALL, HIGH STREET, BIDDULPH ST8 6AR**

PRESENT:

- **Mayor:**
Councillor A K Harper
- **Deputy Mayor:**
Councillor N R Yates
- Councillor N Eardley
- Councillor D J Hawley
- Councillor M A Hopkins
- Councillor K J Jackson
- Councillor A C Lawton
- Councillor A H Hart
- Councillor J T Jones
- Councillor C Smith (arrived at 18.07)
- Councillor J T Salt
- Councillor C Wood
- Councillor W Rogers (Chair)

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Mrs Sarah M Haydon – Chief Officer (Minute Taker)
- Mrs Margaret Warman - Compliance and Governance Officer
- Ms Jodie Hancock – Events and Partnerships Officer
- Ms Elizabeth Norton – Finance Officer

Councillor Rogers recited the disclaimer regarding the recording of the meeting.

82. APOLOGIES

- Councillor C Brady

83. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- i. Disclosable Pecuniary Interests: None.
- ii. Other Interests:

Councillor Jackson declared an interest in confidential item 96, he advised he has two grandchildren at James Bateman; Councillor Salt is a Governor at James Bateman.

Councillors Hart and Harper declared an interest in confidential item 97, as members of Moorlands Partnership Board.

Councillor Rogers requested an additional agenda item, to be added at the end of the meeting in relation to the Visitor Centre at Biddulph Grange Country Park.

Proposed by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Harper. All **agreed**.

84. MINUTES

To **confirm** the Minutes of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting held on 23 January (approved at the Town Council meeting on 13 February 2024).

The minutes were **confirmed**.

85. ACCOUNTS MATTERS

- a) To **approve** the bank reconciliations for December 2023 and January 2024 - all accounts (attached).

The reconciliations were **approved**. Proposed by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Harper.

- b) To **receive** a verbal update on the Unity online banking processes following the first month of usage.

Councillor Rogers confirmed the Unity Bank account is up and running; he'd made a first successful payment, and thanked the Finance Officer for her help and support.

The Chief Officer provided a balance update and confirmed the Financial Regulations had been amended to formalise the process of payments online. She advised the setting up of beneficiaries is long-winded, but was going well so far. The Chief Officer confirmed that all Councillors can view the Unity Bank account, as members of the Finance Strategy and Management Committee.

Councillor Yates stated that he required a new log-in.

Councillor Hart queried whether the Chief Officer was happy with the account, she confirmed that she was; we should be able to see the correct current position of our bank account going forward, rather than awaiting the bank statement.

Received.

86. BUDGET

- a) To **receive** a summary of receipts and payments for 2023-24 to-date (attached)

The document was **received**.

- b) To **receive** an update on anticipated income and expenditure before year-end.

The Chief Officer identified a number of outstanding amounts in relation to service charge payments (where final bills were anticipated) and reimbursement from grant schemes.

Councillor Jackson queried whether service charges are split evenly. The Chief Officer stated that the equation was completed by Staffordshire Moorlands District Council, before Town Council took over the management of the Town Hall, which was based on the occupancy, floor space, site management etc.

Councillor Jackson queried whether in relation to Citizens Advice, the same calculation is used. The Chief Officer stated that it is a different equation as the service charge is in addition to the rental cost. Citizens Advice only book a room for the days they need it.

The update was **received**.

87. AUDIT

- a) To **approve** the revised Monitoring Councillors Job Description (attached)

Councillor Hawley confirmed that he and Councillor Eardley had used what the Compliance and Governance Officer had originally put together, with a couple of additions; how often certain things need to be looked at, whether that be quarterly, annually, etc. and a spreadsheet to be used when completing quarterly reviews.

Councillor Hawley stated that it was discussed that part of the role should be to keep an eye on what is happening during a council meeting and ensure that rules are adhered to.

The document was proposed by Councillor Jones; seconded by Councillor Hart. **Agreed.**

Councillor Rogers thanked the Councillors for their work.

- b)** To **receive** a report following the January internal control visit by Councillors Hawley and Eardley

Councillor Hawley confirmed that as monitoring councillors they had completed the quarterly audit and found no issues to report.

- c)** To **consider** significant events that have occurred during 2023-24 and the Town Council's response to them

The Chief Officer tabled a list of significant events that occurred during 2023-24; this was designed to encourage discussion about significant events which couldn't have been foreseen when setting the budget; the Chief Officer stated that the Town Council should consider whether there has been a financial or reputational impact. The Chief Officer posed questions such as, 'was our approach effective?' 'Is there anything we need to consider for the next financial year?'

Moved by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Harper. **Agreed.**

- d)** To **confirm** that recommendation from the 2022-23 audit have been completed (attached).

The Chief Officer confirmed the recommendations have been completed, there were no formal recommendations only small improvements in our approach. The Chief Officer confirmed that information had been received from the external auditors, Mazars, in relation to 2023-2024.

88. ASSET MANAGEMENT

To **receive** an update on the management of assets and the inventory of purchases, and to approve the current Asset Register (presentation).

The Chief Officer updated the Committee on the Town Council's approach to the management of assets; Scribe is our accounts package, which has the ability to record asset purchases (linking invoices), this provides a good level of transparency. At this time of the year, we review all of our capital purchases during the financial year and ensure we've updated them all accurately in

Scribe and also create an inventory (of much smaller value items). The Chief Officer discussed the current asset register.

Councillor Salt asked about the location of the market items. The Chief Officer confirmed the items had been moved to the storage facility at Brown Lees and the Asset Register will be updated.

Councillor Lawton questioned whether there is a depreciation policy. The Chief Officer confirmed that depreciation is not required within the town and parish council sector.

The document was **received**. All agreed.

89. RESERVES

To **receive** an update on the management of reserves (presentation) and proposals for 2024-25.

The Chief Officer confirmed that a revised Reserves Policy will be presented at the next Finance Strategy and Management Committee meeting at the end of the financial year, and presented the reserves allocated to different projects in the current financial year.

The internal control process had highlighted the need for consideration in relation to the renewal of IT equipment; whether replacements should be funded via reserves or be allocated a sum of money in each year's budget. The Chief Officer explained that if these amounts were included in the budget, it would increase the precept, which Councillors had been reluctant to do previously.

The Chief Officer questioned whether the current approach is effective – i.e. smaller amounts are allocated to individual projects within the Reserves Policy.

Councillor Yates questioned whether the Town Hall frontage was included in Capital Public Realm earmarked reserves (EMR). The Chief Officer confirmed that this was the case.

Councillor Wood questioned what the minimum would be to keep in reserve. The Chief Officer confirmed £200,000 is allocated as a general reserve, which is 6 months of the precept amount. Councillor Wood stated that Council's reserves could be targeted to go back into central government, he agreed funds should be earmarked for the big projects.

Councillor Hawley stated that he thought laptops should be included in the precept, as part of the administration of the council. He thought that it would present a false picture if funds were taken out of reserves, it should be a fixed amount in the budget (precept) for capital spend on IT/laptops each year.

Cllr Smith arrived at 18.07pm.

Councillor Hart stated that funds were previously put aside for major capital projects and that not all have come to fruition, he agreed that the council should be spending reserves. However, he also agreed with Councillor Hawley that IT replacements should be budgeted in the precept.

Councillor Lawton agreed that a conservative accountancy approach, that the IT provision should come out of precept rather than reserves.

Councillor Salt stated that she agreed with IT provision coming out of the precept however questioned the Chief Officer about what is required at the moment rather than next financial years precept.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the laptops are currently out of warranty, and all will need replacing. The Chief Officer explained that the day-to-day IT costs are included in the precept, however previously any replacement or capital one-off spend would come from the reserves, as a 'project'.

The Chief Officer confirmed that she would bring more detailed information to next month to the Committee in relation to the Reserves Policy. It was discussed to include capital IT provision in the precept for the following financial year.

Councillor Salt requested a breakdown that details how much of the precept income is put into reserves annually.

90. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND PROJECTS

The Chief Officer confirmed that reimbursement was due for £4,000 for the Garden Event; £4,660 for the Feasibility Study on the Town Hall frontage and £6,000 for the Older People's Project.

The Chief Officer stated that the District Council is keen to support businesses in relation to new frontages to ensure funding comes to Biddulph High Street; Town Council staff have been supporting this.

Councillor Salt requested data detailing which shops have received funding.

There was a discussion regarding what the next the steps are in regard to the Town Hall frontage. The Chief Officer reported that she is awaiting a letter that comes with the grant offer, and stated that the procurement requirements need to be considered. This will be added to a future Town Council agenda.

91. TO CONSIDER A DRAFT OF THE TOWN COUNCIL FIVE YEAR STRATEGY (ATTACHED)

Councillors reviewed the document.

Councillor Salt requested health and wellbeing be noted on page 12 of the document under the 4th pillar. The Chief Officer agreed to amend this.

Councillor Hawley asked for the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation Working Group to be added.

The Chief Officer queried whether the draft document could be put out for community consultation. This was proposed by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Wood. All **agreed**.

92. POLICIES (attached)

- a) To **approve** the reviewed Appraisal and Review Policy
Councillor Jackson suggested an amendment; change 'most important resource' to 'integral resource'.

There was a discussion around whether scoring was required in relation to objectives and targets. It was not required.

Proposed by Councillor Jackson; seconded by Councillor Yates. All **agreed**.

b) To approve the reviewed Risk Management Policy

Proposed by Councillor Hawley; seconded by Councillor Yates. All **agreed.**

c) To approve the reviewed Flexible Working Policy

Councillor Wood questioned whether the promotion of work life balance had been assessed. There was a discussion in relation to working from home. The Chief Officer confirmed this is possible, but also noted the need to ensure we have enough office cover.

Councillor Salt gave thanks to the staff who have implemented the changes of the Flexible Working Act 2023, before they become law.

Proposed by Councillor Hart; seconded by Councillor Harper. All **agreed.**

d) To approve the reviewed Whistleblowing Policy

Councillor Smith requested an amendment on point 4.2 'or if safeguarding concern'.

The Chief Officer confirmed that the document had been sent to the employment solicitor, and will also make amendments as per their recommendation.

Proposed by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Yates. All **agreed.**

e) To approve the reviewed Annual Leave & Special Leave Policy

Councillor Smith suggested a reference the Carers Policy in this policy.

Proposed by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Hart. All **agreed.**

f) To approve the reviewed Protocol to Mark the Death of a Local Holder of Office

Proposed by Councillor Jones; seconded by Councillor Yates . All **agreed.**

g) To **approve** the reviewed Flag Flying Protocol

Proposed by Councillor Yates; seconded by Councillor Wood. **Agreed.**
1 Opposed.

h) To **approve** the reviewed Councillor Email & IT Use Guidance

Proposed by Councillor Wood; seconded by Councillor Jones. All **agreed.**

i) To **approve** the reviewed Councillors' Handbook

There was a discussion in relation to appropriate dress code for Councillors for meetings. Councillor Jackson proposed to remove 5.2 paragraphs 1 and 2; seconded by Councillor Harper. **Agreed.**

j) To **approve** the new CCTV Policy

Proposed by Councillor Yates; seconded by Councillor Hart. All **agreed.**

Councillor Jones questioned whether there is a policy about personal safety in relation to Councillors and Staff.

Councillor Wood agreed to share new Staffordshire Moorlands District Council Policy.

STANDING AGENDA ITEMS

93.

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

b)

The Chief Officer noted the below items to consider for disposal;

- 8 x green/white stripey roofs – mouldy and ripped
- Several broken plastic patio set items
- Parts of gazebos and white gazebos – parts have been used for repairs
- 3 x folding tables -plastic rigid and smashed
- Unusable steel frames (without roofs)

All have been in storage at Biddulph Park and are not required or usable.

Proposed by Councillor Hart to dispose of all above items; seconded by Councillor Jones. **Agreed.**

c) To consider the sale of a trailer that is no longer required for markets. The Chief Officer stated that the 9ft trailer is beyond economical repair, which has been in storage at Biddulph Park. It requires new hitch, flooring, etc and there is an issue with moving it from Biddulph Park.

It was noted that an offer had been made to purchase the trailer for £1,500. Benchmarking had been undertaken to establish if this was a reasonable offer.

It was proposed by Councillor Hart to accept this offer; seconded by Cllr Jones. **Agreed.**

d) To confirm approved suppliers as part of the Procurement Policy

Gary Smith and Ignite Facilities Ltd would be new additions to the list, following receipt of appropriate documentation.

The Chief Officer advised that the Administration Officer is pulling together a scheme with suitable rules and regulations; this would be presented at a future Town and Community Committee meeting.

It was proposed by Councillor Jones to confirm the approved suppliers; seconded by Councillor Smith. **Agreed.**

Councillor Hart left the meeting at 19.15pm.

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

94. TO CONSIDER THE MANAGEMENT OF A PIECE OF LAND TO BE USED BY BIDDULPH IN BLOOM FOR A MEMORIAL GARDEN

The Chief Officer explained that Biddulph in Bloom (BIB) cannot own land, therefore if the Town Council do not take on the land, BIB cannot complete the project. The Chief Officer advised that if the piece of land is transferred to the Town Council, anything that they build on the land is then the Town Council's responsibility, the Town Council will have to manage the project with regard to planning, build, etc.

It was proposed to support BIB with a piece of land to create the memorial garden, however not the land at the end of Wharf Road car park.

There were a number of proposals without seconders, which were withdrawn.

Councillor Smith proposed the Town Council take on the piece of land, but work with BIB to identify an alternative site for their remembrance garden; seconded by Councillor Salt. **Agreed.**

95. TO APPROVE MEMORIAL TESTING QUOTATIONS FOR THE BURIAL SITES (ITEM REFERRED FROM RECREATION AND AMENITIES COMMITTEE)

The Chief Officer stated that the Recreation and Amenities Committee had seen previous quotes, but there was a new quotation to consider now.

It was proposed by Councillor Wood to confirm the Alliance quote; seconded by Councillor Yates. **Agreed.**

96. TO CONSIDER MAKING A £200 DONATION TO JAMES BATEMAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TO SUPPORT READING ACTIVITIES (EMAIL ATTACHED)

There a was discussion relating to the correct route to take when requesting the funds. Whether a donation is possible or whether the school should apply for a grant. The Chief Officer confirmed that they could grant money without breaking the rules, via funds left in the Town Councillor grant pot.

Councillor Hawley proposed to encourage James Bateman to apply for a councillor grant in future; seconded by Councillor Jones. **Agreed.**

Councillors Jackson, Salt and Smith declared an interest in the item and did not vote.

97. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON CURRENT FUNDING IN PLACE FOR THE RESTORATION OF THE MINER'S LAMPS, AND TO AGREE THE TOWN COUNCIL CONTRIBUTION

The Chief Officer confirmed:

Moorlands Partnership Board have agreed £8,000

Staffordshire Moorlands District Council agreed to pay for installation – approx. £3,000

There is a shortfall of £3,000-£4,000.

Potential costs are:

£12,000 Repair quotation (not including solar lighting)

£ 3,745 Installation quotation

£15,745 in total

Councillor Salt proposed that the Town Council pays the shortfall (including any additional costs for solar lighting); seconded by Councillor Jackson. **Agreed.**

Councillor Harper abstained from the vote.

It was proposed by Councillor Rogers, to suspend Standing Orders 3x to allow the meeting to continue; seconded by Councillor Harper. All agreed.

98. TO CONSIDER ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE LEASE OF A PHOTOCOPIER BEYOND APRIL 2024

The Chief Officer tabled the options.

Councillor Salt questioned whether purchasing a photocopier would be cheaper. The Chief Officer stated that there could be issues with the ongoing maintenance.

Councillor Smith queried the copy charges. There was discussion around whether the 24-month contract includes a 'get out' clause and whether a new copier is better quality.

Councillor Jones proposed Option 2, TB Technology Limited; seconded by Councillor Smith. All **agreed**.

The Chief Officer agreed to pursue Option 2, but would bring this back to the Committee if there are any caveats.

99. TO CONSIDER AN EMAIL (ATTACHED) IN RELATION TO THE BIDDULPH COMMUNITY OFFICER

Councillor Rogers confirmed that Sharon Middling had been given notice and left yesterday. The Chief Officer reported that she had received the email after Sharon had been given notice.

Councillor Salt declared an interest as she is a Board member at the Zone; Sharon is the Chair.

It was discussed that the email states that the role had helped to establish menopause support group at the Zone. Councillor Salt confirmed this wasn't completed by Support Staffordshire.

It was discussed that Sharon is a valuable member of the community in the work she has completed.

It was proposed by Councillor Yates to decline Support Staffordshire request to fund a role; it was received outside of the deadline set and therefore funding is not available; seconded by Councillor Harper. **Agreed**.

Councillor Salt abstained.

100. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE ON FUNDS RECEIVED FROM TOWN COUNCIL TENANTS

The Chief Officer informed Councillors that the Room C tenant had left suddenly owing an amount of £1,500 (not including a notice period).

The Chief Officer explained a series of emails and letters have been sent chasing the funds, there was an initial response stating that the tenant had got the funds but had experienced a domestic abuse incident therefore had to move address. After this, the tenant has not been located. The rent is still owing on the room, there were promises of payment, but it has not been received.

There was a discussion regarding what the write-off process would be. Further discussion would be deferred to another meeting.

The update was **received**.

101. QUOTATIONS (to be tabled)

a) To **approve** a quotation for:

- i. Inspection, Testing, Servicing, Maintenance, Repair, Upgrading and Renewals and 24-hour monitoring of the Intruder Alarm, CCTV and Fire Alarm System at Biddulph Town Hall

The Chief Officer advised she'd sent out the invitation to tender to three organisations and had received 2 quotes from Sitewatch and Your Choice Fire & Security.

Sitewatch was proposed by Councillor Jones; seconded by Councillor Yates. All **agreed**.

- ii. Inspection, Testing, Servicing, Maintenance, Repair, Upgrading and Renewals and 24-hour monitoring of the Intruder Alarm at Biddulph Grange Country Park Visitor Centre

Sitewatch was proposed by Councillor Jones; seconded by Councillor Yates. All **agreed**.

- iii. Inspection, Testing, Servicing, Maintenance, Repair, Upgrading and Renewals for the Door Access system at Biddulph Town Hall

Sitewatch proposed by Councillor Jones; seconded by Councillor Yates. All **agreed**.

- b) To **approve** a quotation for the repair of the Mayoral chain, including the creation of a display of 26 retiring shields (on the 50th anniversary of the Town Council), and refurbishment of the remaining 57 shields.

The Chief Officer confirmed the amount for the retiring/ mounting of shields would be £2085; repairs to the current chain would equate to £3315.

There were discussions around the frame for the retiring shields.

It was proposed by Councillor Yates; seconded by Councillor Jones. **Agreed**. 3 voted against.

- c) To **approve** a quotation for the management of the lime trees at the Burial Grounds

The Chief Officer tabled 3 quotations.

E J Tree Surgery were proposed by Councillor Wood; seconded by Councillor Harper. All **agreed**.

- d) To **approve** a quotation for enhanced IT provision within the Town Hall and the purchase of replacement laptops due to issues extending the warranties

The Chief Officer tabled the quotations and explained that it is necessary to enhance our cyber security in relation to GDPR regulations. This would include enhanced wi-fi.

The Chief Officer explained that there is not an issue with speed of the Town Hall wi-fi, but with coverage, due to the increase in people using rooms behind reception where coverage is inconsistent.

The quote in relation to cyber security was proposed by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Jones. All **agreed**.

Councillor Hawley noted that there is a requirement to provide wi-fi when letting/ booking an office space. The Chief Officer stated that she will do more

investigation and will bring the second part of the quotation back to the Committee.

- e)** To **approve** a quotation for remedial work following a legionella inspection at the Town Hall

The Chief Officer reported that it was difficult to get a quote from plumber for these works. A current approved supplier had agreed to provide the required information.

Proposed by Councillor Wood; seconded by Councillor Harper. All **agreed**.

- f)** To **approve** a quotation for asbestos reinspection activities

It was discussed that Westland have been previously used; there were no issues, and they were recommended by others.

It was proposed to use Westland by Councillor Harper; seconded by Councillor Yates. **Agreed**.

- g)** To **approve** a quotation for PAT testing activity across Town Council assets

It was proposed to use Electrical Test Midlands by Councillor Yates; seconded by Councillor Jones. **Agreed**.

- h)** To **approve** a quotation for stage lighting testing and servicing within the Town Hall

It was proposed to use Active Visual Supplies by Councillor Hawley; seconded by Councillor Smith. **Agreed**.

Mrs Warman, Miss Hancock and Miss Norton left the meeting at 20.51pm.

102. STAFFING

a) To **consider** additional hours for a member of the team.

The Chief Officer had received a request from the Finance Officer to increase her hours to 30 per week, currently she is contracted to complete 22 hours. She would also like to increase her time at home.

There are no issues with her work, but the volume of it has increased significantly. It is hoped that Unity may help to stabilise this, but the Chief Officer proposed trialling 30 hours for a three-month period.

Councillor Yates felt it would be appropriate to consider an annualised contract.

Proposed by Councillor Jones ; seconded by Councillor Harper. **Agreed.**

b) To **confirm** that annual appraisals will commence at the end of April 2024

Confirmed.

103. ADDITIONAL ITEM- HEADS OF TERMS FOR VISITOR CENTRE

The inclusion of this item had been agreed at the start of the meeting.

The Draft Heads of Terms had been circulated before the meeting.

The Chief Officer confirmed that she had received assurances from the Assets Team at the District Council that the annual cost for dealing with drainage would be around £300.

It was noted that there was a restriction on sub-letting; we would want to do this.

Clarity would also be required in relation to parking.

Proposed to accept by Councillor Jones; seconded by Councillor Harper. **Agreed.**

The meeting ended at 9.01pm .

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

DRAFT