

BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL
Minutes of the Finance & Staffing Committee
held on Monday 15th March 2021 at 7:01pm online using Microsoft Teams



PRESENT

Cllr S Hitchings – Committee Chairman	Cllr P Osborne – Committee Vice Chairman
Cllr L Lindsay – Chairman of Council	Cllr L Hitchings – Vice Chairman of Council
Cllr H White	Cllr C Stevens
Cllr R Carter	Cllr H Mieville
Cllr A Cross	

IN ATTENDANCE

Town Clerk

42. PUBLIC SESSION

There were no members of public in attendance.

As government funding is currently available for the Changing Places cubicles, Cllr Stevens asked for this to be looked at for the Corn Exchange. The Chairman suggested that the clerk asks the Corn Exchange consultants, IPA to look into this funding stream.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

Cllr Stevens also mentioned the possibility of a Changing Places cubicle in the new public conveniences/TIC building for the Marsh & Ham car park.

43. APOLOGIES

None

44. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None had been submitted.

45. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 14TH DECEMBER 2020

Minute No. 39.2 should read that it was proposed by Cllr L Hitchings instead of Cllr Hitchings.

Subject to this amendment it was PROPOSED by Cllr White, SECONDED by Cllr Lindsay and AGREED unanimously that the Minutes be APPROVED and SIGNED. The minutes will be signed at the earliest opportunity.

46. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE

46.1 Payments and Investments – Thank you to Councillors White, L Hitchings, Carter and Clark who have helped the Town Clerk with the checking and approving of payments in the absence of the RFO. Thanks are also extended to Cllr S Hitchings for overseeing the cashflow and investments. This has been incredibly helpful.

Cllr White noted that the Town Clerk has managed the extra workload in addition to all other duties and thanked her for her efforts.

46.2 Office Cover – The office is still closed to the public but is staffed each day to ensure the smooth running of receiving/distributing post, deliveries, filing, finance cover, etc.

46. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE (cont)

- 46.3 RFO Cover – An agency has provided the council with a bookkeeper to assist with the year end and the accountant that has been assisting since December continues to come in every other week.
- 46.4 Sports Clubs – The sports clubs were most grateful for the rent relief for the January to March period and the utilities relief for the October to March period. Invoices have been sent by the town clerk for audit trail purposes.
- 46.5 Community Fridge – Nominal codes have been created to keep the funding for the fridge separate to other council funds, as a grant from the Dorset Council is being held until a bank account can be opened and the volunteers are being reimbursed for their training/DBS checks from this budget line.
- 46.6 Census Training – Four members of staff volunteered to do the Census training in order to fulfil the town council's service provision for the Census 2021. This was carried out outside of their contracted hours and overtime was paid using the funds provided by the Census agreement. The accountant, who has been supporting the council since December, has reflected this in the budgets/Sage.
- 46.7 Staff Training – This year's record shows that staff training attendance has again increased, to a total of 35 courses, with most training sessions attended online. At the beginning of 2020 staff that couldn't take part in 2019 took part in Fire Warden training. The Town Clerk attended a webinar for creating accessible documents assisting website accessibility, Operation London Bridge, Cyber Security, sexism in the workplace, dealing with challenging people and various trainings based on the Coronavirus crisis (video presentation skills, holding remote meetings, optimising home working, managing your council's social media presence throughout the coronavirus, Microsoft 365). The Town Clerk also attended the SLCC Conference and SLCC sessions Microsoft 365 and Thinking Fast. Both the Town Clerk and Operations Manager took part in a counter terrorism workshop. The Assistant Town Clerk attended training courses around Cloud computing for the modern council and website training based on website accessibility, optimising home working, a Dorset Local Plan workshop, Affordable Housing training and NALC Planning for the future. The RFO attended CCLA and Sage sessions throughout the year and the Market Manager took part in NABMA training sessions.
- 46.8 Councillor Training – Councillors attended four training courses in total. Due to Covid-19 three courses were cancelled. Cllr Carter attended the Dorset Council Local Plan workshop as well as NALC Planning for the Future. Cllr Osborne attended training Finance for Councillors and Cllr Stayt took part in Budgets & Precepts.
- 46.9 Grant Applications – None have been received for this period and the Blandford Opportunity Group has withdrawn its request for a service level agreement due to their current financial position.

Cllr Mieville queried why the group no longer required the SLA and Cllr S Hitchings confirmed that the group is a beneficiary of the estate of Freeman, Heather Bracewell. Cllr Stevens added that the Dorset Council has continued to fund 100% of the grant to the group, which has continued to run throughout the pandemic.

47. ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF EXPENDITURE AGAINST BUDGET FOR THE FOLLOWING:

47.1 Administration Budget for the year to 23rd February 2021

The paper was noted (see Appendix B).

47.2 Overall Revenue Budget for the year to 23rd February 2021

The paper was noted (see Appendix C).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr S Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr White and AGREED unanimously that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The council approves the virement of the underspend from the following budget headings to General Reserves (1500) and carries them forward to the 2021/2022 financial year:

- **Civic Expenses (4802)**
- **Corn Exchange Project Manager / Consultant**
- **Grants (4400)**
- **Service Level Agreements**
- **Corn Exchange Building Maintenance (5206)**

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

47.3 General Reserves

The paper was noted (see Appendix D).

48. REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION

48.1 There are no cheque payments to retrospectively approve

48.2 To receive and retrospectively approve direct debit payments for the period 1st October 2020 to 31st January 2021 (sheets 177-180) totalling £115,050.28

It was PROPOSED by Cllr S Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Osborne and AGREED unanimously that

The direct debit payments for the period 1st October 2020 to 31st January 2021 (sheets 177-180) totalling £115,050.28 are received and retrospectively approved.

48.3 To receive and retrospectively approve BACS payments BACS 284 to BACS 288 totalling £43,480.20

It was PROPOSED by Cllr S Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Osborne and AGREED unanimously that

BACS payments BACS 284 to BACS 288 totalling £43,480.20 are received and retrospectively approved.

48.4 To receive and retrospectively approve Online Faster Payments FP026 to FP033 totalling £459,033.36 (which includes payments to other Town council bank accounts).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr S Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Osborne and AGREED unanimously that

Online Faster Payments FP026 to FP033 totalling £459,033.36 are approved retrospectively.

48.5 There were no CHAPS payments to retrospectively approve (the next CHAPS payment is scheduled for 25th March 2021 and will appear on the June agenda)

48. REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION (CONT)

48.6 Retrospective approval of the Investment Account for the period 26th November 2020 to 28th February 2021

The paper was noted (see Appendix E).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that

The Investment Account for the period 26th November 2020 to 28th February 2021 is approved retrospectively.

48.7 Report by Chairman on Bank Reconciliation and Petty Cash check

Cllr S Hitchings carried out a petty cash check last week and confirmed that the monthly bank reconciliation had been undertaken during the period and everything was found to be in order. There was a delay in producing the bank reconciliations, but this has now been brought up to date and approved by the Chairman and the Town Clerk.

48.8 Bank Reconciliation to 31st January 2021

The paper was noted (see Appendix F).

49. REVIEW OF THE VARIABLE DIRECT DEBITS

The paper was noted (see Appendix G).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lindsay and AGREED unanimously that

The variable direct debits are approved.

50. TO RECEIVE THE INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT

The paper was noted (see Appendix H) and Cllr Mieville thanked the Town Clerk for her work in covering the role.

51. INSURANCE RISK ASSESMENT RELATING TO THE TOWN COUNCIL'S INSURANCE COVER AND APPROVAL OF INSURANCE PREMIUMS FOR 2021/22

The paper was noted (see Appendix I).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Carter and AGREED unanimously **that a RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Town Council:

- **Approves the removal of business interruption cover.**
- **Confirms that there are no other aspects of insurance cover that they wish to amend.**
- **Approves expenditure authority to enter into a further 3 year long term agreement with Company A until 18th April 2024 at a cost of £13,803.52 for 2021/2022 (Expenditure Authority: Localism Act 2011 s1-8).**
- **Approves expenditure of up to £1,750 for the awaited additional amount for the Railway Arches cover and the clerk will report the amount back to council.**

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

52. REVIEW OF THE RISK ASSESMENT MANAGEMENT POLICY (INCLUDING FINANCIAL) ARRANGEMENTS FOR 2021/22

The paper was noted (see Appendix J).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Carter, SECONDED by Cllr Mieville and AGREED unanimously **that a RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Town Council approves the risk management policy (including financial) subject to the removal of business interruption cover, replacing it with ‘prudent financial management’.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

The amended document will be distributed to councillors for the purposes of the annual meeting of the council in May.

53. REVIEW OF ASSET REGISTER

The paper was noted (see Appendix K) subject to amending Lambert to Lamperd.

ACTION: TOWN CLERK

54. TO REVIEW THE FINANCE & STAFFING COMMITTEE REMIT AND THE FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The paper was noted (see Appendix L) and it was also noted that there are no proposed amendments from staff to either the remit or the financial regulations. These were last updated in December 2020 and will be further considered at the annual meeting in May 2021. Councillors did not have any amendments.

55. TO RECEIVE AN UPDATE REPORT ON THE CCLA PROPERTY FUND

The paper was noted (see Appendix M) and the Chairman commented that council resolved on 1st March to invest an additional £276,000.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Carter, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously **that a RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

The Town Council wishes to keep all the units and continues to review the fund at future F & S Committee meetings.

ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL

56. TO RECEIVE A REPORT ON FREE VENUE HIRE REQUESTS RECEIVED FOR 2020/21

The paper was noted (see Appendix N) and the council’s commitment to groups, that have not been able to hold the events during the pandemic, continues for when they are able to hold their events in accordance with government guidance.

The Chairman thanked the clerk for covering the RFO role, along with support from the bookkeeper and accountant, and she thanked him in return for his valuable input with the management of the investments and the cashflow.

The Chairman went on to thank the committee for their support during his time as Chairman, which was extended due to the pandemic, and remarked that – considering the current staffing situation – he would be willing to stay on should council so wish.

The Meeting closed at 8:12 pm.

SIGNED: **DATED:**