

**BLANDFORD FORUM TOWN COUNCIL**  
**Minutes of the Finance & Staffing Committee**  
**held on Monday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2023 at 7:05pm held in the Corn Exchange**

**DRAFT**  
Subject to confirmation

**PRESENT**

Cllr L Hitchings – Committee Chairman  
Cllr R Holmes – Committee Vice Chairman  
Cllr L Lindsay – Chairman of R & A  
Cllr N Lacey-Clarke – Vice Chairman of Council

Cllr H Mieville – Chairman of Council  
Cllr S Hitchings  
Cllr A Cross

**SITTING IN**

Cllr S Chapman

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Town Clerk

Responsible Financial Officer

**27. PUBLIC SESSION**

There were no members of public in attendance.

Cllr L Hitchings queried the minimum distance that Jerry's is supposed to be maintaining on the footpath and asked that the matter is raised again with Dorset Council. Cllr Lindsay explained how difficult it is passing on the footpath with a walking stick. Cllr S Hitchings added that the barriers have been reintroduced that were originally instructed to be removed.

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

**28. APOLOGIES**

Cllr K Herbert – Chairman of T&GP

Cllr H White

**29. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS**

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

**A dispensation is granted to all Councillors, except Cllr Cross (as he does not live in the parish of Blandford Forum), to enable them to participate in discussion and vote on the setting of the council tax.**

**30. MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2023**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Cross, SECONDED by Cllr Holmes and AGREED (6 in favour, 1 abstention) that the Minutes be APPROVED and SIGNED.

**31. TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE**

The report was noted (see Appendix A).

VOIP System – The staff have been aware for some years that BT is moving all its customers from the old analogue public switched telephone network (PSTN) to a fully digital network. The plan is to have moved everyone over before Openreach stop the PSTN (and ISDN) service in 2025. By then, every phone line in the UK will be digital, routing calls over IP (Internet Protocol) rather than the traditional PSTN. The PSTN switch-off is happening in 2025. From then on, at home or at work, everyone will be using digital phone services.

### 31. **TOWN CLERK'S REPORT & CORRESPONDENCE (cont)**

The new digital system will be expensive, and we are discussing ways of reducing the number of handsets required. We are also aiming to introduce the new system when we relocate. Cllr L Hitchings advised that the number of handsets can be reduced, which will lower the costs required.

Corn Exchange Reinstatement Costs – As part of the project works, a reinstatement costing report has been commissioned, which is much higher than the last one carried out in 2020. The Town Council's insurer has therefore been advised and the client manager has responded to inform the council that, to increase the sum insured for 'Corn Exchange/Council Chambers/Town Hall/Offices' to £6,061,565.00 would incur an additional premium to the figure of £66.35 (including IPT) based on the remaining 137 days of the current policy period. This has therefore been approved and is being processed.

Community Ownership Fund Paperwork – The funding agreements have been received and will be an agenda item at next week's council meeting.

### 32. **ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF EXPENDITURE AGAINST BUDGET FOR THE FOLLOWING:**

#### 32.1 Administration Budget for the year to 31st October 2023

The paper was noted (see Appendix B).

#### 32.2 Overall Revenue Budget for the year to 31st October 2023

The paper was noted (see Appendix C).

#### 32.3 Reserves Accounts as at 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023

The paper was noted (see Appendix D).

### 33. **REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION**

#### 33.1 To receive and retrospectively approve cheque payment 011139 (Sheet 881) totalling £185.18 (for petty cash)

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

**The cheque payments 011139 (Sheet 881) totalling £185.18 (for petty cash) are received and retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

#### 33.2 To receive and retrospectively approve direct debit payments for the period 1st September 2023 to 31st October 2023 (sheets 212-213) totalling £68,867.73

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

**The direct debit payments for the period 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023 (sheets 212-213) totalling £68,867.73 are received and retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

#### 33.3 To receive and retrospectively approve Online Faster Payments FP165 – 178 totalling £869,068.60 (includes payments to other Town Council bank accounts and transfer of precept) and Corn Exchange Faster Payment CE01 totalling £8,129.91

### 33. **REVIEW OF FINANCE DOCUMENTATION (cont)**

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

**The Online Faster Payments FP165 to FP178 totalling £869,068.60 and Corn Exchange Faster Payment CE01 totalling £8,129.91 are received and retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

#### 33.4 **Retrospective approval of the Investment Account for the period 1st August 2023 to 30th November 2023**

The report was noted (see Appendix E).

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

**The investments are retrospectively approved.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

#### 33.5 **Report by Chairman on Bank Reconciliation and Petty Cash checks**

The Committee Chairman, Cllr L Hitchings confirmed that the monthly bank reconciliation had been undertaken during the period and was in order. The Committee Vice Chairman, Cllr Holmes had carried out the petty cash check and was able to confirm it balanced.

#### 33.6 **Bank Reconciliation to 31st October 2023**

The paper was noted (see Appendix F).

### 34. **TO RECEIVE THE INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT**

#### 34.1 **To agree how to proceed with budget line 4800 Mayoral Expenses**

The paper was noted (see Appendix G).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Holmes and AGREED (6 in favour, 1 against) that

**A working group is formed to consider the Mayoral Allowance, which is referred to in the Mayor's Handbook, and all Councillors are invited to attend.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

In the meantime, Cllr Miéville was advised to keep a record of his expenditure.

### 35. **REVIEW OF VARIABLE DIRECT DEBITS**

The paper was noted (see Appendix H).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED unanimously that

**The variable direct debits are approved.**

### 36. **CONFIDENTIAL**

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

36. **CONFIDENTIAL (cont)**

**The public and press may be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that publicity might be prejudicial to the public interest as per Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.**

36.1 To receive a report regarding the Town Council's salaries budget and current workload and to consider requests for the 2024-2025 budget

The paper was noted (see Appendix I).

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

**The recommendations in the report are approved, however SCP5 will replace SCP4 as the starting rate for the Grounds & Caretaking role.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

36.2 To receive the Payroll budget (staff grading) for the year 2024/25

The paper was tabled (see Appendix J).

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

**The staff grading for 2024/25 is approved as per the tabled document and is signed by the Committee Chairman. A full staffing review will be carried out on SCP brackets once the Corn Exchange project is nearing completion.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

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

**The public and press were welcomed back into the meeting for the following items;**

37. **CONSIDERATION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2024/25**

37.1 Consideration of the proposed revenue budget for Administration Costs for 2024/25

The paper was noted (see Appendix K).

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

**The proposed Administration budget is accepted, along with the rationalisation of the following budget lines – 4803, 4804, 4807 and 4808 – and the verification of the figure for the salary charge out to Barnes following the pay increase.**

**ACTION: TOWN CLERK**

37.2 Recommendations from Committees

The paper was noted (see Appendix L).

**Recreation & Amenities Committee Meeting held on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

**Minute No. 26 – Consideration of the proposed budget for the financial year 2024/25 and recommendation to Finance & Staffing Committee Meeting**

9:09pm – Cllr Mieville left the meeting.

**37. CONSIDERATION OF THE TOWN COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2024/25 (cont)**

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Chapman, SECONDED by Cllr Stevens but NOT AGREED that

The earmarked reserves are set at £11,000, which is £4,500 less than last year's budget for the Recreation & Amenities Committee, for the 2024-25 financial year.

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lindsay, SECONDED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke and AGREED (6 in favour, 1 non-vote) that

**The earmarked reserves are set at £15,500 for the Recreation & Amenities Committee, adding £4,500 to the Play Area Re-Surfacing budget line, for the 2024-25 financial year.**

9:09pm – Cllr Miéville returned to the meeting.

**Town & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2023**

Minute No. 30 – Consideration of the proposed budget for the year 2024/25 and recommendation to Finance & Staffing Committee Meeting

It was PROPOSED by Cllr Lacey-Clarke, SECONDED by Cllr Cross and AGREED unanimously that

**The earmarked reserves are set at £15,500 for the Town & General Purposes Committee for the 2024-25 financial year.**

**37.3 Consideration of the overall budget for the year 2023/24 and recommendation of the precept for 2024/25**

The paper was noted (see Appendix M).

It was PROPOSED by Cllr L Hitchings, SECONDED by Cllr Holmes and AGREED (6 in favour, 1 abstention) that a **RECOMMENDATION is made to full council that**

**The draft budget is considered for the 2024/2025 financial year, with investigations into potential savings, however the precept will be finalised at the Town Council meeting scheduled for Monday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2023.**

**ACTION: TOWN COUNCIL**

The Meeting closed at 10:08pm.

**SIGNED:** .....

**DATED:** .....