



WINCANTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD VIA ZOOM ON MONDAY 18TH JANUARY 2021 AT 7.00PM

Present: Councillors Shelbourn-Barrow (Chair), Greening (from 19:06), Smith, Thomas and Vagg.

Also present: Councillors Power, Ralph, Shelbourn-Barrow, Tudgay and Walters and Mrs Place (Balsam Centre).

Locum Clerk: Zöe Godden

There was one member of the public present at the start of the meeting.

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and reminded attendees that the meeting was being livestreamed. It was confirmed that the meeting was quorate and that all Councillors had received the supporting documentation distributed before the meeting.

19:01 - The Chair allowed a public open session.

A member of the public asked why working group meetings were not held in public; where cheque lists and quarterly budget information could be found; whether the Town Council was subject to any additional fees from the External Auditor in relation to the 2019-20 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) and why the end of the Planning Committee meeting had been edited.

The Locum Clerk said that, as per her previous email to the member of the public, the External Auditor had not yet sent its report in relation to the 2019-20 AGAR and that, if any additional fees had been incurred, an invoice would likely be received with the report.

The Chair said that the other questions would be answered at the next Finance Committee meeting.

19:04 - The Chair brought the public open session to a close.

The meeting started at 19:04

001 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillor Greening, who would arrive late.

002 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

003 To note that the Full Council approved the adoption of the revised Financial Regulations on 7th December 2020.

Noted. It was confirmed that all Councillors had received a copy of the new Financial Regulations.

19:06 - Councillor Greening joined the meeting.

004 To consider switching to Unity Trust Bank and signing up to online banking, including making and receiving payments directly from and to the bank account.

The Clerk summarised her report, which had been distributed to Councillors before the meeting. Councillor Smith asked why the Council had not started using online banking already and how payments would be authorised if not via a cheque signed by two councillors. The Locum Clerk said that the previous version of the Financial Regulations had not included clauses from the National Association of Local Councils model Financial Regulations document that would allow the Town Council to operate its bank accounts online. These clauses were included in the new Financial Regulations that had been adopted by the Full Council on 7th December 2020. The Locum Clerk went on to say that Unity Trust Bank accounts could be set up to require two Councillors to authorise payments. Each Councillor on the bank mandate would have their own log-in, so it would always be clear who had authorised payments.

Councillor Tudgay asked if Unity Trust Bank was secure. The Locum Clerk said that Unity Trust offered the same high levels of security as other banks and had increased security due to the recent prevalence of criminals fraudulently attempting to open bank accounts in order to access CV-19 grants for businesses.

The Chair noted that switching to Unity Trust Bank offered the opportunity to modernise the Council's financial practices and reduce bank charges. Along with the implementation of new accounting software, staff time would be saved and reports could be produced in a more timely manner.

RESOLVED: It was proposed by Councillor Shelbourn-Barrow, seconded by Councillor Greening and unanimously agreed to recommend to the Full Council that Wincanton Town Council should switch its current account to Unity Trust Bank; that the new account should be set up to enable the Clerk and Deputy Clerk to view online accounts and submit payments; that councillors acting as signatories should be set up to view online accounts and authorise payments; to recommend to the Full Council at least four councillors to act as signatories.

Action FGP210118/1: Locum Town Clerk

005 To consider grant requests received for 2021-22.

There was some general discussion about the difference between restricted and unrestricted funds and the level of running costs that charities were required to hold, which was thought to be at least three months' worth. The amount of grant funding for each applicant was considered at the next agenda item.

19:27 - Mrs Place left the meeting.

006 To consider a recommendation from the Governance Working Group that the Finance Committee considers recommending the draft budget and precept request for the year 2021-22 to the Full Council for approval, including any amendments the Finance Committee might wish to suggest.

The Locum Clerk shared the draft budget on the screen so all meeting participants could see it and explained that there was a proposed new budget structure that gave a lot more detail and broke costs down into different service areas. The Locum Clerk went through each budget line in turn. Several minor amendments were suggested and the Locum Clerk made changes to the budget spreadsheet. The following additional points were raised:

- Long-term responsibility for unadopted highways needed to be established to better inform the Town Council when setting budgets for items such as grit bins.

- The Locum Clerk was instructed to find out what had happened to the metal bench that had been damaged in a traffic collision in the Market Place.

Action FGP210118/2: Locum Town Clerk

- The Locum Clerk was instructed to make sure that a hand sanitiser dispenser had been put up on the outside of the toilet at Cale Park recreation ground so that the toilet could be reopened.

Action FGP210118/3: Locum Town Clerk

- The cost of electricity used at the Town Hall needed to be investigated as it was felt to be high.

Action FGP210118/4: Locum Town Clerk

- The Locum Clerk was instructed to start an earmarked reserve for a post-CV-19 community event, that could be started with any unspent funds from the 2020-21 budget, to be agreed at a future Full Council meeting.

Action FGP210118/5: Locum Town Clerk

- The Locum Clerk was instructed to start an earmarked reserve for High Street Regeneration.

Action FGP210118/6: Locum Town Clerk

- The Chair noted that the Town Initiative Fund had been reduced because the newly recruited Project and Development Co-ordinator role would be looking to raise funds for projects and would support local groups and businesses to apply for grants themselves. The role was part-funded by SSDC but the full amount of staff costs was being budgeted for in the Town Council's 2021-22 budget, to ensure continuation of the role in the event that SSDC was not able to continue to contribute to costs.

20:22 – Councillor Ralph left the meeting.

There was some general discussion about the proposal to add £1000 to the budget for a possible market. It was felt that a market was not a priority for 2021-22, especially with the CV-19 situation as it was. Councillor Greening said that he wanted to retain the amount but it was **agreed** to remove it for 2021-22.

20:24 – Councillor Ralph re-joined the meeting.

At this point in the meeting, the Chair asked Councillors to consider the grant requests. There was some general discussion about how the level of grant giving would impact on the overall budget and precept request. Councillors acknowledged the benefits that the various organisations brought to the community, especially during the CV-19 pandemic, and also recognised that the Town Council was holding only a very small amount in reserves of approximately £89,000. There was a general feeling that the Town Council's grant giving policy needed to be more robust and this would be reviewed for the 2022-23 round of grant applications.

In order to assess the impact of the grant applications on the budget and precept request, the Locum Clerk added the full amounts requested to the budget spreadsheet. This would have resulted in a 6% increase on the Town Council's budget. It was felt that the Town Council should attempt to keep any budget increase to around 3%.

Councillor Vagg reported that she had received a personal message from the grant applicant from The Word, saying that they wished to withdraw their application. The Locum Clerk said that she would ask for written confirmation of the withdrawal.

Action FGP210118/7: Locum Clerk

RESOLVED: It was proposed by Councillor Smith, seconded by Councillor Shelbourn-Barrow and unanimously agreed to allow the meeting to run longer than the two hours specified in Standing Order 3x.

There followed some discussion about how the grant amounts could be amended to keep the budget increase to around 3%. Councillor Ralph noted that the application from South Somerset Citizens Advice Bureau had been received after the deadline and it was **agreed** not to award a grant to this organisation in 2021-22. The suggested changes were added to the budget spreadsheet by the Locum Clerk, bringing the budget increase to 3.23%, which represented an increase to a Band D property of £5.67 per year. The Chair noted that the Town Council's portion of the precept was paid by taxpayers in addition to the amounts due to the Poilce, Social Care and other agencies.

RESOLVED: It was proposed by Councillor Thomas, seconded by Councillor Smith and unanimously agreed to recommend the amended draft budget to the Full Council for approval.

007 ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION FOR THE NEXT AGENDA

No matters were suggested for the next agenda.

The meeting ended at 21:09.



Locum Town Clerk