

HUNTINGDON TOWN COUNCIL**FINANCE COMMITTEE**

A meeting of the Finance Committee was held at the Town Hall, Market Hill, Huntingdon on Thursday 26th November 2015.

MINUTES

Present: Cllrs A Beevor; A Blackwell, D Brown, J Dyne, L George, S Hassell, W Hensley, P Kadewere, A Mackender-Lawrence, S McAdam, B Morrell, T Sanderson and R Valatka (Chairman)

Absent: Cllr J Jacobs

43. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs A Dovans, T Forster, S Gifford, B Manning and S Mulcahy

44. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none

45. PUBLIC ADDRESS

There was none.

46. MINUTES

Members had before them the minutes of the Finance Committee meeting held on 29th October 2015. It was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED that these were a true record of the meeting and they were duly signed by the Chairman.

47. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM SUB COMMITTEES

Members had before them the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee meeting held on 12th November 2015. The Chairman asked Members whether they were happy to approve the recommendations contained within the minutes, noting that the Bank Reconciliation item had been received, not approved.

Councillor Sanderson requested that where a 0% increase precept had been proposed as a fourth option under the Precept item, his name was listed as the proposer, along with Councillor Morrell as seconder. Another Member advised that in previous years, individual Members had been named in minutes, but that this had been steered away from. In the case of important proposals such as this example, it was deemed important to name the proposer and seconder.

A Member questioned the requested changes to the meeting of the Lettings Sub Committee on the 8th October 2015 and the Town Clerk advised that these had been

made, along with the creation of a table of fees, and that these would be presented at the next meeting of the Lettings Sub Committee for approval.

Another Member questioned the deadline dates for setting the precept and the Town Clerk advised that subject to approval, there would be a Finance Sub Committee meeting on the 3rd December, another on the 17th December and then the precept would be formally approved at the Finance and Town Council meetings on the 14th January 2016.

In light of no further queries, it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to accept the recommendations contained within the minutes of the Finance Sub Committee subject to the requested changes.

Clerk's note: at the end of the meeting, a Member queried why a member of the public had been allowed to attend the meeting of the Finance Sub Committee meeting when it was a private and confidential meeting. The Chairman advised that he had invited the individual to speak during the meeting, but that he hadn't been asked to leave ahead of the private and confidential discussions. The Town Mayor queried the Town Clerk as to whether he advised the Chairman to ask the individual to leave after addressing the meeting. The Town Clerk informed Members that he had not noted the individual still being in the room. The Town Clerk reminded Members that in all Sub Committee meetings where it had been approved for them to be private and confidential, minutes should not be shared outside of the Council. Members queried who could attend the meetings within the Council and the Town Clerk advised that any Member can attend a meeting of a Sub Committee whether they sit on the Committee or not but that they would not be able to vote on any matters, nor speak during the meeting; unless invited to do so by the Chairman.

48. **MONTHLY EXPENDITURE**

Members had before them a report from the Finance Manager of the monthly expenditure of the Council for October 2015.

The Finance Manager addressed the meeting and explained that following the previous meeting of the Finance Committee, a new report layout had been created as requested, explaining who the individual payments were made to and providing a brief description as to what the payment was for.

One Member asked when the Council would be moving over to the new Omega accounting system and the Finance Manager advised that it would be soon but that training would be required in the first instance because of not having used the system before.

Another Member questioned whether the new system would demonstrate clearly expenditure against budget headings and the Finance Manager advised that this would be possible after the training had been completed.

A Member queried a payment made for staging and Members were informed that this was for the staging that was purchased earlier on in the year for the Assembly Hall.

It was suggested that there could be a column added into the expenditure report to outline which Officers approved the payment to make it easier to account for individual authorisations.

Another Member questioned the Finance Manager as to how long Sage and Omega would be running simultaneously together for. The Finance Manager advised that all balances would need to be transferred across from Sage to Omega and Sage could then be closed down. The Member asked when Sage would expire and the Finance Manager explained that the set up with Sage had been changed to a monthly direct debit scheme so that it could be cancelled whenever the Council was in a position to do so.

The Member moved on to question two mileage payments for journeys to Shrewsbury and Banbury. The Town Clerk explained that two Officers had been sent on a training course in Shrewsbury due to it being more cost effective to pay mileage than to pay for a much higher course fee locally. The trip to Banbury had been for the Head Groundsman to visit the wholesalers and visit the trial grounds.

Another Member raised the item of the replacement bollards on the Market Square, asking whether the payment would be reimbursed through the insurance claim. The Town Clerk advised that this was the case and the payment would be reimbursed in due course.

The Chairman addressed the meeting, advising that he had requested all bank statements for Huntingdon Town Council to be circulated to all Members but instead, an agenda item had been included on the agenda to request that Members form a rota system to carry out spot checks of the bank accounts. The Chairman felt that this was limiting access to the Council's bank accounts and that Members shouldn't approve monthly expenditure without having seen the bank statements first. The Chairman further advised that he had not seen the Council's bank statements since taking on his role of Chairman for the Finance Committee and Sub Committee. The Town Clerk corrected the Chairman and highlighted that the bank statements had been contained within the agenda pack for the last Finance Committee meeting on the 5th November 2015.

A Member addressed the Chairman and suggested that the Town Clerk and Finance Manager should be trusted with looking after the bank accounts, but that if deemed necessary, Members could request further information. Another Member agreed with this suggestion, further proposing that should individuals wish to see the bank statements, they could request to do so by appointment with the Town Clerk and Finance Manager.

Another Member asked the Finance Manager whether there could be a report for monthly income as well as expenditure, as this was what had been done previously. The Finance Manager advised that this would be presented from the next meeting of the Finance Committee.

The Town Clerk addressed Members regarding the suggestion of looking at the bank statements via appointment. He stated that during Councillor training back in May 2015, it was advised that two Members should take it in turns to come into the office and do monthly spot checks. To date, not one Member had visited the office to do so. The Town Clerk told Members that this was standard practise across local Councils and advised that Members were more than welcome to come and view bank statements via appointment.

The Chairman moved on to advise Members that he had not seen the agenda prior to its distribution, nor had he approved or requested various items to be put on the

agenda. There was discussion amongst Members about protocol of creating agendas and the Town Clerk addressed the meeting to advise that an agenda was owned by the Town Clerk, with the chairman being able to request additional items. Some Members were in disagreement with this statement, but one Member stated that the Town Clerk was correct and that if a Chairman wanted a say over the agenda, they should make the effort to visit the office a week in advance of the agenda going out, to request any items and to review the final draft. Members generally agreed that out of courtesy, the agenda should be sent to the Chairman of that meeting ahead of it being distributed to all Members. One Member questioned what was in the Council's Standing Orders about distribution and sign off of agendas and it was agreed that the Town Clerk would look into this.

Clerk's Note: The Proper Office is responsible for preparing the agenda. Aside from the motions accepted from councillors, there will be other motions which the Proper Officer will need to include on the Agenda – Local Council Explained Meera Tharmarajah NALC Solicitor.

A Member moved the discussions back to the agenda item in question, asking a further question about the expenditure for copiers/printers. The Town Clerk advised that there were a number of printers and copiers in the Town Hall office and that Officers had been looking into terminating contracts for the unnecessary machines. Members were informed that it was more costly to terminate the contracts rather than to let them run their course. Finally, a Member questioned the payments to Imtech and what they were for. The Town Clerk confirmed that Imtech was the current contractor for the Town Hall and Medway Centre's maintenance but that the contract had been terminated as of 31st March 2016 and tenders would be obtained to get best value for money.

The Chairman asked Members whether they were happy to approve the monthly expenditure report before them and it was

RESOLVED to do so.

49. **MONTHLY BANK RECONCILIATION**

The Chairman had initiated discussions about this item under the previous item on the agenda but after much discussion about the benefits; or lack of; of all Members being sent copies of the Council's bank accounts, there were two proposals put forward:

(i) Councillor Hensley proposed that five Members from the Finance Committee should be selected to carry out monthly spot checks of the Council's bank accounts with Member A and B undertaking the first monthly check, Member B and C undertaking the second, Member C and D undertaking the third and so on and so forth.

(ii) Councillor Sanderson proposed that the Chairman and Vice Chairman should carry out the monthly spot checks of the bank statements.

Before a decision was made, a further Member stated that they were in agreement with the first proposal, but that the five chosen Members had to represent both political parties.

Members moved back to discuss the circulation of bank statements to all Members,

with one Member suggesting that they could be uploaded to the private and confidential section of the Town Council's website. The Town Clerk advised that under the Freedom of Information act and the Local Government Transparency Code, all payments of over £50 had to be published publically on the Council's website. A list of monthly expenditure for all payments was already available to view on the Town Council's website and would be updated with the latest approved expenditure reports. Another Member reiterated his comments about bank statements being unnecessary and that it would be more beneficial to have a monthly report about expenditure vs. budget headings.

Councillor Hensley re-iterated his proposal for five Members of the Finance Committee to be selected for a rota of monthly spot checks of the Council's bank accounts and it was proposed, seconded and

RESOLVED to accept this proposal.

Clerk's note: 8 Members voted in favour, 3 voted against and 2 abstained.

In light of this decision, Members were asked which five individuals would like to carry out the spot checks. It was agreed that the following Members would carry out the checks in sequence, with the Chairman and Vice Chairman (Councillors Valatka and Blackwell) welcome to come into the office and carry out spot checks:

- (i) Councillor Beevor
- (ii) Councillor Hassell
- (iii) Councillor Hensley
- (iv) Councillor McAdam
- (v) Councillor Mackender-Lawrence

A Member asked how the rota would be formulated and the Town Clerk advised that Officers would co-ordinate the rota and inform Members in advance of their allocated visits for the spot checks.

50. **CIL EXPENDITURE**

Members had before them a report regarding the purchase of new furnishings for the Town Hall from available CIL funds. The Chairman invited the Town Clerk to expand on the report and the CIL money available. The Town Clerk advised Members that at the Town Council meeting on the 5th November, Members had been informed that there was a sum of £22,500 available to spend from CIL funds.

At that meeting, Members had been asked to send in suggestions as to how this money could be spent ahead of the Finance Committee meeting but nothing had been submitted. In light of Officers having been given no guidance or recommendations, a report had been compiled to suggest new furnishings for the Town Hall.

One Member questioned whether furnishings for the Town Hall would fall under the remit for spending under community infrastructure levy, suggesting that perhaps it wouldn't qualify. The Member questioned whether a declaration would need to be submitted to Huntingdonshire District Council to outline what the money was to be spent on. The Town Clerk advised that the only requirement was to contain a separate column on the budget submission to highlight CIL expenditure, alongside S.137 expenditure.

The Chairman highlighted that it was sensible to spend money on areas that would bring in Revenue to the Town Council. Councillor Brown expanded on this comment by advising Members that he had recently hired the Town Hall for a function and the furniture wasn't fit for purpose.

Another Member suggested again that furniture wouldn't be able to be purchased through CIL money because it had to be spent for community amenities. In light of these concerns, it was agreed that the Town Clerk would speak to HDC to confirm the scope of spending CIL money. Members were concerned about the timeframe for spending the CIL money but the Town Clerk assured Members that there was a 12 month window for spending.

The Town Clerk asked Members whether they were happy to accept the recommendations contained within the report on the basis that HDC was content with the spending, but Members requested that the decision was brought back to the Finance Committee after coming up with new spending ideas.

The Chairman finished the discussions by emphasising the importance of understanding how the money could be spent and on what and it was

RESOLVED to defer making any decisions until further information and guidelines for spending were obtained.

Clerks Note: Under the requirements of the Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010 (as amended October 2015)

- *Any spend of CIL funding must fit within the usual powers of the Town/Parish Council and their Powers of Competence.*
- *If a Town/Parish Council has failed to spend CIL funds transferred to them within a period of 5 years from the date of initial receipt, or has not applied the funds in accordance with the Regulations then the District Council can serve a notice on the Town/Parish Council requiring it to repay some or all of the receipts that had been transferred to them.*

51. **SALE OF ASSETS**

The Chairman invited the Town Clerk to provide an overview to Members about the sale of Town Council assets. The Town Clerk explained that Officers had been looking at the portfolio of Town Council assets and the associated running costs of each. Members were informed that there were two assets, which could be considered to be sold for income. The first was the Priory Road Mortuary, which costed the Council money with electricity and water bills, along with rates charged. The only use for the building was for the toilet facilities and using the remaining space as a soil store.

The second asset was a piece of allotment land on Primrose Lane, which was unable to be cultivated or used. The history of the land was explained as formerly housing farm buildings and then being used as a Green Fingers shop building. The Town Clerk explained that he and the Property and Estates Manager had visited the planners at HDC about using the land as a brownfield site and there had been no obvious objections. One Member asked how big the plot was and the Town Clerk advised that three housing plots could be put on the site to fit in with the existing street scene.

The Town Clerk advised Members that the money from the sale of the Mortuary could

be used for the repair to the Priory Road Cemetery wall and that the money from the sale of the allotment land could be used to be put into reserves. These figures would need to be contained within the budget recommendations and it was suggested that this should be taken to the Finance Sub Committee meeting to be discussed.

The Chairman questioned how to make the maximum profit from the sales and the Town Clerk advised that an agent would be commissioned to value and sell the assets to the best possible value. The plots however couldn't be used for anything other than residential properties to fit in with the street scene. Members discussed the options for both plots of land and it was

RESOLVED to proceed with no cost planning investigations to make an informed decision.

52. **FINANCE SUB COMMITTEE**

Members were asked to approve an additional meeting of the Finance Sub Committee for Thursday 3rd December 2015 at 7.00pm. The Chairman questioned why an additional meeting was required when the next meeting had already been noted as Thursday 17th December. The Town Clerk advised that in light of setting four budget options and HDC not having released the tax base figure yet, it was vital to allow enough time to look at and scrutinise the different options. Members were reminded that the Precept had to be approved in January 2016 and that time was very precious in making the best informed decision possible. The Town Clerk explained that the budget options would be presented with all items to be included down one side for Members to decide whether to increase, reduce or delete those items from the budget. Staffing was noted as being an item for inclusion. Members were in agreement that an additional meeting was required and it was

RESOLVED to do so.

53. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next meeting was noted as the 14th January 2016

Chairman