

## FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of a VIRTUAL meeting (GoToMeeting ID: 399-225-269) of the BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE held on Tuesday 2 March 2021 at 11.00am

PRESENT Cllr Sarah Carney

Cllrs: Barry Irvine (to 12.57pm) Martin Ray  
Maggie Ray Steve Williams

Also in attendance: Cllrs Rose Allwork, Anne Rickard and Dave Rickard, Will Austin (Town Clerk), Paul Fuszard (Finance & Office Manager) and one representative of the press.

### PUBLIC FORUM

Monty Crook, Chairman of the St Mary's Church House Hall Trust (C.I.O.) and Management Committee, updated members on the current financial position of the Trust and invited councillors to offer help.

The Chairman thanked Mr Crook for his input.

### **30. APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were submitted by Cllrs Geoffrey Ackerman and Sandra Brown.

### **31. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Sarah Carney declared an interest in agenda item 11, Literary & Scientific Institute (minute 40) as the Town Council's representative to the Bridport Area Development Trust.

### **32. MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Best Value and Scrutiny Sub Committee held on 8 December 2020 be confirmed as a correct record, and that the Chairman should sign the minutes at the earliest available opportunity.

### **33. ST MARY'S CHURCH HOUSE**

The Chairman introduced a written request for advice and support from the St Mary's Church House Hall Trust, ENCL: 3593.

Members recognised the value of this facility to the community, and discussed the level of financial reserves currently held, updated since the agenda was issued. These were considered sufficient to enable the Trust to continue to operate pending an application to the Town Council's annual smaller organisation grants scheme later in the year. The Town Clerk undertook to contact the Trust about the grants process.

Members also discussed developing a closer relationship with the Trust.

RESOLVED: that further liaison be pursued, and an application to the Council's community grants scheme be welcomed once open.

Mr Crook left the meeting at 11.26am.

#### **34. INTERNAL AUDIT AND FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENT**

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3594.

The Town Clerk reported on the second visit that the internal auditors, Lightatouch, had made in February 2021.

He highlighted each section covered under the audit, namely:

- Town Council minutes
- Policies and Procedures
- Bank and cash
- Investments
- TIC activity
- Budgetary Management
- Income and expenditure
- VAT claims
- Continuing Covid-19 arrangements
- Transparency of the Council website

The Auditors reported that the records and procedures in place continue to provide a good standard of control and no formal recommendations were made for the period September to December 2020 for these transactional elements.

Members thanked the Finance and Office Manager for all his work.

RESOLVED:

- (i) that the internal audit report and recommendations be received and approved; and
- (ii) that the incorporation of the Council's financial risk assessment is within the corporate risk assessment, as agreed at Full Council on 19 January 2021, be noted.

#### **35. INVESTMENT REVIEW 2020/21 AND STRATEGY 2021/22**

The Town Clerk summarised a report setting out the Council's investments over the past year, and a draft investment strategy, ENCL: 3595. The draft included options for incorporation of a greater emphasis on ethics.

Members noted the investment income over the past year, and the Council's proposed future investment strategy. They discussed ethics in detail, including:

- A Council commitment to divestment from fossil fuels, which had developed to a wider ethical discussion at the Climate Action Sub Committee;
- Measurable options such as Environment, Social and Governance investing as a possible route for future investments, with a view to enabling and requiring ethical considerations.
- Possible subscription to [www.ethicalconsumer.org](http://www.ethicalconsumer.org) as a source of information;

- A focus on larger investments for review, for the greatest impact;
- Policy wording that leads to change, rather than enables change;
- Links between ethics and the Council's Rights Respecting Charter and Climate Emergency Action Plan;
- The availability of high-yield investments in the low-carbon economy;
- Constraints of national legislation, that should be reviewed;
- Issues of liquidity and security as the legislative requirements of the Local Government Act 2003, alongside the non-statutory but important issues of yield and diligence, as factors that should be considered in policy-setting;
- Local investment as an ethically important factor;
- A role for the Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee in defining ethics; and
- The need to arrive at a measurable Council definition of the term 'ethical' for inclusion in the Investment Strategy.

RECOMMEND:

- (i) that the investments made in 2020/21 be noted as in the report.
- (ii) that the Investment Strategy be approved as drafted, subject to recommendations from the Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee in respect of a definition of the term 'ethical'.

The meeting adjourned for 10 minutes at 12.26pm and reconvened at 12.36pm.

**36. ASSET REGISTER**

Councillors considered the Asset Register, ENCL: 3596. The Finance and Office Manager explained additions and disposals since the previous year's register. Other minor changes might be required before the financial year end.

RECOMMEND: that the Asset Register be approved and the Town Clerk be given delegated authority to make any final amendments, before it is signed by the Chairman of the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Town Clerk.

**37. STANDING ORDERS AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS**

Councillors considered a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3597.

The report noted that the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations were considered satisfactory for good governance, but that a review in the coming year could usefully adapt and adopt the latest model versions for the local council sector.

Members discussed the report, along with the need to incorporate the subject of ethics into any review.

Cllr Dave Rickard reported that DAPTC had been in discussion regarding changes to the Code of Conduct. Any changes could need to be reflected in revised Standing Orders.

RECOMMEND:

- (i) that the Council's Standing Orders be approved for use without amendment, pending a review taking account of updated model Standing Orders.

- (ii) that the Council's Financial Regulations be approved for use without amendment, pending a review taking account of updated model Financial Regulations.

### **38. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3598 that gave advance notification by Dorset Council of a review of community governance to commence in July 2021. Members were asked to consider the approach to engaging the Council and community in the review, and a working group was proposed.

RECOMMEND: that

- (i) a Working Group of members be established to consider the community governance review; and
- (ii) the Finance & General Purposes Committee and Full Council should consider the membership of the working group.

### **39. ANNUAL TOWN MEETING ARRANGEMENTS**

It was reported that the 2020 Annual Town Meeting had not been able to take place during the first Covid-19 lockdown. There was no guarantee that a physical meeting would be able to take place in 2021 and members were asked to consider how to proceed in that light, including the option of holding a virtual alternative.

Members considered:

- The incorporation of the newly formed Bridport Area Community Housing Trust into any proceedings;
- Use of the event to promote the Council's Climate Emergency Action Plan;
- Whether the Government would extend virtual meetings legislation beyond its current expiry on 7 May 2021;
- The value of a virtual meeting.

RESOLVED: that the arrangements for the virtual or physical 2021 Annual Town Meeting be considered by the Town Clerk and Town Mayor, taking account of new information as the Covid-19 road map unfolds.

### **40. LITERARY & SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTE**

Cllr Sarah Carney updated members on developments since the last meeting, which had agreed that further information and a business plan were needed, to inform Council discussions. The Bridport Area Development Trust had conducted a thorough options appraisal and further work was ongoing. An update was expected by March 2021.

RESOLVED: that the update be noted.

The meeting closed at **1.03pm**

**The next meeting of this Sub Committee will be on 8 June 2021**