

Minutes of the VIRTUAL Meeting (Zoom ID: 896-7202-7734) of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE of Bridport Town Council held on Monday 17 January 2022 at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT: Cllr: Maggie Ray (Chairman)

Cllrs: Rose Allwork	Gill Massey
Karen Hunt	Martin Ray
Julian Jones	Anne Rickard
	Sarah Williams

Also in attendance: Cllrs Ian Bark and Dave Rickard.

PUBLIC FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

49. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Geoffrey Ackerman.

50. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

51. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that subject to amendment of minute 42, resolution (i) to read “Bridport Town Council reduces its representatives to the Bridport Museum Trust from two to one”, the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 8 November 2021 be confirmed as a true and correct record and that the Chairman should sign the minutes at the earliest opportunity.

Responding to a question about progress with the former Lily public house/Sunny Days Nursery and with Court Orchard Play Area, the Town surveyor reported that:

- The agent for the former Sunny Days Nursery had been approached for clarification of proposals for the future of the building, and a response was awaited before any formal approach could be made by the Town Council; and
- The first meeting of a community group of seven local people had taken place and had looked at how the Court Orchard Play Area space could be used. The group had been given an open canvas at this point and it was hoped that positive proposals would emerge.

Responding to a query about minute 44 questioning the use of the term “management project” in relation to Bridport Museum Trust, the Town Clerk advised that whilst this term had been used at the meeting, the Museum Trust had subsequently advised that the process was an “organisation review”. The minutes were considered to be accurate and should not therefore be amended; instead it was appropriate to report the correction to the committee as an information item.

52. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Sub Committee held on 7 December 2021 be received as a correct record and that the one recommendation be approved, as follows: -

RECOMMEND: that Minute 25 – the Scheme of Allowances be adopted at Level 4, and that this decision be reassessed following the Community Governance Review.

Responding to a request, the Town Clerk advised that the West Bay Car Boot Fund Grants Panel would meet in late January or early February 2022.

53. FINANCIAL ESTIMATES 2021/2022 – 3rd REVISION

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3683.

RECOMMEND: that the 3rd revision of the estimates for the year 2021/2022 be approved.

RESOLVED: that the precept figure be moved to the end of the summary above the final totals in future revision reports, preceded by a sub-total for income and expenditure.

Responding to a question, the Town Clerk reported that the transfer of the WI Hall was with solicitors, who would be chased for progress.

54. BUDGET AND ESTIMATES 2022/23

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3684.

In considering this item, members noted:

- The position of the current year 2021/22 revenue budget estimates
- The position on the Town Council's finances held in reserves and proposed Capital Budget
- Use of Reserves
- The recommended revenue budget (estimates) for next year (2022/23) with a commentary on recommended significant variations from this year
- The recommended fees and charges for 2022/23
- Comments of the Budget Working Group
- Medium Term Financial Forecasts
- Carbon Budget
- Summary of Budget Considerations
- Options on the level of precept to fund the budget for 2022/23

The estimates and projects had been considered at the Best Value and Scrutiny Sub Committee and the Budget Working Group.

The Town Clerk highlighted the considerations for members, which included to:

- present a balanced budget, removing the one-off budgeted deficit included in the 2021/22 budget
- cater for the impact of COVID-19 on services, expenditure and income

- maintain and develop existing services provided by the Council
- maintain appropriate levels of reserves insofar as this is possible during the pandemic, and continue to earmark reserves to support project delivery, including a capital programme
- make provision for salary increases, including an estimated national pay award
- make provision to continue to deliver Town Council Plan projects
- provide continuing support for town events
- maintain grant funding for community projects and support of key organisations through service level agreements – Arts Centre, Museum, Leisure Centre, CAB, Youth & Community Centre, West Bay Discovery Centre, the Indoor Skate Park and the Literary & Scientific Institute
- through the delegated services budget, seek to make ongoing revenue provision to meet some of the costs of discretionary services that are likely not to be delivered by Dorset Council and that the Town Council may need to manage e.g. public toilets

The Town Clerk drew members' attention to the options on the precept and advised that whilst the officer recommendation was to set a balanced budget, it was open to members to consider any level of precept. The options put forward were:

- Option 1: increase the precept by £27,694. In total, this would raise £756,035 and provide a deficit budget (i.e. funded from general reserves) of £10,000.
- Option 2: increase the precept by £37,694. In total, this would raise £766,035 and provide a balanced budget.
- Option 3: increase the precept by £47,694. In total, this would raised £776,035 and provide a contribution of £10,000 to general reserves.

The current Band 'D' Town Council charge was £242.76, resulting in the following annual and weekly increases in Council Tax for a Band 'D' Council Tax Payer:-

	<u>Annual</u>	<u>Weekly</u>	<u>Band 'D'</u>
Option 1	£ 3.79	£0.07	1.56%
Option 2	£ 7.05	£0.14	2.90%
Option 3	£10.31	£0.20	4.25%

Members discussed the report in detail, including:

- The impact of the budget proposals and inflation on the level of Council Tax;
- The possible implications of the ongoing review of community governance;
- The contribution made to the budget proposals by a reduction in the level of councillors' allowances;
- A return to a balanced budget after a year in which a deficit budget was set to limit the impact on Council Tax payers;
- The need for careful management of project priorities, given the pressures on reserves;
- A minor change to the way in which insurance costs were presented in the draft budget;
- An expected increase in energy costs;
- The calculation of the share of income from the Football Club Car Park paid to Bridport Football Club; and
- The challenge of achieving the external income targets set out in the Capital Programme.

Following consideration of the report, it was unanimously RECOMMENDED to Full Council:

- (a) that the draft estimates for 2022/23 be approved as set out in Appendix A.
- (b) that the proposed fees and charges for 2022/23 be approved as set out in Appendix B.
- (c) that the Medium Term Financial Plan be approved as a guide for future years as in Appendix C, noting that each year's budget will be subject to separate approval.
- (d) that the draft capital programme and proposed use of reserves for 2022/23 and future years, as set out in section 4 of the report and at Appendix D.
- (e) that in terms of the precept, Option 2 be approved, as set out above and in section 12 of the report, which would increase the precept to £766,035 with the annual Band 'D' charge increasing from £242.76 to £249.81, the increase being equivalent to 2.9% or 14p per week.

The Town Clerk and Finance & Office Manager were congratulated on the preparation of these figures in what had been a difficult year.

55. MEETINGS CALENDAR

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3685, who thanked Claire Peters-Way for drafting the proposed meetings calendar for 2022/23.

RESOLVED: that the meetings calendar be approved as tabled.

56. ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk reported that there were no recommendations from the meeting of the committee held on 12 January 2022. He asked members to note that the committee had looked at a possible emergency sleep pod for homeless people, and had resolved to ask Bridport Local Area Partnership to consider this as a project. This could result in a funding request, if taken forward.

Responding to a member query, the Town Clerk reported that proposed changes at West Rivers House by Dorset Council to accommodate homeless people, had been delayed by funding and contractual issues.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Clerk be noted.

57. RESILIENCE OFFICER RECRUITMENT

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL:3686.

The Town Clerk summarised the report, that set out a request from the Climate Action Sub Committee for the recruitment of a Resilience Officer, aimed primarily at building climate resilience within the community. The post would be part-time at 18.5 hours per week, for a fixed term on 12 months in the first instance. Funding for this period

would be from the Climate Emergency Reserve. Given the similarity with the existing post of Project Manager & Community Initiatives Officer, and the potential flexibility afforded by this, it was appropriate to consider this as a possible job share opportunity. The Clerk drew members' attention to the revenue budget impact, should the post be extended beyond 12 months, and to the need to avoid an unmanageable impact on other officers' time, including that of the Town Surveyor and the Grounds Team.

Members considered:

- The definition of the term 'resilience';
- The job title;
- The need for a focus on climate-related matters; and
- The identified need for additional capacity for resilience.

RESOLVED: that the recommendation of the Climate Action Sub Committee to create a post to build climate resilience, as set out in the report, be approved.

58. BRIDPORT COMMUNITY ORCHARD

Consideration was given to the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town Council and Bridport Community Orchard Group, ENCL: 3687.

RESOLVED: that the Memorandum of Understanding be approved for signature by the Town Clerk.

59. REVIEW OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INTERNAL AUDIT AND APPOINTMENT OF AN INTERNAL AUDITOR FOR 2022/23

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3688, setting out the arrangements for internal audit, and recommending the retention of the existing auditor, Lightatouch Internal Audit Services.

RECOMMEND: that the existing internal audit arrangements continue for 2022/23.

60. RISK ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT: ANNUAL REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3689.

The report set out the Council's approach to risk management, and included a risk assessment that had been updated to remove one risk associated with the community bus. No other changes had been identified from the previous review, and risks relating to Covid-19 had been retained.

RECOMMEND: that the Risk Assessment and Management Strategy Policy be approved as tabled.

61. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR

The Town Surveyor registered his grateful thanks to all of the grounds staff, who had worked through a challenging year and then reported on the following matters:

- Ongoing work on a potential transfer of land at Skilling to Bridport Town Council from Magna Housing;

- Work towards the completion of a feasibility study for the redevelopment of Bridport Bus Station, working in partnership with Dorset Council and supported by planning consultants;
- Asset transfers, including public toilets, for which a report had been submitted to Dorset Council and was under consideration;
- Two new tenants agreed at Mountfield, and one tenant vacating;
- Platinum Jubilee events/activities planned by the Town Council and community groups. Support funding of £2,000 was requested;
- Plottingham river erosion that was affecting the tennis courts. Remedial works funding of £5,000 was requested; and
- Christmas lighting, that would be improved with financial support from Christmas Cheer and match funding from other sources. Renewal funding of £3,500 was requested as the Town Council's contribution. Members highlighted the need to extend fundraising efforts to local businesses and the public.

RESOLVED: that the transfer of land at Skilling to Bridport Town Council from Magna Housing be pursued.

RESOLVED: that support funding of £2,000 for Platinum Jubilee events be approved.

RESOLVED: that funding of £5,000, for remedial works relating to river erosion at Plottingham be approved.

RESOLVED: that funding of £3,500 for improvements to Christmas lights be approved.

RESOLVED: that the report of the Town Surveyor be noted and that the thanks of the committee be recorded in respect of the hard work carried out.

62. FREE HIRE OF COUNCIL VENUES – ELIGIBILITY

The Town Clerk reported that a policy was needed to regulate the free hire of Council venues. Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that this matter be considered as part of a wider review of fees and charges.

63. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

Cllr Gill Massey reported on a very successful Wassail at the Community Orchard on Sunday 16 January 2022, which approximately 200 people attended. This was believed to be the largest attendance to date at the event.

64. COMMUNICATIONS

The Town Clerk reported that:

- There would be two meetings of the Full Council, on 24 and 25 January 2022. The first would be a virtual meeting, with recommendations from that meeting to be approved at the second meeting, which would be held in person. This was to accord with the statutory requirement to meet in person to set the budget and precept and the meeting on 25 January 2022 would be kept as short as possible; and

- Dorset Council had advised at very short notice of two briefing sessions relating to the Bus Service Improvement Plan, to be held on 19 and 20 January 2022. Details would be circulated to members by email.

Cllr Dave Rickard, Leader of the Council reported that a statement was needed in respect of recent works carried out to trees at West Bay, which had attracted concerns. The Town Surveyor advised that the works to pollard the trees to a height of 6' had been recommended by a professional contractor and by Dorset Council's Tree Officer, for the health of the trees and the safety of the public. The Town Clerk advised that a public statement would be drafted.

Cllr Anne Rickard thanked the Town Surveyor for his work to keep the Council's services and projects proceeding.

65. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Town Clerk presented Payments List 4 of the 2021/22 accounts, in the sum of £302,227.39, which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting.

RESOLVED: that List 4 of the 2021/22 accounts be approved and signed by the Chairman.

66. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

67. TENANCY ISSUE

The Town Surveyor reported on an issue with a tenant that it was considered would require legal support, to ensure compliance with lease requirements.

RESOLVED: that the matter be referred to the Council's solicitors for action.

The meeting closed at **9.12pm**.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 14 March 2022