

Minutes of a Meeting of the FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held at Mountfield on Thursday 7 March 2024 at 7.00pm.

PRESENT Cllr: Sarah Williams (Chairman)

Cllrs: Rose Allwork Anne Rickard
 Sandra Brown Dave Rickard

Also in attendance: Paul Fuszard (Finance and Office Manager), Will Austin (Town Clerk), and John West (Bridport Area Development Trust/West Bay Discovery Centre).

PUBLIC FORUM

There were no contributions to the Public Forum.

66. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence was received for Cllrs Karen Hunt, Julian Jones, Gill Massey, Maggie Ray and Martin Ray.

67. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

68. MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 15 January 2024 be confirmed as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

69. BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB COMMITTEE

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting of the Sub Committee held on 5 March 2024 be received and adopted, and that the following recommendations be approved:

(min. 30)

RESOLVED:

West Bay Car Boot Sale Grants Panel

that the grants be approved as listed, in the sum of £6,750.

(min.31)

RESOLVED:

Internal Audit

that the internal audit report and recommendations be received and approved.

(min. 32)

RESOLVED:

Investments Review 2023/24 and Strategy 2024/25

- (i) that the investments made in 2023/24 be noted as in the report; and
- (ii) that the Investment Strategy for 2024/25 be approved as drafted.

(min. 33)

Asset Register

RESOLVED: 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.

(min.34) Annual Town Meeting Arrangements

RESOLVED: that the agenda and arrangements for the Annual Town Meeting be agreed.

(min.35) Standing Orders

RESOLVED: that the draft Standing Orders be approved, and that the next review should include greater clarification of the role of the Council Leader.

(min.36) Media Policy and Social Media Policy

RESOLVED: that the draft policies be approved.

(min.37) Menopause Policy

RESOLVED: that the draft policy be approved.

RESOLVED: that the Project Manager and Community Initiatives Officer and the Tourist Information Centre Manager be thanked for their work on the Media, Social Media, and Menopause Policies.

70. MARKET AND BUSINESS LIAISON WORKING GROUP

The notes of the Working Group held on 6 February 2024 were presented. There were no recommendations arising from the meeting.

Members discussed the need for increased business representation at meetings and suggested that the Harbour Consultative Group and Bridport Business Chamber be approached for suggestions.

RESOLVED: that the notes of the meeting of the Market & Business Liaison Working Group held on 6 February 2024 be received and noted.

71. ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL WELLBEING COMMITTEE

The Town Clerk reported that there were no recommendations to the Finance & General Purposes Committee, from the Environment & Social Wellbeing Committee meeting held on 6 March 2024.

72. WEST BAY DISCOVERY CENTRE

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3890, setting out a proposal for the Town Council to operate West Bay Discovery Centre under an agreement with Bridport Communities Trust, which was expected to take ownership of the facility from October 2024.

RESOLVED: that John West be invited to speak on behalf of West Bay Discovery Centre.

John West thanked officers and Cllr Ian Bark for their involvement in informal discussions to date, and advised that:

- The Discovery Centre had been a part of the Bridport Area Development Trust (BADT) since its opening in 2018.
- BADT's focus was on projects, however, and the intention had always been to transfer the Discovery Centre.
- Discussions had taken place with a range of organisations that could potentially take on the Centre.
- There had been a close relationship with the Town Council since 2016, when Coastal Communities Fund funding was achieved to convert the former chapel to the Discovery Centre.
- The creation of Bridport Communities Trust was considered an ideal vehicle for taking forward the transfer.
- The proposal would relieve volunteers of management tasks, and would offer the Centre a sustainable future.
- Over 40 volunteers currently worked in support of the Centre.

The Town Clerk summarised the report tabled with the agenda, which had been drafted based on information provided by John West and set out the background to the proposed transfer, the key benefits, the financial implications, an estimated operating budget, and a proposed operating model.

Members discussed the proposal, including:

- Whether Dorset Council funding would continue if the Town Council was involved and ownership moved away from BADT. John West advised that this was to be confirmed following discussions with Dorset Council.
- The incorporation of the Town Council's Service Level Agreement grant into the estimated budget. This support funding would need to be maintained if the Centre was to operate at 'break-even'.
- The loss of Gift Aid on any donations until such time as Bridport Communities Trust achieved registered charity status.

RESOLVED: that the proposal for the Town Council to take over the operation of West Bay Discovery Centre be approved, as set out in the report.

73. SERVICES ADMINISTERED BY THE TOWN SURVEYOR

The Town Clerk summarised the current position in respect of a number of ongoing projects, as follows:

- Plottingham Field – a planning application would be required to include a new skatepark, play area, landscaping, and a lighting scheme to allow for a new cycle and walkway into the Bus Station from Foundry Lea. An architect had been appointed.

RESOLVED: that authority to develop a planning application be delegated to the Town Surveyor.

- Bridport WI Hall improvements – a planning application would be required for improvement works to include ceiling replacement, electrical works, windows and doors, and courtyard works including an access ramp.

RESOLVED: that authority to develop a planning application be delegated to the Town Surveyor.

- Mountfield – approval was sought for the next stage of replacement windows, to complete the first floor. Works were ongoing to complete Coneygar Hill entrance works on behalf of the Millennium Green Trust.

RESOLVED: that the next phase of window replacement at Mountfield be approved, with the detailed project requirements delegated to the Town Surveyor.

- Bridport Football Club car park enhancements – following planning approval, a scheme would be worked up with the Environment Agency and a tree planting specialist, followed by a tender process for the works and identification of funding sources.
- Court Orchard Green enhancements – the next stage of this resident-led initiative would include replacement play equipment, tree planting, and installation of new goal posts and nets.
- St Mary's Field – following a rejection of a grant application for refurbishment of the shelter at St Mary's, approval was sought to fund the estimated cost of £2,500.

RESOLVED: that funding for the refurbishment of the shelter at St Mary's Field, to a maximum of £2,500, be approved provided this funding is from the 2024-25 budget.

- UK Shared Prosperity Fund bids – bids for funding were being prepared for the Bridport Futures Learning Hub and improvements to Bridport FC Car Park.
- Tree works – following five-yearly insurance inspections, works orders had been raised to complete the recommendations at Mountfield, Coneygar Hill, Riverside Gardens, St Mary's, Asker Meadows and Bridport Cemetery.

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

74. COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE REVIEW

The Town Clerk reported that there were no urgent requirements.

RESOLVED: that this item be deferred.

75. FEES AND CHARGES

Consideration was given to ENCL: 3891.

RESOLVED: that the fees and charges for 2024/25 be approved.

RESOLVED: that the Town Clerk and Town Surveyor be granted delegated authority to vary fees and charges in exceptional circumstances, where this is deemed beneficial to the Council.

76. BUDGET 2023/24 – EARMARKING

The Finance and Office Manager reported that, in line with previous years, budget headings underspent may be reserved, to help finalise the budget outturn for the current financial year and to give flexibility for spending, outside of the formal annual accounts cycle. However, it was anticipated at this stage, that the opportunity for earmarking this year would be limited.

Members discussed:

- The need for prudence in spending decisions that affected the position of reserves;
- Invoices that were expected to be sent to the Friends of Millennium Green; and
- Consideration of contributions to general reserves in future budgeting.

RESOLVED: that the earmarking be carried out under delegation, in line with the approach set out by the Finance and Office Manager.

77. PENSIONS DISCRETIONS POLICY – REVIEW

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3892.

RESOLVED: that the existing Pensions Discretions Policy be confirmed, with no changes.

78. REPORTS FROM OUTSIDE BODIES

There were no reports.

79. COMMUNICATIONS

There were no communications.

80. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

The Town Clerk presented List 5 of the 2023/24 accounts, in the sum of £212,242.90 which had been authorised for payment since the last meeting. This was tabled for members' information, and it was

RESOLVED: that List 5 of the 2023/24 accounts be approved and signed by the Chairman.

81. 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 and press be temporarily excluded and they are instructed to withdraw.

82. REVIEW OF STAFFING

Consideration was given to a report of the Town Clerk, ENCL: 3893.

The Town Clerk reported on a review of staffing that proposed changes to cater for the community governance review, the impending retirement of the Town Surveyor, and the separation of a job share role into two part-time positions.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the changes proposed in the report be approved.

83. PROPERTY MATTERS

This item was deferred.

The meeting closed at **8.39pm**.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 10 June 2024