

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday
10am – 12 noon

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
AXMINSTER
DEVON
EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

Email: Clerk@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

Axminster Town Council:

Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Guildhall Sub-Committee 7pm

MINUTES APPROVED 11/01/2024; Part ONE Minutes (Redacted)

Held in person on Monday 30th October 2023. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Bruce (DB), Burrough (KB), Dowdeswell (MD), Leat (SL) and Walden (JW).
Also attending as advisory committee members (non-voting): Leigh Conley, Matt Young.
Cllr. Lippett (RL) was present for part of the meeting having arrived after the starting time.
(Meeting was declared as quorate).

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH). Deputy Clerk, Sarah Jackson (SJ)

No members of the public in attendance.

*Clerk welcomed all in attendance and ran through meeting procedure and protocol.
Clerk highlighted the building fire precautions and alerted those present to the fire exits.*

Public Forum session.

No public representations.

No members of the Sub-Committee wished to speak in public forum.

As such, Clerk closed the Public Forum session at 7.05pm

GSC23/001

To elect a Chair of the Guildhall Sub-Committee:

JW proposed DW as Chair. Clerk confirmed that DW had previously indicated that he would be willing to serve in that capacity. Seconded by KB. Resolved.

Cllr. Willey is hereby elected as Chair of the Guildhall Sub-Committee and will serve in that role until the first convened meeting of the Sub-Committee after May 2024, or until he tenders his resignation.

In the absence of DW, JW volunteered to stand as Acting-Chair for the duration of the meeting. Seconded by MD. Resolved.

GSC23/002

To elect a Vice-Chair of the Guildhall Sub-Committee:

Acting-Chair proposed that this matter be deferred until the next scheduled meeting of the Sub-Committee. Agreed.

Continued overleaf.

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GSC23/003

To note members of Sub-Committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above. Meeting was quorate.

GSC23/004

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies for absence and reasons therefore:

Apologies received from Cllr. Willey (DW) due to a conflicting engagement.

Absence approved by Acting-Chair, seconded by KB. Resolved.

GSC23/005

To note members of Sub-Committee not otherwise present and to receive any other apologies for absence:

Former Cllr. Birnie was not present having tendered her resignation from the Council after the publication of the agenda on which her name was shown as a member of the Sub-Committee.

GSC23/006

To receive any declarations of interest from members of the Sub-Committee in relation to items of business on this agenda and to note any dispensations previously afforded:

A declaration at this point does not preclude the need for members to declare any additional interests that may arise during this meeting.

SL declared an "Affects Non-Registerable Interest (NRI)" as a member of Axminster Drama Club and as a Trustee of the same organisation who owned the building immediately adjacent to the Guildhall. Noted.

Leigh Conley declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest (DPI) in the matters in Part Two relating to staff pay, conditions and other connected issues as an employee of the Guildhall (the Guildhall Manager). No other interests declared at this time.

GSC23/007

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the draft Terms of Reference for this Sub-Committee.

Acting-Chair proposed one amendment (replacing "shall" with "may" in clause c). JW then proposed adoption of the substantive Terms of Reference for the Sub-Committee.

Seconded by DB. Resolved.

Clerk: Please forward to all members of Council for their approval and adoption as policy when they consider and review the minutes of this Sub-Committee meeting on 13/11/2023.

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GSC23/008

To consider any matters listed on this agenda that Councillors consider should be dealt with as confidential business as per the provisions of The Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960: None raised by Sub-Committee members other than to note those items already listed on this agenda.

Business to be considered by this Sub-Committee:

SF23/029

a) To note the formal handover of the Guildhall building (with associated financial, governance and licensing responsibilities) from the former GMC charity trust to the Town Council on 1st August 2023; To consider any matters pertaining to that transfer of obligations that the members of the Sub-Committee feel needs to be raised in Part One business.

Noted. No matters raised by Sub-Committee members.

b) To receive presentation from the Guildhall Manager, Leigh Conley.

Presentation received and noted. Resolutions arising from the debate:

It was proposed by Acting-Chair, seconded by SL, that an additional 15 chairs be purchased for the balcony seating area to provide both amenity and also expand the seating capacity in that area which would generate additional ticket sales receipts in the future. Expenditure of up to £800 was authorised, delegated to the Clerk and Guildhall Manager to obtain best value, with product matching the chairs already owned. Resolved. Clerk: Please action.

It was proposed by Acting-Chair, seconded by KB, that the ear-marked reserve of £2000 be used to purchase the necessary items to enable the Guildhall Cinema project to progress; authority delegated to Clerk and Guildhall Manager to expend accordingly. Resolved.

Members asked LC to provide a report as to the licensing and operational proposals for the cinema project and bring those back to the Sub-Committee as soon as was possible.

Continued overleaf.

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Other matters covered within the presentation and subsequent discussion:

Payment of acts within the limitations of local authority accounting and auditing regulations.

Staffing needs as venue becomes busier.

Potential need for an auto-print ticket facility. LC: Please investigate and report back to GSC.

Storage requirements within building for plant, equipment and AV items

Potential for creation of 3rd dressing room area for privacy, act amenity, child safeguarding and H&S purposes. Members agreed in principle that such a project would bring benefits to the venue but asked LC, the Clerk and Deputy Clerk to bring a costed proposal back to FULL Council (mindful of the anticipated cost and building works) whereupon a decision could be made.

Financial out-turn report of recent events & acts and the profit attributable to each.

RFO: Please collate all the available financial data and prepare a quarterly report on the financial position of the venue/building.

Cllr. Lippett joined the meeting at this point and was co-opted onto the Sub-Committee at the suggestion of the Acting-Chair. Clerk asked that this co-option be formally ratified by FULL Council when they next met. Noted.

c) To discuss the future of the Guildhall, event planning, funding options and financial viability/risks.

A vigorous debate between members ensued with a variety of viewpoints aired. The consensus reached was that the Guildhall venue was well-regarded, and much-used locally and further afield, and that the acts, performances, and bar sales offered variety, good value and a sense of community. It was recognised by all that the continued operation of the venue necessitated an element of cross-subsidy from precepted funding but that the alternative was not a viable option at the present time. Other types of performances were discussed but members felt that some could be poorly received by other hospitality businesses in the town and that, as such, they could be considered unfairly competitive. No further action at this time. Guildhall Manager was asked to feedback to Sub-Committee on a regular basis on the liaison and co-operation between the Guildhall and other town venues.

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d) To note EDDC Business Rates and PRS/PPL billing charges for FY23-24 and to consider whether these costs should be factored into future considerations for event/venue hire charges and ticket prices.

Noted. RFO confirmed that he was still in negotiation with both parties to seek additional relief on both charges and would report back to the Sub-Committee as developments warrant. No price increases were supported by Sub-Committee members until the outcome of those negotiations reached fruition. RFO: Please note.

e) To note the recommendations of the Strategy & Finance Committee regarding VAT accounting protocol for the Guildhall venue (in conjunction with the overall Town Council position) and the likely implications for the Guildhall operation (and pricing).

Noted. As above, members were not supportive of any price increases at the present time until the outcome of the VAT assessment of the venue was completed.

f) To receive a Guildhall building maintenance report.

Received and noted with thanks. Acting-Chair thanked the staff efforts to keep the building in good condition despite the limited means available. It was recognised that any closure relating to necessary or unforeseen building works would have a direct impact on the venue's finances and thus, every effort to keep the building open during such works was to be welcomed.

g) To consider any areas of anticipated or potential expenditure that will directly impact upon the Town Council's budget preparations for the forthcoming financial year, FY24-25. Report received from RFO/Clerk. Noted.

h) To consider any proposals for capital works or capital investment in the building/venue and to consider how expenditure for such works would be covered within the Guildhall financial framework, or as part of a wider Town Council budget consideration. Report received from RFO/Clerk. Noted.

i) To consider whether the Sub-Committee wishes to revise charges relating to the income areas below:

- 1) Building Hire charges – per hour, per session, per day or on a longer term basis.
- 2) Bar Sales (alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages)
- 3) Other refreshments (bar snacks, ice cream etc)
- 4) Technical charges / equipment hire / ticket supplements / payment supplements.

As outlined above, members felt that the ongoing matters of external licencing/rates charges, and the proposed VAT assessment (and recommendations) should be undertaken and completed before any decisions were made in this respect on increasing charges. Noted.

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j) To consider whether the Sub-Committee wishes to invest in automated ticket generation software and hardware.

This matter was raised within the Guildhall Manager's report (see above) and no further action in this respect was proposed at this time.

k) To consider whether the Sub-Committee wishes to enhance the opportunities for donations towards the building upkeep and operation (noting that the venue is now operated by a local authority and is ineligible to receive HMRC Gift Aid nor donations which are earmarked for a particular purpose).

Report received from RFO/Clerk. Noted. No further action proposed at this time other than to accept the recommendations of the RFO in terms of Gift Aid non-eligibility and the wider protocol on Local Authority income via donated funds.

l) To note progress with installation of Solar PV onto the main hall roof as an energy saving measure and to consider investment in additional (solar PV) battery powered heating assets to reduce reliance on fossil fuel (gas) generated heating and to provide amenity cooling in the summer period.

Noted. Clerk to keep Sub-Committee up to date with project progression information. The ancillary topic of a new installation for heating/colling of the building was noted but members recognised that there is a pending application for grant assistance in this regard and that no decisions could be made until the outcome of that application was known, positively or negatively.

m) To receive report on proposals received from a significant venue client relating to technical charges and provision of specific hardware/AV equipment which could be purchased and re-hired at profit thus improving revenue streams for the Council; to simultaneously consider existing AV equipment hire and recharge arrangements and to consider whether a more cost-effective model is more appropriate.

Clerk advised the Acting-Chair and members that the proposals were currently in a state of uncertainty due to ongoing discussions with the 3rd party and requested that this agenda item be deferred until more clarity was available. Noted and agreed.

Members did discuss the ongoing situation whereby it was recognised that the AV & lighting equipment available to performers and visiting artists was rudimentary and would require capital investment in the future to ensure that the venue maintained its attractiveness and appeal to those artists (and their audiences). Clerk: Please liaise with Guildhall Manager and the Technical advisor to draw up a "wish-list" of equipment (both necessary & desirable) for consideration by the Sub-Committee at a future meeting.

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SF23/029

n) To consider matters pertaining to building Health and Safety, Fire Safety, Risk Management and Employee/Volunteer training. Report received from RFO/Clerk. Noted.

GSC23/010

To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion or notation only.

No matters raised by Acting-Chair or Clerk.

GSC23/011

To consider date of next meeting of the Guildhall Sub-Committee.

Members considered the draft calendar of meetings drawn up by the Clerk recently and expressed their view that 4 meetings a year for this Sub-Committee would be insufficient given the often urgent nature of the venue business and the fluctuating demands upon the Council from operating and managing the venue. Six meetings per annum was felt to be more appropriate. Clerk was asked to draw up a revised timetable of meetings accordingly.

The next meeting of the Sub-Committee was proposed for 7th December 2023 (Thursday) at the Guildhall to ensure that all business could be covered prior to the Council's Christmas closure period. Noted.

Acting-Chair proposed that Standing Orders be suspended to allow the meeting to move beyond the 2-hour limit. Seconded by SL. Resolved unanimously.

GSC23/012

KB proposed that under the provisions of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, (as amended by the Local Government Act 1972 the public, (including the press) be excluded from the meeting as publicity would be prejudicial to the public interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted. SL seconded the proposal. Resolved.

Part ONE recording was stopped at this point and the meeting moved into Part TWO (Confidential) session whereupon recording was resumed. LC and MY left the meeting at this point in light of the confidential business to be transacted.

Continued overleaf.

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All matters below are considered strictly confidential due to the nature of the business under discussion.

GSC23/013 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to employment, as set out below:

a) Staff Remuneration and Pay Grading Structure.

RFO provided a report on the staffing hierarchy and grading situation following the integration of the GH staff into the Town Council's organisational structure post 1/8/2023 [the Guildhall staff having been transferred under TUPE regulations].

RFO was asked to undertake some equivalence benchmarking. Once this data was available, the matter should be brought before FULL Council for their review and decision (noting that Employment Committee would have to refer such recommendations to FULL Council in any case). Thereafter, the issue of the grading/pay structure for the Guildhall staff could be reviewed and assessed. RFO: Please action.

As noted above, the ratification/approval of employee remuneration in respect of the recent pay settlement was on the agenda for FULL Council on 13th November 2023.

b) Staff Performance Reviews (appraisals)

It was agreed that GH staff appraisals should be undertaken in accordance with the policy and timetable already established for Town Council employees. Clerk to liaise with GH Manager to ensure that such appraisals are completed and recorded in line with Council policy.

c) Staff Contractual Hours and Rota Arrangements

It was noted by members (and mentioned within the GH Manager's report) that the operational needs of the venue were creating some challenges on the ability to cover evening and weekend shifts (for performances, acts etc) whilst also ensuring that the day-to-day operation of the venue did not adversely affect or impose upon the Town Council's operational requirements/tasks.

Clerk was asked to prepare (in conjunction with GH Manager) a proposal (costed within the overall TC budget) for the possible options and bring this back to the Sub-Committee for their consideration. LC was confident that the situation could be managed with the existing staff resource at present but was keen to start making plans for when the venue became busier in 2024/25.

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d) Staff Contractual Duties

This matter had been covered in the previous debate. No further action necessary.

e) Guildhall Organisational Chart within overall Town Council Employment Hierarchy.

This matter had been covered in the previous debate. No further action necessary.
Organisational chart reviewed and noted with thanks.

With no further business to attend to, the Acting-Chair closed the meeting at 9.50pm thanking all in attendance for their patience, contribution and time.

Signed Date.....

Minutes of the inaugural meeting of the Guildhall Sub-Committee 7pm

MINUTES APPROVED 11/01/2024; Part ONE Minutes (Redacted)

Held in person on Monday 30th October 2023. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Guildhall Sub-Committee Recommendations from meeting held 30th October 2023 that require ratification by Full Council

GSC23/007 Terms of Reference

That the Town Council agrees to adopt the Sub-Committee Terms of Reference as approved by the members of the Sub-Committee and circulated to all members of the Town Council.