

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Held at 7.30 p.m. on Monday, 10th May 2021 at Axminster Guildhall.

PRESENT: Cllrs. A.G. Sedgewick (Deputy Mayor, Chairman), J.J. Farrow (Mayor), S.P. Holt, Mrs. S.L.N. Leat and M.D.G. Spurway.

Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk.

0 Members of the Press 0 Members of the Public

1. APOLOGIES: Cllrs. C.A. Doherty, M. Mynard and J.W. Walden.
2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: CLLRS. FARROW, MRS. LEAT, MRS. SEDGEWICK AND SPURWAY EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

CLLR. MRS. LEAT DECLARED AN INTEREST AS SECRETARY OF AXMINSTER DRAMA CLUB.

CLLR. FARROW DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND A GOVERNOR OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY PRIMARY ACADEMY AND AS A JOINT TENANT OF A TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AT WOODBURY PARK ALLOTMENTS.

CLLR. SEDGEWICK DECLARED AN INTEREST AS LIAISON COUNCILLOR WITH AXE VALLEY LOCAL ACTION GROUP.

CLLR. HOLT DECLARED AN INTEREST AS LIAISON COUNCILLOR WITH TOTALLY LOCALLY, TREASURER OF AXMINSTER HOSPITAL LEAGUE OF FRIENDS AND A MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL TRUST.

3. PUBLIC FORUM: None.
4. MATTERS ARISING FROM AND ACTIONS OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS: The Town Clerk reported that the appraisals for the outdoor staff had been done. Those for the indoor staff would be done following the training sessions due to take place. Outstanding actions were the sourcing of quotes for decorating, which was being done by the Guildhall Management Committee; identity badges which had been deferred for discussion to the June meeting of the Town Council due to pressure of business and housekeeping on the website as other items were of higher priority in terms of staff time.
5. COVID 19 SITUATION: The Town Clerk sought clarification on Councillors' position regarding staff return to working from the Guildhall in view of the fact that meetings were allowed but the Guildhall was remaining closed and Government Guidance and that of other advisory bodies was to continue to work from home. The matter will be discussed in committee.
6. MATTERS OF URGENCY: The Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Cllr. Spurway and the Town Clerk will attend for a presentation to the Cemetery Caretaker who was retiring after almost 32 years with the Town Council.

Cllr. Farrow 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. Cllr. Mrs. Leat seconded the proposal. Agreed.

7. MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES: None that would not be covered later on.
8. RETURN TO WORK ARRANGEMENTS: Cllr. Sedgewick spoke of the need to create two spaces in the front office and creating a reception window in the inner office to enable the Administrative Assistant to interact

safely with the public. Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Holt, proposed that the matter be passed on for action by the Operations Committee. Agreed.

There was further discussion regarding the possibility of operating a flexible, hybrid system whereby the Administrative Assistant would operate in the reception office at those times when it was open to the public. An arrangement could be put in place for the Deputy Clerk to use the office when the Administrative Assistant was not in or was working from home.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS OF INTERVIEW PANEL FOR CEMETERY GROUNDSKEEPER: Cllr. Sedgewick said that scrutiny of the applications and further contact with the two applicants had indicated that neither met the requirements of the job description and person specification. The Town Clerk recommended that, as advised by the Deputy Clerk previously, the job be advertised more widely. She added that consideration should be given to offering a higher rate of pay and had given a range of indicative, though slightly outdated, salaries for similar jobs. The Deputy Clerk said that the job had never been formally evaluated and this might be affecting recruitment. She suggested looking for a similarly graded named job currently being advertised.

Cllr. Farrow wished to be sure that all possible steps had been taken to recruit through the job club. The Deputy Clerk reminded members that it was costing £400 per day for the two days the contractor was doing the cutting. Cllr. Leat commended using a range of salary.

Cllr. Sedgewick proposed that a second round of local advertising was undertaken in addition to going further afield using the firm which had been used previously for the Lengthsman post. Cllr. Holt seconded the proposal. Agreed.

Possible salary ranges would be explored, the cost implications established and circulated electronically to Committee Members and then placed on the Town Council agenda for ratification.

10. OVERTIME: The Town Mayor had expressed concerns about reports that staff were working over their hours at evening and weekends and asked for details of work patterns. Discussion indicated that for outdoor staff planned overtime might relate to the need to complete a project within a deadline when short-staffed. Unplanned overtime occurred when emergencies arose out of hours, such as bad weather, which created a need for remedial action. For office staff during the past year technology problems and the telephone divert arrangements made for COVID had been the cause of unplanned overtime. Planned overtime could relate to accommodating meetings with contractors at hours to suit them or travel to or from training or other events at a distance but was principally caused by attending evening meetings. Councillors stated that they were not averse to paying for overtime but felt that more control was needed as it appeared that much was of an ad hoc nature. Deputy Clerk said that this could be reduced by not requiring staff other than the Town Clerk to attend evening meetings and they were now trying to do this. Cllr. Sedgewick proposed that the Administrative Assistant be issued with an office mobile telephone which should operate in the same way as the desk top office telephone. Cllr. Holt seconded the proposal. Agreed. Cllr. Holt did not feel that a policy was needed. Cllr. Farrow asked that all over time be fully recorded.
11. FEEDBACK FROM EXIT INTERVIEWS WITH STAFF: The Town Clerk reported on the exit interview with the one-day Cemetery Caretaker. The Deputy Clerk said that there was no guidance on how long such records should be retained.
12. STAFF AND COUNCILLOR TRAINING: sessions on appraisals and time management had been arranged for all staff and any available Councillors. Risk Management Overview Training for all Councillors would be arranged by Cllrs. Holt and Sedgewick for a Saturday in June and for Strategic Planning later in the year.
13. PROGRESS WITH EMPLOYEE HANDBOOK: Work on this had not yet been started.
14. FLEXIBLE WORKING: Cllr. Sedgewick said that no feedback had been received. Cllr. Farrow asked whether it was applicable to all staff equally. The Deputy Clerk will add some revised wording after she has completed work on the Annual Accounts.

15. JOB DESCRIPTION AND CONTRACT – RESPONSIBLE FINANCIAL OFFICER/DEPUTY CLERK: The Committee is trying to get job descriptions which match what employees are doing and using a standard format. Evening and weekend working was not mentioned specifically ~~covered in the~~ but was dealt with indirectly through the statement relating to payment for additional hours in the contract of employment. Cllr. Sedgewick felt further advice might be needed on ~~that point~~ . the distinction between regular overtime and additional hours as the post holder is working at least one evening a week throughout the year.
16. The Deputy Clerk said that she felt that the staff were having to do more and more, and it was not possible to include evening work in their standard hours and still leave time to cover the workload. She said that evaluation of all office staff posts was long overdue.
17. JOB DESCRIPTION AND CONTRACT – ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT: The Chairman said that neither the job description nor the contract reflected what she was doing correctly. A clause needs to be included regarding pay for additional hours and to reflect that the hours of duty were now 16. The Town Clerk gave feedback on her discussions with the Administrative Assistant and various changes were agreed and will be made. Cllr. Farrow felt that there was a lot of duplication between the various officers. Cllr. Holt felt that organising the archives was a project rather than being something which should be in the job description. He felt that the contract and the job description should be aligned to make sure they meet the needs of the Town Council and the employee. Cllr. Sedgewick will have a meeting with the Town Clerk to discuss these documents prior to consultation with the Administrative Assistant.

Signed Date