

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EMPLOYMENT COMMITTEE

Held at 7.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 21st September 2021 at Axminster Guildhall.

1. PRESENT: Cllrs. A.G. Sedgewick (Deputy Mayor, Chairman), Cllrs. S.P. Holt (Vice-chairman) J.J. Farrow (Mayor), M.D.G. Spurway and J.W. Walden.

The Town Clerk (Miss H. Kirkcaldie)

0 Members of the Press 0 Members of the Public

IN THE TEMPORARY ABSENCE OF CLLR. SEDGEWICK, CLLR. HOLT TOOK THE CHAIR FOR THE ENTIRETY OF THIS MEETING.

2. APOLOGIES: C.A. Doherty, C.W.C. Hall and M. Mynard and the Deputy Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer, (Mrs. Z. Adamson-Drage).

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

CLLRS. FARROW, 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.

CLLRS. FARROW, HOLT AND SEDGEWICK EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF AXMINSTER NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP.

CLLR. FARROW DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND A GOVERNOR OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY PRIMARY ACADEMY, A MEMBER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, THE NATIONAL TRUST AND THE CO-OP, A FRIEND OF FERNE ANIMAL SANCTUARY, A VOLUNTEER COLLECTOR FOR DEVON AIR AMBULANCE TRUST AND AS A JOINT TENANT OF A TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AT WOODBURY PARK ALLOTMENTS

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

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

CLLR. SPURWAY DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST A MEMBER OF THE LIBERAL PARTY AND A MEMBER OF THE CO-OP FOOD GROUP.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS OF AXE VALLEY ACADEMY, AS A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER SKATEPARK STEERING GROUP, AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION, LIAISON COUNCILLOR WITH AXMINSTER JOB CLUB, A MEMBER OF THE LABOUR PARTY, COMMUNITY UNION, NATIONAL TRUST AND AS BEING SAFEGUARDING LEAD FOR AXMINSTER YOUTH CLUB.

4. PUBLIC FORUM: None.

5. COVID 19 SITUATION: No matters to raise, though communications relating to this remain on-going.

6. MATTERS OF URGENCY: The Town Clerk said that there was a matter for consideration In Committee.

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. Spurway seconded the proposal. Agreed.

7. MATTERS ARISING AND ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES: a letter had been sent to the Deputy Clerk. The Clerk said that she had been working on uploading committee minutes and would continue to do so. Other matters would be raised later in the agenda. Cllr. Leat had carried out some initial training in Teams. Councillors were agreed that protocols would have to be established to avoid documents being altered without authority. The Mayor asked that both Cllrs. Leat and Hall be thanked for their input to the training.
8. STAFFING MATTERS:
- a. Staff Handbook Update—Cllr. Holt said that he sought approval in principle for the content and layout. Amendments were suggested in respect of the wording for “Our Staff”. Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Sedgewick, proposed that the document be recommended to full Town Council subject to the changes discussed. Agreed.
 - b. Overtime:
 - i. Policy – Cllr. Holt said that he had spoken to the Deputy Clerk regarding the areas of concern she had raised. Cllr. Holt said that he had altered the wording so that it reflected what was set out in staff contracts. He said that the policy was about control of overtime, audit control and management of risk. Cllr. Sedgewick undertook to look into a system of staff time reporting which would not be too onerous and relate this to the Flexible Working policy.
 - ii. Monthly Report – Cllr. Holt said that there needed to be clarity as to what hours staff were working on such a regular basis that they should form part of the contract rather than be classed simply as additional hours. The consensus was that further detail was needed on all overtime.
 - iii. Staff Attendance at Meetings – in response to a question from Cllr. Farrow, the Town Clerk said that the reason for having all three officers attend meetings was to ensure continuity of zoom meetings in the case of power cuts/unreliable broadband connection. This had been reduced for most committee meetings, though not for Town Council meetings as the previous Mayor had requested that all three officers attend.
 - iv. Working in Emergency Circumstances – this item related to a clause in the contract of a former member of staff and it would now be possible to reword the contract before a new appointment was made.
 - c. Staff Leave Position – the Town Clerk updated on this situation. Cllr. Holt said that Council's preference was for staff leave to be spread across the year.
 - d. Christmas Closure – It is planned that the offices will be closed from 21st December to 3rd January inclusive, re-opening on Tuesday, 4th January 2021
 - e. Local Parish Job Advertisement – the Town Clerk drew Councillors' attention to an advertisement for a local parish clerk where the pay rate was commensurate of that the Deputy Clerk but where the financial and other responsibilities were considerably less.
 - f. Benchmarking/Job Evaluation – job evaluation should be carried out internally. Benchmarking relates to the whether the roles are paid the right amount and how they compare with other, similar situations in the area. Cllr. Sedgewick undertook to prepare a format for benchmarking against similar roles at other authorities and would liaise with advisory organisations to see what was needed.
 - g. Resignation of Lengthsman – Cllr. Sedgewick updated members on her debrief of the various staff in line with Council policy. The Town Clerk said that the footpath work was up to date at the time the Lengthsman resigned. She said that the more rural paths were not such a problem as

the urban paths. She asked Councillors to walk the urban paths and report to the office any where work of any sort was needed. A letter of appreciation will be sent to the Handyman who is covering the work of three staff in a very flexible way. Cllr. Sedgewick questioned the justification, given the shortage of outdoor staff, of undertaking work on the planters and the feeling was that it should be put on hold.

- h. Future Roles of Outdoor Staff – Cllr. Sedgewick said that key areas of work to be covered were cemetery groundskeeping, footpaths, gardening and allotment. She said that there was an opportunity to recruit for two full time posts. She proposed that one post be for groundskeeper with responsibility for the Cemetery and one for a groundskeeper with responsibility of the footpaths/public rights of way and that both should deal with gardening duties as needed. It was felt that all outdoor staff should have the same line manager. Councillors were not in favour of operating a system of annualised hours feeling that flexible working would be a better approach. Cllr. Sedgewick will draft the specifications and circulate them to the other members of the Committee prior to discussion at the October Committee meeting.
- i. Matters of Urgency – Resignation of Deputy Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer: The Town Clerk suggested that a locum be sought either via an employment agency or via Council advisory organisations. She said that the key area to cover was the financial side. If necessary, help should be obtained in the short term from local accountancy firms. Cllr. Holt felt it would be prudent to defer advertising for the post until after the benchmarking process had been undertaken.
- j. Strategic Plan Input – Cllr. Holt asked that this matter be deferred but that members send their thoughts via email to the Chairman.
- k. Report on Action Under Disciplinary Procedure: The Chairman updated members on this matter.

Signed Date

ACTIONS LIST

ACTION	BY WHOM	BY WHEN
Staff Handbook for Oct TC agenda	Town Clerk	
Overtime Policy for Oct TC agenda	Town Clerk	
Supply more information on overtime	Town Clerk	Oct Emp Mtg.
Draft system of staff time reporting	Cllr. Sedgewick	Oct Emp Mtg.
Prepare format for benchmarking	Cllr. Sedgewick	Oct Emp Mtg.
Sign up for walking urban paths	All Councillors	A.S.A.P.
Draft specifications for outdoor staff roles	Cllr. Sedgewick	A.S.A.P.
Secure locum Deputy Clerk	Mayor/Deputy Mayor	A.S.A.P.