

## AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD AT 7.00 p.m. ON MONDAY, 25<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2021.

1. PRESENT: Cllr. J.J. Farrow, (Mayor), Cllr. A.G. Sedgewick, (Deputy Mayor), Cllr. Mrs. S.L.N. Leat, Cllr. M.D.G. Spurway, the Town Clerk, the Deputy Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer and the Administrative Assistant.

1 Member of the public, 0 representative of the press.

2. APOLOGIES: None.

3. NOT PRESENT: Cllr. J.W. Walden.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

CLLRS. FARROW, LEAT, SEDGEWICK AND SPURWAY EACH DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

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. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY ENTERPRISE.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS OF AXE VALLEY ACADEMY, AS A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER SKATEPARK STEERING GROUP, AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND AS BEING SAFEGUARDING LEAD FOR AXMINSTER YOUTH CLUB.

5. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 30<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2020: will be signed by the Chairman at a later date.

6. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF ABOVE MEETING NOT LISTED ON THE AGENDA: the meeting with the Technology Advisors will be re-scheduled; the laptops had been purchased and were being set up; the grant to Axe Valley Ring and Ride had been paid.

7. PUBLIC FORUM: a member of the public asked whether the cause of the fire at the Arts Café was known and was told that despite rumours circulating in the town no written report had been received by the loss adjustors or the Town Council from either of the emergency services which had investigated the incident.

8. COVID 19 RELATED ADJUSTMENTS: no matters were raised but the Town Mayor said that it would be prudent for the Town Council to factor its presence into any plans at least for the coming year.

#### 9. FINANCIAL MATTERS

a) Quarterly report against budget - The Responsible Financial Officer reminded members that the budget had been set in a pre-COVID situation. She said that income was below that predicted, for example in relation to the rental occupancy of the Old Courthouse. Considering Expenditure cost centres, she said that the decision to clean the War Memorial, which was not a budgeted expenditure had pushed the amenities budget well over its limits. The need to relocate the Guildhall Manager's Office, occasioned by the impact of COVID

19 had had an adverse effect on costs for the Guildhall, as had repairs to the cooker and dishwasher. Staff costs were over-budget as a result of national cost of living increases backdated to April.

Councillors had no questions to put to the Responsible Financial Officer. Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Spurway, proposed that the report be adopted. Agreed.

b) Finalisation of Budget for 2021-2022 – the Responsible Financial Officer set out those items of the Budget which were to be funded from the following reserves:

Town Improvement Fund - £7000

Community Benefit Fund - £4000

Town Building Fund - £4000

Community Infrastructure Levy - £5000

General Reserves. - £35319.19

The total proposed expenditure was £351,102.94

10. COUNCIL AMBITIONS FOR NEXT FIVE YEARS: During a wide-ranging discussion, the following matters were raised:

- a) The existence of a unique opportunity to review the future use of the Guildhall and the Old Courthouse.
- b) Neighbourhood Plan.
- c) Service provision for residents.
- d) Public engagement.
- e) Re-enforcement of the 4 agreed budget priorities.
- f) "Well run Council" obligations.
- g) Supporting post-COVID 19 recovery
- h) Acquiring a revenue-earning asset from the District Council if the opportunity arose.
- j) Future staffing needs
- i) The need to take a flexible approach.

It was agreed that a working party consisting of Cllrs. Farrow, Sedgewick, Leat and Spurway be convened to look into the Old Courthouse. Cllr. Farrow will contact other Councillors in case some wish to contribute too.

#### 11. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS

a **Guildhall:** The Guildhall Chairman is looking into the progress made regarding the various improvement projects by the late Guildhall Manager. The Town Clerk will pursue matters relating to damp penetration and faulty guttering.

#### **b Old Courthouse**

- i) **General Update on Repairs:** The clean-up work had started in the Arts Café. Contractors to quote for damp remediation were yet to be identified. Defective heaters in the former museum area were being investigated. A further quote regarding the stonework was awaited.

12. MATTERS OF URGENCY – COMMUNITY WILDING PROJECT: Following a request to the Mayor to support this venture, it was agreed, proposed Cllr. Farrow, seconded Cllr. Sedgewick, that wildflower seed be purchased as part of the Council’s commitment to the Climate Emergency.

13. MATTERS OF URGENCY – DEFECTIVE FOOTBRIDGE: Following prolonged debate regarding a defective footbridge on an informal track linking Foxhill Playing Field with Footpath 69, it was with regret that Councillors resolved not to authorise any remedial work as the bridge was not on an official public right of way and it had to be mindful that it did not have the insurance cover for such works. It was resolved that a letter be sent to the County and District Councillors, the County and District Councils and the local Member of Parliament regarding such problems.

Cllr. Sedgewick 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. Farrow seconded the proposal. Agreed.

14. QUOTES FOR PROPOSED WORKS: None.

15. TENANCY MATTERS:

a) Old Courthouse – a second letter expressing interest in the former Senior Citizens’ Centre had been received and was noted.

The clean-up work had just started. There was discussion regarding whether items such as the dishwasher, which had been installed by the previous tenant would be regarded as part of the structure or as contents. The situation will be clarified with the insurers.

Signed ..... Date .....