

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

**MINUTES OF A VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND STRATEGY COMMITTEE HELD AT 7.00 p.m.
ON MONDAY, 29th MARCH 2021.**

1. **PRESENT:** Cllr. J.J. Farrow, (Mayor), Cllr. A.G. Sedgewick, (Deputy Mayor), Cllr. S.P. Holt, 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:** Cllr. Mynard.

3. **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.

CLLR. HOLT DECLARED AN INTEREST AS TREASURER TO AXMINSTER HOSPITAL LEAGUE OF FRIENDS.

4. **ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD 22nd FEBRUARY 2021:** None.

5. **PUBLIC FORUM:** No matters were raised.

6. **COVID 19 RELATED ADJUSTMENTS:** Members felt that the situation was improving somewhat with a slight sense of freedom.

7. **FINANCIAL MATTERS- A.C.E.R. SHOPPING VOUCHER UPDATE:** The Deputy Clerk said that some repayment cheques were still being received and would be banked. Just over £1200 of the £1500 allocated had been reimbursed by those who felt able to do so, which was welcomed. The Town Mayor will find out what the balance is on the Tesco cards and if these are still being used. Generally, there had been less reliance on A.C.E.R. compared with the situation at the start of the pandemic as support lines were in place. The Town Mayor expressed the members' thanks for the work of the Deputy Clerk in respect of A.C.E.R.

8. **DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE:** The terms drafted by the Town Clerk were considered to be too detailed and covered some items which were already covered in Standing Orders and Financial Regulations but were light on reference to Strategy. Cllr. Holt undertook to look at them to see where they could be adjusted. The Deputy Clerk said that the roles of the Committee should be ones of oversight and due diligence to ensure that things are done in accordance with regulations. These terms of reference will be reconsidered after the Strategic Planning training meeting.

9. **TOWN COUNCIL RESPONSE TO DISTRICT COUNCIL CONSULTATION ON ASSET TRANSFER:** Members considered the questions posed by the District Council regarding its proposals for the possible transfer of assets to Town and Parish Councils and advised officers of their suggested responses. Cllr. Walden reminded members that it was a consultation about the principle of asset transfer and not about specific assets at this stage. The Deputy Clerk said that the proposed procedures were heavily weighted in favour of the District Council and did not provide much information that would help in any decision to take over an asset. Members went through the response sheet and indicated the appropriate responses to the Town Clerk.

10. **PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS – THE GUILDHALL:** The Administrative Assistant was sourcing contractors to quote for redecorating works. Lack of availability of contractors was causing considerable

problems in this. Attempts were being made to source firms further afield. Most firms would not be able to come on site until the Autumn. Work on the stanchions would start on 19th April to remove the damaged render. The Town Clerk had been approaching surveyors regarding the building survey. Cllr. Leat reported that she was having problems in getting contractors to come and quote for stage curtains and there was no specification.

11. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS - OLD COURTHOUSE: the loss adjustor and his contractor had made a site meeting to look at the problems and a report was awaited after Easter.

12. MATTERS OF URGENCY: In the aftermath of points raised at the public meeting held on 15th March regarding the need to improve the town centre as a visitor attraction once lockdown is eased, the Town Clerk explained the definition of Section 137 Funding, so-called after Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972, as applicable to projects which a Council wished to undertake but for which it did not have specific powers, provided the proposed project was not specifically forbidden by another piece of legislation. The amount which could be so spent is the product of the number of registered electors for a parish and a fixed sum (which is increased slightly each year by central Government). Cllr. Holt mentioned the powers permitted under Section 144 of the Local Government Act. Cllr. Farrow said that this gave the Town Council the option to support Totally Locally in its project to provide town maps at key locations. The Deputy Town Clerk reminded Councillors that they needed to be mindful of the budget which had been set but stated that it may be possible to vire from underspent cost centres. The Town Clerk said that there was also the option to take the money from reserves. Cllr. Walden added that there were earmarked funds such as the Town Improvement Fund which could be used.

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. Holt seconded the proposal. Agreed.

13. QUOTES FOR PROPOSED WORKS – SCAFFOLDING TO ENABLE REMOVAL OF DEFECTIVE RENDER ON GUILDHALL STANCHION: Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Walden proposed that the quote of £795.00, exclusive of Value Added Tax, be accepted. Agreed.

Cllr. Holt said that there was a need to look at the Guildhall roof for maintenance purposes. Use of a drone would be one way of achieving this and would feed into the need to get information for repairs and longer-term structural considerations. He proposed that a professional drone operator be sourced. Cllr. Walden seconded the proposal. Agreed.

14. TENANCY MATTERS:

a) Old Courthouse - A letter had been received from a tenant regarding the high level of electricity bills. The Responsible Financial Officer said that this mirrored a problem experienced by a previous tenant. Extensive investigations had shown that there was no draw-down from any other property, as had been feared. The consumption appeared to stem from the heating. Their correct functioning and that of the timers needs to be established. Further investigations will be undertaken.

Signed Date