

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE
Held at 7.00 p.m. on Monday, 26th July 2021 at Axminster Guildhall.

1. **PRESENT:** 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. 0 Member of the public, 0 representative of the press.

2. **APOLOGIES:** Cllr. J.J. Farrow, (Mayor), Cllr. Mynard and Cllr. J.W. Walden.

3. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:**

CLLRS. 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.

COUNCILLORS HOLT AND SEDGEWICK, EACH DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STEERING GROUP.

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. LEAT DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING SECRETARY OF AXMINSTER DRAMA CLUB

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

4. **ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD 10TH MAY 2021:**

- a. Contractors Insurance Requirements – no limit specified by our insurers.
- b. Circulation of Guildhall Minutes to non- Guildhall Councillors – there had been no minutes to circulate.
- c. The Deputy Clerk had drafted the advert for the spaces in the Old Courthouse but the area calculations for the Senior Citizens' area had not been completed.
- d. The site visit to the Bridport building had not been arranged as it was not known whether it had re-opened yet.
- e. The site meeting at the Old Courthouse had taken place.

5. **FINANCIAL MATTERS- APPLICATION OF FUNDS:** Cllr. Holt asked that it be noted that there was an excess of £85,000 in three of the four accounts and that under the Financial Compensation Act did not operate above those levels.

6. **FINANCIAL MATTERS- INFORMATION SENT TO AUDITOR:** Councillors had no comments to make. This will be placed on the reference section of the members' area.

7. **FINANCIAL MATTERS- INSURANCE:** the Town Clerk said that renewal was due in September. The Council is in the final year of a three-year agreement. She had alerted them to the fact that we would be taking on new assets and was awaiting their renewal terms.

8. **FINANCIAL MATTERS- DOG BINS AT CLOAKHAM:** Dist. Cllr. Hayward had offered two dog bins for installation at appropriate points in the new development. He was willing to pay for the installation but requested the Town Council's agreement to take on the cost of emptying them in future. Cllr. Spurway mentioned that there had been problems with the public using the private food waste bins at Cloakham Lawn Sports Centre. Cllr. Holt proposed that this offer be accepted and that the Town Council pay for one to be emptied twice a week. Cllr. Spurway seconded the motion. Carried. The Town Clerk will inform Dist. Cllr. Hayward.

9. **DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE:** Clarification was needed in view of the fact that the Terms of Reference which had been approved at the last meeting had since been changed by the Town Clerk in order to try and reflect the decision that the maintenance and repair of Town Council buildings be transferred to the Operations Committee. Cllr. Sedgewick sought members' views as to the proposed amendments. Cllr. Holt said commended the Responsible Financial Officer's suggestion that a limit of £25,000 be stipulated at 8d and the amended section be removed from 8i. Town Clerk will amend the Terms of Reference.

10. LIVE STREAMING OF MEETINGS AND PROJECTION OF DOCUMENTS: Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Holt, proposed that quotes be sought for this. Agreed. Cllr. Holt suggested that information be obtained from the Clerk to All Saints Parish Council as similar equipment had been installed there. The Town Clerk suggested that advice is sought from the District Council.

11. RISK MANAGEMENT TRAINING: Cllr. Holt proposed that training, open to all Councillors and Officers between 18.45 and 19.30 on the evening of the next three or four Strategy and Finance Committee Meetings, with the start of the Committee meeting being put back to 19.30. Cllr. Sedgewick seconded the proposal. Agreed. Cllr. Holt will notify other Councillors.

The Responsible Financial Officer highlighted the fact that the internal auditor had asked questions in areas which had not been covered by previously and there were not systems in place in this or other organisations to get that information easily, such as proof from the bank as to which Councillors were authorising expenditure via online banking. She said that this was a Financial Risk issue of which Councillors needed to be aware, so that controls were robust, reviewed and refreshed. Cllr. Sedgewick asked that the Responsible Financial Officer bring to the next meeting a list of all the information the internal auditor had requested.

Any element of a transaction from the proposal giving rise to it, to the end payment needs to be accountable.

Cllrs. Holt and Leat will assist the Responsible Financial Officer in undertaking the review of internal controls.

12. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS – STRATEGIC PLAN FOR THE CEMETERY: Cllr. Spurway referred to work he had undertaken with the Administrative Assistant to consider which area of the site should be developed next for burials and what preparation would be needed. He mentioned problems with flooding and the inadequacy of the paths in the older part of the Cemetery. Development of the Cemetery field would require drainage measures being installed. Even in the existing Z section the ground was insecure for undertakers to manoeuvre away from the main paths. The Town Clerk said that funding was required to for a consultant to advise on what measures were required to make the Cemetery ready for the next phase of development.

Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Leat, proposed that contact be made with the District Council to try and get a specification to go out to consultants.

13. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS - OLD COURTHOUSE: it was agreed that Cllrs. Leat, Walden, Farrow, Holt and Sedgewick form a working party to look at the Old Courthouse. Cllr. Leat felt that there were decisions for the whole Council to make before the working party started work, such as the long-term future of the site. Cllr. Sedgewick said that she felt that the discussion should be started by the Working Party and then referred up. She undertook to arrange a meeting and will notify those concerned.

14. MATTERS OF URGENCY: None.

15. UPDATE ON OFFICE 365: The Town Clerk said that the roll over of email had taken place at the end of May but there had still been some ongoing problems. A “fix” had been applied over the last weekend, but it was too early to say whether this had resolved the issues. Staff were intending to have a training day for share point. Cllr. Holt had suggested that each Councillor have a file on Sharepoint to store the documents on which they are working. The Deputy Clerk said that Teams is the conduit for Sharepoint.

Cllr. Holt 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. Sedgewick seconded the proposal. Agreed

16. QUOTES FOR PROPOSED WORKS – QUOTES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY AUDIT: Only two of the three firms approached originally were prepared to quote just to undertake an audit with no follow up. The Town Clerk said that it was her understanding that both firms quoting was that they would come to Axminster Town Council and go through everything at all sites with a fine-tooth comb. Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Leat, proposed that quote from Acorn for the sum of £500 plus travelling costs at 0.45p per mile be accepted. Agreed.

20. TENANCY MATTERS:

a) Old Courthouse Heating - following discussion regarding the high costs of electricity bills, about which tenants had raised concerns, the Responsible Financial Officer said that there were three possible options to resolve the concerns to decide on the short-term solutions and to look to the long term.

Cllr. Holt suggested that the tenant be charged for one third of the power billed and the remaining debt be written off. Cllr. Leat seconded the proposal. Agreed.

In the longer term, Cllr. Sedgewick asked that the Working Party be convened and report.

At the suggestion of the Responsible Financial Officer, Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Holt, proposed that costs be obtained for timers which could be used to control the heaters. Agreed.

b) Lease Valuation – following receipt of advice from a valuer, Cllr. Holt proposed that more information be sought from our own solicitors. Cllr. Leat con

Signed Date

ACTION	BY WHOM
Advise PGH re one dog bin to be emptied twice a week.	Town Clerk
Amend wording on terms of reference	Town Clerk
Speak to PGH and E.D.D.C. re live streaming.	Town Clerk
Seek advice on consultant for Cemetery works.	Town Clerk
Arrange Cemetery site visit.	Town Clerk
Refer lease matters back to solicitors	Town Clerk
Arrange date for Health and Safety Audit.	Town Clerk
Contact Risk Training offer to Councillors and officers.	Cllr. Holt.
Reference area for AGAR documents	Deputy Clerk
Report on internal controls and review with Cllrs. Holt and Leat.	Deputy Clerk
Get Teams and Sharepoint operational	Deputy Clerk
Arrange site meeting for Old Courthouse working party.	Cllr. Sedgewick
Contact tenant regarding heating and look into timers.	Deputy Clerk
Get all insurance details in place.	Town Clerk
Arrange Cemetery site meeting.	Town Clerk