

**AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STRATEGY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE**

Held at 7.30 p.m. on Monday, 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021 at Axminster Guildhall.

1. **PRESENT:** Cllr. J.J. Farrow, (Mayor), Cllr. A.G. Sedgewick, (Deputy Mayor), Cllr. C.W.C. Hall, 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.W. Walden.

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.

COUNCILLORS FARROW, 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.

CLLR. SPURWAY DECLARED AN INTEREST AS A MEMBER OF CO-OP FOOD GROUP, AND OF THE LIBERAL DEMOCRATS.

4. **ACTIONS AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MEETING HELD IN JULY 2021:**

- a. Dist. Cllr. Hayward had been advised of the decision regarding the dog bin.
- b. Amending of wording on terms of reference had still to be done.
- c. Council had indicated that live streaming was not a priority matter now.
- d. The Deputy Clerk had been seeking advice on consultants for the Cemetery Works but with limited success.
- e. A Cemetery Site visit had still to be arranged.
- f. Risk Training had been started by Cllr. Holt.
- g. The financial audit supporting documents had been uploaded.
- h. Not known whether Cllrs. Leat and Holt had had a chance to discuss internal controls with the Deputy Clerk.
- i. Cllr. Leat had delivered some training to enable Councillors and staff to become more familiar with Teams.
- j. The Old Courthouse Working Party had had a further meeting.
- k. The Deputy Clerk had spoken to the tenant regarding the heating and the matter of timers had been investigated with contractors.
- l. As much of the insurance cover as could be put in place at this stage had been.

5. **PUBLIC FORUM:** The Town Mayor raised questions about the proposed additional benches and the maintenance of the vegetation at the Old Courthouse Garden on behalf of a Member of the Public. In response, Cllr. Holt said that the Working Party had agreed that both matters would be Autumn Projects but a decision had still to be made on what vegetation was to be cleared. Following further discussion, Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Leat, proposed that the Working Party should draw up a specification to be put out to tender. Agreed.

6. **FINANCIAL MATTERS- REQUEST FOR DEFIBRILLATORS AT CLOAKHAM:** Following discussion, in which Cllr. Hall said that there was an existing defibrillator indoors at the Sports Centre, Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that the Town Council procure one defibrillator and a cabinet of the same types as the others it had purchased and that this be sited outside at the Outdoor Bowls Club. Agreed.

7. FINANCIAL MATTERS- TO SET UP A PLATINUM JUBILEE GRANT FOR NEIGHBOURHOOD EVENTS: The Deputy Clerk advised that donating funds to a non-constituted body was contrary to the Council's Financial Regulations. The Town Clerk suggested that the Town Council itself could purchase items such as bunting and make these available to Neighbourhood Groups. The Deputy Clerk said that an alternative might be to channel the funding through an existing group which did have a constitution. She said that £2000 had been set as the budget in the present financial year for Platinum Jubilee costs.

Cllr. Holt, seconded by Cllr. Sedgewick, proposed that a maximum of £5000 be set for the next financial year when the budget is finalised. Agreed.

8. FINANCIAL MATTERS- APPLICATION FOR GRANT FOR ECO-FAIR:

CLLR. FARROW INDICATED THAT SHE WISHED TO VACATE THE CHAIR AND TAKE NO PART IN THIS ITEM OF BUSINESS BECAUSE OF HER INVOLVEMENT WITH THE APPLICANT ORGANISATION SO CLLR. SEDGEWICK TOOK THE CHAIR.

The request was for a grant of £265 to cover initial administrative costs of setting up an Eco Fair. Councillors noted that the applicant organisation had not yet set up a bank account. Following discussion, Cllr. Sedgewick, seconded by Cllr. Leat, proposed that the grant be approved, subject to proof of the establishment of a bank account, as it was in line with the Town Council's declaration of a climate emergency. Agreed.

CLLR. FARROW THEN RESUMED THE CHAIR.

9. FINANCIAL MATTERS – MONTHLY GRANT PROCESS: Cllr. Sedgewick suggested that the Council should move from an annual disbursement of Grants to a monthly process. Cllr. Hall supported this suggestion and said that he felt that the existing form was not very user-friendly. In response to a question from the Mayor as to whether this would present any problems in terms of process, the Deputy Clerk said that there were two types of grants, small ones £1000 and under and large ones over £1000. The purpose of the Autumn deadline for the larger grants particularly, was to inform the budgeting process for the following year. Cllr. Hall thought it groups should be able to make more than one application. Cllr. Sedgewick proposed that grant applications both large and small, should be considered in-month and that this change in process should come into effect in November 2021. Cllr. Hall seconded the proposal. Carried.

10. HEALTH AND SAFETY

- a. Policy – Councillors had no comments. It had been shown to the Health and Safety Auditor who had suggested that specific mention of working at height, legionella, asbestos management, infection controls and Construction Design and Management be added. The Policy will be represented when this has been done.
- b. Report on Visit from Auditor – most of the time had been spent responding to questions posed by the auditor and showing him the documentation, which was already in place and discussing what needed to be added. Detailed tours of the Guildhall and Cemetery sites took place but not the Old Courthouse.
- c. Risk Assessments - No specific list of required Risk Assessments had been given but the point was made that certain risk assessments, such as fire, asbestos and legionella needed to be done by people with detailed knowledge of these risks. Cllr. Holt, seconded by Cllr. Farrow, proposed that a competent fire risk assessment for all buildings be done as a matter of urgency. Agreed. Cllr. Sedgewick suggested that advice be sought on a suitable contractor from the District Council.

11. REVIEW OF EMERGENCY PLAN: this matter was deferred.

12. REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS: this item was deferred.

13. REVIEW OF FINANCIAL REGULATIONS: This was deferred. The Deputy Clerk said that at the moment they were fit for purpose but would need to be reviewed before May.

14. INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE GRANT FUNDING: No suggestions had been received from local businesses. The Town Clerk had submitted a suggestion which she had discussed with a member of the Waffle team, who had indicated that it would be something that they would be keen to take forward. Following

discussion, it was agreed that she go back to the member of Waffle and say that the Town Council would be interested in proceeding with items 1 and 3 in the suggestion, namely an intra-town bus service and provision of a charging point at the Guildhall.

15. STRATEGIC PLAN INPUT: various items were put forward for consideration. Cllr. Farrow said that the challenge was to put a time scale to these items and that whoever is to be the locum Responsible Financial Officer will need to have a list of priorities for year 1. The following items were identified and agreed, proposed Cllr. Sedgewick and seconded Cllr. Hall: lifts, website redesign, skatepark funding, site developments at the Guildhall and the Old Courthouse, welcome packs and New to Axminster meetings. Cllr. Spurway will lead on the Cemetery matters. The Deputy Clerk said that a prioritised list should be drawn up. Cllr. Farrow will cover the Jubilee Field. Cllr. Holt said that he would draft a list of year one priorities.

16. COUNCILLOR PROJECT LEADS: Cllr. Holt had drafted an outline of on-going projects and sought Councillors to liaise with the staff to drive the projects to completion. Cllr. Hall offered to lead on website, communications and social media and Teams/SharePoint. Cllr. Sedgewick will lead the Neighbourhood Plan, Cllr. Holt the Old Courthouse, Cllr. Sedgewick offered to lead the Guildhall. Cllrs. Tucker, Walden and Farrow were involved with the Skatepark. Cllr. Spurway will lead on the Cemetery. The Town Clerk felt that Raymonds Hill Play area needed to be added to the general list.

17. POLICY AND PROCEDURE REVIEW SCHEDULE: Cllr. Sedgewick had prepared a list of the Council's policies and a timetable for their review. Cllr. Hall will look at the Social Media Policy and Cllr. Sedgewick at that for General Data Protection.

18. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS - OLD COURTHOUSE: The Town Clerk said that the repair work at the Arts Café had been started. The tanking work had been completed and damp-proof membrane installed. Work on the chimney and ridge tiles was nearly completed.

19. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS – GUILDHALL: The Town Clerk reported that the remedial works to the electricity supplies to the bar and kitchen had been completed.

20. MATTERS OF URGENCY: None.

21 UPDATE ON OFFICE 365: members were advised to refer any problems or irregular happenings to the Council's technical advisory service. Cllr. Leat said that it was important that procedures were put in place for use of documents on the Teams interface. Cllr. Hall undertook to look into this.

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. Leat seconded the proposal. Agreed

22 MATTER OF URGENCY – INCIDENT AT NORTH STREET ALLOTMENTS: Councillors were given an update on this matter. The Town Clerk will report it to the insurance company and submit a RIDDOR report.

23. QUOTES FOR PROPOSED WORKS – CLEANING AT OLD COURTHOUSE: A comparative quote had been received for this work which was less favourable than the present cost. Cllr. Farrow, seconded by Cllr. Sedgewick proposed that the Council remain with the present contractor until the renovation works at the Arts Café had been completed. Agreed.

24. INSURANCE MATTERS: dealt with under matters of urgency.

25. LEASE VALUATION: A response had been received from the solicitor. Cllr. Leat, seconded by Cllr. Holt, proposed that the advice received be followed. Agreed.

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

ACTIONS LIST

	ACTION	BY WHOM	BY WHEN
Sep-21	Arrange Cemetery Site visit.	Town Clerk	A.S.A. P.
	Draw up specification for Old Courthouse Garden work	Working Party	A.S.A. P.
	Order Defibrillator and cabinet for Cloakham.	Admin. Assistant.	A.S.A. P.
	Contact applicant re small grant approval	Town Clerk	by 24th Sept
	Add recommended items to health and safety policy	Town Clerk	A.S.A. P.
	Review Social Media policy and draft Teams Protocol	Cllr. Hall	A.S.A. P.
	Draft list of year 1 priorities for strategic plan	Cllr. Holt.	A.S.A. P.
	Advise contractor re non-acceptance of quote.	Admin. Assistant.	A.S.A. P.
	Contact solicitor re leases.	Town Clerk	A.S.A. P.