

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday, Wednesday, Thursday
10am – 12 noon

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Locum Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
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Axminster Town Council: Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee.

APPROVED at a meeting of this committee on 28th February 2022; Part ONE Version

Held in person on Monday 31st January 2022 at 7.30 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Sedgewick (AS) (Vice-Chair), Holt (SH), Leat (SL), Spurway (MS) and Walden (JW) (*Quorate*). Locum Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (LTC).

Chair highlighted the building fire precautions and alerted those present to the fire exits. Chair also reminded those present of their personal obligations in relation to the ongoing CV19 situation and health guidance in that regard.

Public Forum session.

No members of the public present. Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.35pm

SF 22/001

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF 22/002

To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies for absence and reasons therefore:

Cllr. Brooker (A). Absence noted and reason and apology approved.

Cllr. Hall. Absence noted and reason and apology approved.

SF 22/003

To note members of committee not otherwise present and to receive any other apologies for absence:

Cllr. Steadman had tendered her resignation from the committee beforehand and Chair thanked BS for their service on this committee.

SF 22/004

To receive any declarations of interest from members of the committee in relation to items of business on this agenda and to note any dispensations previously afforded:

A declaration at this point does not preclude the need for members to declare any additional interests that may arise during this meeting.

None declared.

Minutes continued overleaf.

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SF 22/005

i) To note and review the minutes of the S&FComm. meeting held on 6th December 2021 (having previously been approved at the FULL Council meeting held 13th December 2021) and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

Noted. No matters arising.

SF 22/006

To consider any matters listed on this agenda that Councillors consider should be dealt with as confidential business as per the provisions of The Public Bodies (Admission to meetings) Act 1960: None raised by committee members.

SF 22/007

To consider matters pertaining to Council's Risk Management and Assessment procedure/protocol:

- a) Committee members considered principles of Local Authority Risk Management & Assessment and to understand what is required of a smaller authority in relation to the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) submission 2021-22. LTC outlined the requirements for a Smaller Local Authority and cited examples of best practice in other authorities.
- b) Members considered training needs for Councillors and staff members to ensure Council's obligations and duties in this respect are achieved and recorded. LTC put forward his suggestion that officers prepare a comprehensive Risk assessment report for consideration by the SFCOMM at the earliest opportunity, whereupon members could review, amend, revise and approve the document. LTC stated that it was the role of officers to prepare the document, and the role of members to properly scrutinise, review and consider it. LTC was directed to prepare report accordingly and circulate to all members of S&FComm.
- c) Members considered a timetable for Risk management and assessment review prior to financial year end in line with above and expressed a wish that their review be completed (as far as possible) by the 31st March 2022 noting that, in future years, the process would be started much earlier in the financial year to allow proper and timely consideration and review.
- d) Members considered next steps in undertaking a comprehensive risk management analysis for Axminster Town Council as outlined above.
- e) Members considered proposal that Council indemnifies itself against potential Cyber Risks by way of an insurance policy and **it was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that LTC be directed to obtain comparative quotes for such a policy and to bring this matter back to S&FComm. At the next meeting. Resolved unanimously.**

Minutes continued overleaf.

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SF 22/007

To consider matters pertaining to Council's Risk Management and Assessment procedure/protocol (continued):

f) Members considered the principle of creating a Town Council Financial Investment/Deposit Strategy (as per FSCS guidelines/regulations for Smaller Local Authorities). SL offered to liaise with LTC to prepare a draft strategy/policy wording and to consider the scope of said policy after reviewing the financial deposit options open to the Council. This matter to be brought back to this committee as soon as possible as this will form part of the wider Risk Management and Assessment protocol.

SF 22/008

To consider matters pertaining to financial matters:

a) It was proposed by Chair, seconded by SH, that Council should NOT apply to the EDDC Support Grant Fund to create a "town-based" support fund for the benefit of local residents which the Town Council would be responsible for administering and distributing on the grounds that other agencies were far better suited to such an administrative project. Resolved unanimously.

b) It was proposed by SH, seconded by JW, that consideration of a draft Town Council Local Procurement Policy (mindful of the limitations of the Council's extant Financial Regulations) should be deferred until the Council was better placed to consider the implications and practicalities of such a policy. Resolved unanimously.

In the meantime, LTC was afforded delegated authority to make the necessary decisions on matters of expenditure (on a case-by-case basis) to ensure that Council's spending was undertaken locally wherever possible (to benefit the local economy and to promote Council's environmental and green objectives) but to be mindful of Council's fiduciary responsibility to offer best value-for-money to local taxpayers.

c) It was proposed by Chair, seconded by SH, that the Town Council should make an application to the OPCC Community Grant Scheme towards the costs of providing security and CCTV for projects across the Axminster parish by the deadline in June 2022 once further details of such expenditure are known to the Council. Resolved unanimously.

d) Members considered Council's financial potential contribution towards the cost of events (to be determined) to celebrate the forthcoming Platinum Jubilee of Her Majesty The Queen in June 2022 and it was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that this matter be deferred to the next FULL meeting of Council to discuss, but that Council was happy to consider requests for expenditure (by way of the powers provided under Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1974) on a case-by-case basis. Furthermore, Council would consider the virement of funds at the financial year-end towards spending demands relating to this event. Resolved unanimously. Chair offered to issue a Mayoral statement in this regard.

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SF 22/008

To consider matters pertaining to financial matters (continued):

e) Members considered the matter of Accounting Software specific to small local authorities for the day-to-day accounting functionality of the Town Council; Locum Clerk provided comparative quotes from a number of sector-specific providers and circulated a briefing report on options available to the Council (which conform to the requirements of the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014, the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020).

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by AS, that the LTC be directed to provide monthly financial reports (and budget information) to Councillors using the most efficient possible method, and to bring this matter before committee again if members so wished for a different approach to financial reporting to be further considered.

f) Members considered the Council's Forward Plan for capital and revenue expenditure in 2022-23 as set out in the Budget and Precept Financial projections as previously approved by FULL Council and considered a timetable for said expenditure. LTC was directed to create a draft "prioritised" schedule of projects for consideration by S&FComm. and OPSComm. as both committees would be required to agree on some projects.

g) Members considered an update on the Council's Asset Register re-assessment and re-valuation project both for the 2021-22 AGAR submission and for future accounting periods. It was agreed that the presentation (and 'usability') of the current Asset Register could be greatly improved and that a review of the values and veracity of the assets currently listed was urgently required. LTC was directed to prepare a new schedule for review and revision at the next S&FComm. meeting. LTC was also asked to review the recent advice received from commissioned provider on property valuations to ensure that these had been incorporated into the Asset Register extant.

SF 22/009

To consider matters pertaining to Council's building and land assets:

a) Members considered whether such matters should be dealt with by this committee or by the Operations Committee (Nb. S&F Comm. incorporates the historic Building and Finance Committee but other matters involving buildings are often dealt with by OPSComm.as amenities). **It was proposed from the Chair that this matter be deferred to a future meeting (potentially a joint S&F/OPSComm.) to be considered again after the Benchmarking / Structure report had been received and reviewed as this issue would impact on Council's staffing resources. Resolved unanimously.**

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SF 22/009

To consider matters pertaining to Council's building and land assets (continued):

b) LTC reported that he was in dialogue with the commissioned surveyor/valuer to obtain a more detailed and up to date valuation and condition survey report. Delays to the report receipt had been noted and LTC was directed to stress the urgency of the matter to the surveyor. (see 22/009g above).

c) Members considered matters pertaining to Jubilee Field recreation area/green space and agreed to develop a Forward Plan for this amenity/asset. It was noted that a public meeting had been convened for the 8th February and that feedback from this meeting would be presented to FULL Council on 14th February. It was also noted that the legal 'notice period' in relation to the disposal of land from EDDC to ATC would end on 4th March and LTC was directed to maintain dialogue with all 3rd parties to facilitate the quickest possible resolution to the disposal legalities as was possible.

SF 22/010

To consider matters pertaining to Council's digital presence and community engagement proposals:

The Chair proposed that this matter be deferred until the next meeting of the committee due to the absence this evening of CH who had been leading on this project (website development, social media policy etc). Agreed by all. Noted.

LTC was asked to remove all copies of previous TC newsletters from noticeboards across the town and to commence preparations of the latest bi-annual Council newsletter (in conjunction with the announcement regarding Precept and Budget for 22-23).

SF 22/011

To consider matters pertaining to strategic policy and delivery:

a) Members considered a proposal as to whether Council wishes to meet in FULL (and committee) session in August in 2022 and annually thereafter. **It was proposed by Chair, seconded by AS, that Council should not ordinarily meet (either in FULL Council, or committee session) in August unless urgent business required otherwise. The Chair did, however, request that this matter be put before FULL Council on 14/2/2021 to approve this recommendation. Resolved unanimously.**

b) Members considered the timetable and methodology for review (and/or revision) of the Council's extant Standing Orders and Financial Regulations, to include Scheme of Delegated Authority for Chairs and Proper Officer. **It was subsequently proposed by Chair, seconded by SH, that LTC be directed to prepare draft wording of updated and improved Standing Orders and Financial Regulations by the end of April and that these should be considered by AS initially for grammar and punctuation etc, whereupon the edited version could be considered by S&FComm. in May with FULL Council considering the final draft in June for approval and adoption. Resolved unanimously.**

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LTC was asked to seek examples of good practice in terms of wording revision from different Quality Award Councils of a similar size to Axminster Town Council and to ensure that any proposed wording revisions improved the extant documents and made them more suitable for use by a Smaller Local Authority in the 21st century. Noted.

c) Members considered the timetable and methodology for review (and/or revision) of the Council's other policies. LTC was directed to prepare a Policy Review matrix for members perusal and consideration at the next S&FComm. in liaison with AS who had indicated that a previous version of such a document was available for comparison. Noted.

d) Members considered whether the Town Council wished to develop closer links and relationships with the Axminster Chamber of Commerce organisation (which incorporates the Totally Locally Axminster group). SH suggested that the Council (at this stage) merely acknowledge the existence and objectives of the Chamber of Commerce and provide support "in principle" towards their efforts to promote the local economy and develop projects to encourage town centre regeneration and improvement. SH offered to remain as the Town Council's representative to that group. No objections raised. Noted.

e) On the matter of the 2022-26 Town Council Strategic Plan, it was suggested by AS that this matter be deferred until the next meeting of the S&FComm. Agreed by all. Noted.

f) Similarly, SH offered to prepare a redacted version of the existing Emergency Plan document (which was felt to be accurate but overly long and complicated) in conjunction with the LTC; this matter to be brought back before S&FComm. as soon as possible. Noted.

SF 22/012

To consider any matters considered as urgent by the presiding Chair:

None raised by Chair.

AS 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. SL seconded the proposal. Resolved.

Part ONE recording was stopped at this point and the meeting moved into Part TWO (Confidential) session

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SF 22/013 (IC)

**To consider matters pertaining to building tenancies and hires;
To receive report from Locum Clerk on ongoing tenancy matters and
to consider future leases/licences and revisions thereof.**

Members discussed matters pertaining to all building tenancies, rents and lease (and licence) wording and terms & conditions.

Inconsistencies in rents charged were noted and it was subsequently proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that the LTC liaise with a local chartered surveyor and valuer based in Lyme Regis (who had worked with the Council previously) to establish the correct market rent for our building assets/properties to ensure that the Town Council was conforming to its fiduciary duties to obtain best rental income and value for its properties so as to minimise precept demand to the wider population. Resolved unanimously.

It was further proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that the Council remove the bandstand from the ongoing tenancy lease re-negotiations but include the item within the licence agreement on a full repairing and maintenance basis. Resolved unan.

It was further proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that Council seek clarity on the issue of insured chattels (such as white goods and carpets) by way of reference to the Arts Café inventory, created at the point that Axminster Arts relinquished control of the building. Resolved unan.

LTC: please note and action accordingly.

SF 22/014 (IC)

**To consider an application from an organisation seeking a Grant
Award/Financial assistance from the Town Council:**

The Axminster Community Shed group had submitted a Grant Request for £7824. After discussion on the merits of the grant request, and the intended purpose of the grant award, it was proposed by JW, seconded by MS, that a reduced award of £2000 be granted towards this worthwhile project, subject to ratification and approval of the award amount by FULL Council on 14/2/2022. Resolved unan.

LTC confirmed that Council had the powers to grant such an award under Section 19 of the Local Government Act 1972; (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 10.00pm.

Signed Date: 28th February 2022