

# Axminster Town Council

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

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow  
Locum Clerk: Paul Hayward

[www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk](http://www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk)



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## Axminster Town Council:

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee.

**Minutes approved at the S&FCOMM. meeting held 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022**

**Held in person on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> February 2022 at 7.00 p.m.**

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Sedgewick (AS) (Vice-Chair), Brooker (A) (AB), Holt (SH) and Spurway (MS). (*Meeting was declared as quorate*).  
Locum Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (LTC).

*Chair welcomed all in attendance.*

*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 7.05pm

### **SF 22/015**

**To note members of committee present:**

Attendance at meeting shown above.

### **SF 22/016**

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

Cllr. Leat. Absence and reason (Health) noted and apology approved.

Cllr. Walden. Absence and reason (Work) noted and apology approved.

**Proposed by Chair, seconded by AB, that these apologies for absence be approved and absence noted. Resolved unanimously.**

### **SF 22/017**

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

Cllr. Sedgewick arrived a few minutes after the start of the meeting.

*Continued overleaf.*

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## SF 22/018

**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.*

No interests declared.

At the FULL Council meeting held 14/02/2022, Cllr. Farrow was afforded a dispensation\* to discuss and vote upon matters pertaining to parish allotments. This dispensation applies until May 2023 (unless rescinded prior to that date) and is afforded in respect of Cllr. Farrow's disclosable pecuniary interests as set out in the Register of Members Interests.

\* *Localism Act 2011 (s.33)*

## SF 22/019

**To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the S&FComm. meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2022 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:**

*Approval proposed by Chair, seconded by SH. Resolved unanimously.*

*No matters arising.*

## SF 22/020

**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 22/021

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

**a) To consider draft Risk Management and Assessment report for Axminster Town Council for the period 2021-2022; members to review and revise as necessary and, if thought fit, to recommend for approval by Full Council on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022.**

Chair thanked LTC for their efforts in bringing this RMA document together in such a short space of time. It was agreed that the draft document would be considered by members of SFCOMM in sections to reduce the burden on the committee and that an extraordinary meeting of S&FCOMM would be convened to consider the overall revised and amended document prior to adoption as part of Council's FULL Risk Management protocol for 2021-22. It was further suggested that member feedback be collated by LTC and integrated into a revised document, and that delegated authority be afforded to Chair & Vice-Chair of the committee (in consultation with the LTC) to prepare the final version for SFCOMM approval. LTC also offered a suggestion that – moving forwards as a Council – there could be some consideration given to using bespoke software to catalogue, assess and monitor Council's risks. LTC was asked to gather together examples for further discussion.

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**b) To consider and review a draft Financial Investment/Deposit Strategy (as per FSCS guidelines/regulations for Smaller Local Authorities) for the Town Council as part of the wider Risk Management Assessment Review.**

Chair thanked LTC for bringing this document together in time for the committee meeting. Cllr. Holt asked that future documents (and policies etc) are always created and published using a standard framework and template to i) ensure consistency and ease of review and ii) to ensure that no pages or section are omitted during the review/publication/printing process. LTC confirmed that he was more than happy to accord to this request.

*Subsequently, it was proposed by Chair, seconded by AS, that the draft FI/DS strategy document be adopted as policy with immediate effect and that it form part of the Council's future Risk Management Assessment protocol. Resolved unanimously.*

LTC asked that the Committee defer the final decision to approve the Strategic Policy to Full Council on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Noted and agreed.

**c) To consider the draft Internal Financial Control Review (IFCR) policy document as part of the Town Council's wider annual Risk Management Review.**

Chair asked that a spelling error on the final page be corrected. Noted.

*Chair proposed that the draft (duly amended as above) IFCR document be adopted as policy. Seconded by MS. Resolved unanimously.*

LTC asked that the Committee defer the final decision to approve the Strategic Policy to Full Council on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Noted and agreed.

## SF 22/022

**To consider matters pertaining to financial matters:**

**a) To consider a request for reimbursement of expenditure relating to the celebration of Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee (QJ22) from a local community organisation; such expenditure to be considered by way of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.**

Chair asked if any precise financial figures had been provided by the organisation in question; LTC confirmed that they had not as yet. This resolution would, in effect, approve an "in principle" position moving forward.

*It was subsequently proposed by Chair, seconded by SH, that:*

*i) Expenditure of up to £200 could be reimbursed by the LTC/RFO subject to reporting mechanism below (see v) without further authority being sought.*

*ii) Expenditure between £200 and £500 could be reimbursed under the delegated authority of either the Chair, or Vice-Chair, of the S&FCOMM in consultation with the LTC/RFO subject to reporting mechanism below (see v).*

*iii) Expenditure between £500 and £1000 could be reimbursed only after a resolution of the S&FCOMM, subject to reporting mechanism below (see v).*

*iv) Expenditure over £1000 could only be reimbursed only after a resolution of the FULL Council, subject to reporting mechanism below (see v).*

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## SF 22/022

### To consider matters pertaining to financial matters (continued):

a) To consider a request for reimbursement of expenditure relating to the celebration of Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee (QJ22) from a local community organisation; such expenditure to be considered by way of Section 137 of the Local Government Act 1972.

*v) All expenditure relating to reimbursement payments in connection with QJ22 as per the powers afforded by S137 of the Local Government Act 1972 must be tabulated and provided to members monthly as part of the ongoing future Financial Reporting protocol.*

*Resolved unanimously.*

LTC asked that the Committee defer the final decision to approve the amendment to the scheme of delegation in this respect to Full Council on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022. Noted and agreed.

b) To consider the preferred use of the funds realised from the sale of two heritage assets recently, namely the Town Bell and Funeral Bier.

*It was proposed by Chair, seconded by MS, that the funds realised (£377) from the disposal of these two heritage assets be vired into a new earmarked reserve fund "Asset Disposal Reserve" and that the funds raised from the prior sale of the Council's Kubota tractor (£6000) also be added to that reserve with immediate effect. Resolved unanimously.*

c) To receive update on the arrangements for opening a new current account with Unity Trust Bank

LTC confirmed that the relevant signatories simply needed to sign the application form and it could then be submitted with all the necessary accompanying documents to UTB. Noted

d) To consider proposal to open further Commercial Savings/Deposit accounts to help mitigate risks of non-protected Council deposits.

LTC provided a matrix of current deposits and account balances to members of the committee and highlighted where said deposits were in excess of the FSCS limits (ie, where such deposits were not safeguarded against loss and were therefore at risk, albeit minimal).

SL had kindly undertaken prior research to identify financial institutions which were willing to accept local authority deposits in the current banking climate. SH acknowledged that Council's previous failure to mitigate this risk was unfortunate and that Council had no option but to take urgent measures to deal with the situation that had arisen, and which would be exacerbated by receipt of the 2022-23 precept in April.

*It was therefore proposed by Chair, seconded by SH, that the LTC/RFO take immediate steps to remedy this situation by opening as many deposit accounts as were necessary to diversify and spread Council's deposits (as long as said accounts conformed to the newly adopted Investment/Deposit Strategy Policy). LTC/RFO was given delegated authority to act subject to reporting back to FULL Council at the earliest opportunity and ensuring that all new accounts were opened with at least 4 bank signatories (Councillors only for authorisation; LTC for admin.) to mitigate the risks identified.*

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## SF 22/022

### To consider matters pertaining to financial matters (continued):

e) **To consider update on the Council's Asset Register re-assessment and re-valuation project; RFO to present report.**

AS thanked LTC for his work in re-tabulating and re-ordering the historic Asset Register which had been noted as being out-of-date and incorrect in certain respects.

LTC highlighted the availability of bespoke Asset Management software which he felt would be beneficial to Council in maintaining and recording their assets. LTC was asked to research examples and bring them back in front of S&FCOMM as soon as was practicable.

It was suggested that LTC continue his analysis and cross-referencing of the Asset Register (now divided into smaller sections for ease of review) and bring the final draft before S&FCOMM on 28<sup>th</sup> March for approval. This could then be formally adopted by FULL Council in April and used for the Annual Return submission later in the year (after consultation and review with the Internal Auditor). Noted and agreed. LTC: Please action.

SH raised a question regarding the valuation of the allotment land at two sites which the LTC was able to answer to Cllr. Holt's satisfaction.

f) **To consider recommendation by RFO to repay smaller of Council's two outstanding PWLB loans due to the minimal level of borrowing outstanding thereupon.**

**It was proposed by Chair, seconded by AS, that the smaller of the two outstanding PWLB loans be repaid with immediate effect. Resolved unanimously.**

LTC: Please action accordingly.

## SF 22/023

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

a) **To consider any updates on the acquisition of the recreation space known as Jubilee Field.**

LTC provided an update as at the date of this committee. It was agreed that the Mayor, Deputy Mayor and LTC would execute the deed of land transfer between EDDC and the Town Council at the earliest possible opportunity on behalf of the Town Council.

LTC to make the relevant enquiries to establish when that signing session will take place.

## SF 22/024

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

The Chair proposed that this matter be deferred until a future meeting of this committee (to be agreed upon) due to the ongoing pressure on staffing resource for the day-to-day operation of the Council. SH volunteered to pick up from where former Cllr. Hall had got to in his review phase and to liaise with LTC to make any amendments to the website, social media pages as could be done within the time permitted until further resources could be put in place. Agreed by all. Noted.

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## SF 22/024

### To consider matters pertaining to Council's digital presence and community engagement proposals (continued):

With regards to agenda item 22/024c) members agreed in principle that the hosting of Council meeting recordings online (or via a dedicated section of the website) was something that the Council should work towards but, again, due to staff resource challenges, the work towards this objective was deferred for the time being (albeit LTC advised that he was in discussion with Council's IT consultant/service provider to ascertain what "could" be possible). Noted.

## SF 22/025

### To consider matters pertaining to strategic policy and delivery:

#### a) To consider a first draft of a revised Standing Orders and Financial Regulations document (to include Scheme of Delegated Authority for Chairs and Proper Officer).

Chair proposed that this matter be deferred until the April meeting of the S&FCOMM. to allow LTC and members to consider revised drafts of both (policy) documents and allow time for debate. LTC had provided copies of similar documents from other Council's for comparison and to highlight amendments which members might consider appropriate. It was generally agreed that the current adopted versions were dated and did not assist Council in operating in a modern, business-like, efficient manner.

AS requested that Clerk forward a Word.doc copy of the extant Standing Orders so that work could begin on draft revisions at this stage in conjunction with the LTC. Noted.

#### b) To consider the following policies:

##### i) Data Retention/Archival Policy

##### ii) Publication and Disclosure Policy

##### iii) Data protection/GDPR/ICO Compliance Policy

Chair proposed that consideration of these policies was deferred until April 2022. Agreed.

#### c) To consider matters pertaining to GDPR/DPO compliance in light of recent guidance on the capture of image data from CCTV systems under the Council's jurisdiction and control.

LTC provided an update for members in light of recent receipt (and review) of NALC LTN13 (Policing your area) released on 10<sup>th</sup> February 2022. This guidance note outlined the various legislation that Council needs to abide by and conform with in respect of the use and provision of public CCTV in the town centre and on the Guildhall building (where images of the public are captured and stored) together with the newly acquired VAS device. Committee members acknowledged that the rules were stringent and the penalties for non-compliance significant. LTC was delegated to research, consult and liaise with the various bodies (Police, ICO etc) to ensure that Council remained compliant at all times. LTC reported that the new Town Centre system was operating well and that the image capture quality was outstanding. The footage had already been used twice to assist local law enforcement agencies (as at 28/2/2022).

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## SF 22/025

### To consider matters pertaining to strategic policy and delivery (continued):

#### d) To consider matters pertaining to developing the Axminster Town Council Strategic Plan 2022-2025(6).

On the matter of the 2022-26 Town Council Strategic Plan, AS apologised for the delay in circulating the latest draft of the ATC Strategic Plan document and confirmed that this would be done after the meeting. Chair proposed that this matter be deferred until the next meeting of the S&FComm whereby the members of the committee would have read and considered the latest draft version ready for debate and consideration. Agreed by all. Noted.

Chair suggested that a suitable discussion item be added to the Annual Parish Meeting agenda so that members of the public could contribute to the plan also. Agreed. Noted.

#### e) To consider (in conjunction with the Operations Committee) whether Council wishes to enter into a consultancy agreement with a H&S Contractor to maintain full H&S Compliance.

Chair proposed that this matter be considered in Part Two session due to the confidential and commercially sensitive nature of the quotes to be discussed. Agreed.

#### f) To consider whether the Council (Officers and Members) should share a “common” Corporate Identity in terms of email traffic, written correspondence etc

Chair proposed that this should be a debate for FULL Council and asked LTC to add to the next available agenda accordingly. Noted.

## SF 22/026

### 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. Chair seconded the proposal. Resolved.

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

*Continued overleaf.*

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## SF 22/025e) (IC)

e) **To consider (in conjunction with the Operations Committee) whether Council wishes to enter into a consultancy agreement with a H&S Contractor to maintain full H&S Compliance.**

This matter had been deferred from Part ONE session earlier.

After discussion and consideration of the proposal from Consultancy A for a retained H&S consultancy service at £1260 (net) per annum and five additional consultancy visits at a total cost of £2750 (net) **it was proposed by AS, seconded by SH, that both the retained H&S consultancy fee, and the additional visit fees, be approved as above for a 12 month period only; LTC to be duly delegated as the primary point of contact for the H&S consultants but that all meetings and proposals for improvements be considered by OPSCOMM. (or H&S Sub.Comm) at the earliest opportunity and that it was noted that the expenditure proposed above was beyond the Terms of Reference of this committee and thus the proposal was put forward as a recommendation to FULL Council to approve. Resolved unanimously.**

LTC: Please note and add to FULL Council agenda 14/3 accordingly.

## SF 22/027 (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.**

LTC provided an update on the current situation with regard to the tenancy at the Old Courthouse Arts Café and other tenancy matters within that building complex where the Council was the landlord.

**After further discussion and debate, two proposals were put forward by Chair, seconded by AS, which recommended that Council urgently take two actions, the details of which are considered confidential by the commercial nature of the business concerned. Resolved unanimously. These will be considered by Full Council on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022 for final approval.**

## SF 22/028 (IC)

**To consider an application from an organisation seeking a Grant Award/Financial assistance from the Town Council which would be outside of the extant Grant Policy:**

A local group had submitted a grant request the ongoing costs of their operation and events. After discussion on the merits of the grant request, and the intended purpose of the grant award, **it was proposed by Chair that any decision on this matter be deferred until April 2022 to allow the LTC to discuss the application with the group organiser and seek clarity on certain sections of the application. LTC was also directed to ask the applicant to complete the appropriate section on the form re: "sustainable grants". Resolved unanimously.**

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.



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## SF22/029 (IC)

### To consider quotations received for CyberRisk Insurance/Indemnity policies/cover:

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by SH, that LTC be directed to seek 3 competitive quotes for this additional insurance cover (which accords with Council's Financial Regulations and forms part of the Annual RMA) and bring these back to S&FCOMM. at the earliest opportunity for further consideration. Resolved unanimously.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.45pm.

Signed ..... Date 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022