

Axminster Town Council

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

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
AXMINSTER
DEVON
EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

Email: Clerk@axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk

Axminster Town Council:

Minutes of the meeting of the Strategy & Finance Committee

DRAFT MINUTES – YET TO BE APPROVED; Part ONE Minutes (Redacted)

Held in person on Monday 29th April 2024. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

Present: Cllrs. Farrow (JF) (Chair), Willey (DW) (Vice-Chair), Bridge (PB), Dowdeswell (MD), Hurren (WH), Leat (SL), and Walden (JW).

(Meeting was declared as quorate).

Also present:

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH)

No members of the public in attendance.

Chair welcomed all in attendance and ran through meeting procedure and protocol.

Chair highlighted the building fire precautions and alerted those present to the fire exits.

Public Forum session.

No public representations.

No members of the committee wished to speak in public forum at this point of the meeting.

As such, Chair closed the Public Forum session at 7.05pm

SF24/032

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF24/033

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

Apologies received from:

Cllr. Bourne (ABo.) due to a conflicting engagement

Cllr. Brooker (ABr.) due to a work commitment.

Cllr. Burrough (KB) due to being on holiday.

Absence and reasons for absence approved by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved.

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/034

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

None.

SF24/035

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 declarations of interest put forward by members.

SF24/036

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the S&FComm. meeting held on 25th March 2024 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

Approval of minutes proposed by Chair, seconded by DW. Resolved unanimously.

Matters arising:

i) Letter to SAAA re: FY22-23 External (PKF) audit still required. RFO: Please note and action asap.

*ii) Grant Award Policy (process and application form) review still pending; Cllrs. JF and SL to liaise to review and report back to committee**

** ATC Grant Award Scheme for FY24-25 currently paused and closed to new applications.*

iii) Council's Policy Review project nearly complete pending last few revisions.

iv) Final building surveys / condition reporting scheduled for w/comm. 29/4 at OCH and cemetery.

SF24/037

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 other than to note those items already listed on this agenda (SF24/047 to 050 inclusive).

Continued overleaf.

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Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

SF24/038

To receive a report from RFO on the migration of Council's financial data and reporting onto SCRIBE accounting software; to receive initial suite of reports for agreement on presentation to FULL Council.

Summary of discussion, and recommendations:

- a) That FULL Council receive a final budget out-turn report every 3 months as part of their standard financial reports pack.
- b) There is no need for any "hybrid" or "summary" Excel reports to accompany the Scribe automated reports generated.
- c) A Bank reconciliation (and balance sheet) to be presented at each Strategy & Finance Committee meeting.
- d) Similarly, a Bank Reconciliation report to be presented at each FULL Council meeting to be signed off against statements by a non-bank-signatory member of the Council.
- e) Asset Register to be reviewed annually unless significant amendments made whereupon S&FComm. can review.
- f) Each meeting of FULL Council to see a schedule of payments made since the last FULL meeting to approve as per standing agenda items under "Financial Matters".
- g) Each meeting of FULL Council to see the summary of receipts report generated.
- h) Staff expenditure to be redacted and reported as a consolidated figure for staff data privacy.

The RFO was also asked to liaise with Scribe team to ascertain whether any hybrid or bespoke reports could be generated from the system to suit any particular requirements of the Council. Noted.

RFO was asked to send a sample financial pack to all members for their attention and review at the Annual Meeting of the FULL Council on 13th May 2024. Noted.

Chair thanked RFO for completing the transition from the old accounting software to the new within one monthly accounting period (following year end) and asked that committee be kept apprised of any additional functionality within the Scribe system that the RFO felt would be of benefit for the committee to review and peruse. Noted.

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/039

To receive a report from the RFO on the progress (and timeline) for the completion and submission of the FY23-24 AGAR (Annual Return) in conjunction with the internal auditor.

Verbal report received from RFO. The Year-End figures for FY23-24 had all been reconciled and balanced, the asset register completed and the AGAR Accounting Figures compiled. The Internal Auditor was due to meet on the 10th May in order to complete their annual internal audit work, and the timetable for AGAR completion would then necessitate an extraordinary meeting in June (prior to the 30th) to allow Council to formally approve the accounts and governance statements, note and accept the IA report and approve the submission of the accounts to the external auditor by the deadline date of the 1st July 2024 with the statutory notice period for the publication of the accounts and the exercise of the period of public rights to begin on the same day, ending in August (30 working days). Noted. Chair agreed that such an extraordinary should be convened; Clerk to make the necessary arrangements and advise members accordingly.

SF24/040

To review and note final draft of FY23-24-25 Town Council risk management & assessment review as approved subject to minor amendments & revisions (as per copy circulated).

Chair proposed that this business be considered in Part Two of the committee meeting as one of the Risk Areas to be considered related to a 3rd party tenancy issue. Agreed (see below).

SF24/041

To consider a report from the RFO relating to CIL funds available for Council expenditure and to note spend deadline for £4756.19 of CIL funding from October 2019; committee to make recommendations to FULL Council for appropriate expenditure to avoid annulment of monies.

After reviewing the report from the RFO regarding spend deadlines for the retained CIL funds within the Council's reserves, it was proposed by the Chair, seconded by JW, that the sum of £4756.19 (being the spend required by OCT2024 as per CIL funding agreement) be spend towards the overall costs of replacing the two noticeboards and planters at the Guildhall car-park roadside (a project previously approved but deferred due to lack of funding). Works to be completed after planting / flowering season had ended. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: Please note and action accordingly using quotes for prior resolution approval.

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/042

To receive a report from RFO/Clerk on the ongoing progress with the EDDC/ATC/DCC Urban Renewal project and to agree next steps / membership of the forum in the future. Chair spoke on this matter and outlined the history of the Urban Renewal project in conjunction with DCC and EDDC. Chair sought additional members from the committee to represent the Council when the forum next meets in its amended form. Cllrs. Walden and Dowdeswell both volunteered. Chair thanked them both for their interest. These appointments to be approved by FULL Council in May.

The RFO (by way of his dual role as EDDC Portfolio Holder for Finance) outlined how the forum was adapting to external factors and that a joint Axminster-Seaton Forum (designated as Axe Valley) was being promoted (which could also include the small town of Colyton as a stop point from one larger town to another). Noted.

SF24/043

To receive a report from RFO/Clerk on the ongoing progress with the SWR CCIF grant project after recent interventions and discussions with DCC Economy Team as to potential use of funds in accordance with SWR project criteria; Committee to agree further/next steps.

After discussion, it was proposed by JW, seconded by PB, that the Town Council should approach SWR with the DCC Economy proposals (re: Stop Line Way cycle path business case) and see if they were willing to amend the terms of the grant award to allow this project to be explored in more depth. Resolved unanimously. RFO: Please note and action accordingly.

SF24/044

To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion or notation only:
None raised.

SF24/045

To note the date of the next scheduled meeting of this committee; 24th June 2024 *

* Although this meeting may be postponed to make room for the Extraordinary meeting of the FULL Council (referred to above).

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SF24/046

DW 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 whereupon recording was resumed.

Committee business to be considered in Part Two:

SF24/040

To review and note final draft of FY23-24-25 Town Council risk management & assessment review as approved subject to minor amendments & revisions (as per copy circulated); this matter had been moved into Part Two by the Chair earlier in the meeting. Clarity was sought from the RFO/Clerk on a tenancy matter that had the potential to create a risk for the Town Council. Clerk advised that the issue had now been satisfactorily resolved (to his knowledge) which was accepted by committee members as mitigation of the possible risk. RFO was asked however to diarise six-monthly to undertake a periodic check to ensure that the issue had not recurred. Noted.

The substantive report (with revisions included) had already been approved by this committee and so the final approved version (for submission to the Council's Internal Auditor) was noted.

SF24/047 (IC)

To consider further matters pertaining to a draft lease agreement between the Town Council and a 3rd party tenant; *to bring members up-to-date on legal discussions, advice received and response from the 3rd party. RFO to present report.*

As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive 3rd party details, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

RFO provided an updated report for committee members following his recent discussions with Council's legal representatives and other Town Councillors. Progress was noted and RFO was directed to bring the matter to a conclusion as quickly as possible, taking on board the amendments proposed by members of the committee re: tenancy terms and conditions. Noted.

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SF24/048 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to an annual subscription payable to a 3rd party service organisation; to consider whether the Town Council should continue subscribing for FY24-25. As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive 3rd party details, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

After vigorous debate, it was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that the Council should renew its annual membership for FY24-25 (at the increased subscription level) but that the interactions between the Town Council and the 3rd party service provider should be assessed over the coming 10 months to determine whether the membership still provided value-for-money to the Council. Resolved unanimously.

RFO: Please renew membership and provide monitoring data as directed.

SF24/049 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to the renewal of the lease / usage agreement for the Town Council's copier/scanner/networked printer; to receive pricing matrix from the RFO. As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive 3rd party details, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

It was proposed by JW, seconded by SL, that the quotation from Supplier R (from seven received) be accepted for the renewal of the Council's copier lease arrangements in August [Reason; Most competitive price, perceived improved service delivery and superior equipment specification]. Resolved unanimously.

RFO: Please note and make the necessary administrative arrangements. Please contact the unsuccessful suppliers and convey Council's thanks for their quotes and interest in our business.

SF24/050 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to the renewal of the waste amenity facilities at the Guildhall; to receive pricing matrix from the RFO. As this agenda item relates to commercially sensitive 3rd party details, this item will be considered as a Part Two confidential matter.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by JW, that the Council should remain with the existing waste carrier but that their proposal for reduced charges should be accepted, saving approximately £900 per annum against budget. Resolved unanimously.

RFO: Please note and make the necessary administrative arrangements

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With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 8.30pm. Chair thanked all committee members for their time and patience.

Signed Date: 24th June 2024

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Held in person on Monday 29th April 2024. Meeting started at 7.00 p.m.

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