

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 25th March 2024. Meeting started at 7.30 p.m.

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

(Meeting was declared as quorate).

Also present:

Cllr. Bull (JB), Cllr. Paice (EP)

Town Clerk, Paul Hayward (PH)

Deputy Town Clerk, Sarah Jackson (SJ).

12 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 7.35pm

SF24/0018

To note members of committee present:

Attendance at meeting shown above.

SF24/019

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

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

Continued overleaf.

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SF24/020

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

Cllr. Burrough. Noted.

SF24/021

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.

SF24/022

To consider and, if thought fit, to approve the minutes of the S&FComm. meeting held on 19th February 2024 and to consider any matters arising from those minutes:

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

Matters arising:

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

*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.*

SF24/023

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 (SF24/030 to 031 inclusive).

Continued overleaf.

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Strategy & Finance Business to be considered:

SF24/024i)

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Council's approved FY24-25 income and expenditure budget and commensurate EDDC Precept demand; to receive report from Chair of the committee and from the RFO (part one).

The Chair of Committee invited the RFO to present the report outlining the background to the FY24-25 budget setting arrangements and the consequential precept demand to EDDC.

The Chair of committee proposed that Council's Adopted Standing Orders be suspended to permit public representations at this point of the meeting by way of a public participation session, seconded by SL. Resolved unanimously.

Chair opened the 2nd Public Forum Session (to be limited to 30 minutes or as otherwise agreed by presiding Chair).

Representations received from members of the public regarding:

Staffing costs and employee numbers.

A request to publish the full expenditure budget forecast and FY23-24 out-turn onto the Council's website.

Criticism of the Council's spending plans regarding the Guildhall building & venue.

Question regarding expenditure on Jubilee Field.

Questions regarding proposed spending plans on capital projects on FY24-25.

At one point of the public forum session, the Chair brought the meeting to a short adjournment due to interruptions from the public gallery. After a few moments, the meeting resumed.

Several representations from members of committee outlining the rationale and background to their decision to raise both the budget and the precept for FY24-25 and acknowledging that previous low percentage increases in precept had resulted in a funding gap within the Council's finances that needed to be bridged.

With no further representations from the public or members present, the Chair of committee proposed the resumption of Council's Adopted Standing Orders to take the business of the meeting onto the next agenda item which will subsequently preclude further public representations. Seconded DW. Resolved unanimously.

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SF24/024ii)

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Council's approved FY24-25 income and expenditure budget and commensurate EDDC Precept demand; following on from part two. The Chair summarised the financial position for the Council in FY24-25 and proposed that the meeting move onto the next agenda item, FC24/025. Agreed.

SF24/025

To consider amended draft of FY23-24-25 Council risk management & assessment (RMA) review and to make revisions and amendments prior to final completion by RFO.

RFO presented the amended draft of the RMA for members review.

Chair proposed that the RFO circulate the final document to the Chair and Vice-Chair and that they, in conjunction with the RFO, be duly authorised to exercise delegated powers in finalising the submission and completion of the final RMA document to both internal and external audit.

Proposed by Chair, seconded by JW. Resolved unanimously.

At this point, Chair proposed that the Council's Standing Orders be suspended to allow the meeting to move beyond the usual 2 hour duration. Seconded WH. Resolved unanimously.

SF24/026

To consider a report from the RFO relating to resourcing requirements in respect of the approved transition to Scribe Accounting Software (as from 1st April 2024).

Report received and timetable for transition of financial data from Excel to Scribe noted (to be finalised by latest date of June 2024).

SF24/027

To consider any matters considered as urgent by presiding Chair for discussion & notation only:

RFO raised forthcoming matter of copier/scanner/printer lease renewal which will need to be considered by this committee once costed options report has been compiled. Noted.

SF24/028

To note the date of the next scheduled meeting of this committee; 29th April 2024

SF24/029

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. ABo. seconded the proposal. Resolved.

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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:

SF24/030 (IC)

To consider 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 and advice received: RFO to present report.

Report received and noted by committee members. No further action required beyond that already resolved for progression with RFO/Clerk authorised to continue negotiations & discussions between the two legal parties to bring this matter to a mutually agreeable conclusion.

SF24/031 (IC)

To consider matters pertaining to the Council building portfolio condition survey quotations, and to subsequently review asset/indemnity values in light of recent correspondence from Council's indemnity insurers.

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.

After considering report from RFO, **it was proposed to suspend the Council's financial regulations for the purposes of this procurement exercise, to allow just two quotes to be considered rather than the usual three [Reason; urgency of works required]**

Proposed by WH, seconded by MD. Resolved unanimously.

It was subsequently proposed by WH, seconded by MD, that supplier AA be awarded the contract to undertake the survey and condition reporting of the Council's building stock portfolio. Resolved unanimously.

RFO: Please instruct the supplier accordingly and arrange the works as expeditiously as possible.

Continued overleaf.

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With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 9.20pm. Chair thanked all committee members for their time and patience.

Signed Date: 29th April 2024

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