

AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE BUILDINGS AND FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD AT 7.00 p.m. ON MONDAY, 28TH OCTOBER 2019 AT THE GUILDHALL

1. PRESENT: Cllr. A.L.Young (Town Mayor), Cllr. A.E. Bourner, Cllr. J.J. Farrow, Cllr. D.R.H. Hull, Cllr. Mrs. S.L.N.Leat, Cllr M. Mynard, Cllr. M.D.G. Spurway, Cllr. P.G.W. Wales, Cllr. J.W. Walden, the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer. 8 members of the public, 0 representative of the press.

CLLR. YOUNG, IN HER CAPACITY AS GUILDHALL MANAGER FOR WHICH SHE DECLARES A PECUNIARY INTEREST, HAS A DISPENSATION TO SPEAK ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL PROVIDED THE PECUNIARY INTEREST IS NOT OF OVER-RIDING SIGNIFICANCE

CLLRS. BOURNER, FARROW, HULL, LEAT, SPURWAY AND WALES EACH DECLARED PERSONAL INTERESTS AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS CHAIRMAN OF THE GOVERNORS OF AXMINSTER SECONDARY SCHOOL.

2. APOLOGIES: Cllr. D.J. Moore (Deputy Mayor).

3. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 30th SEPTEMBER 2019: having been approved by the Town Council, these would be signed by the Chairman after the meeting.

4. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF ABOVE MEETING: None were raised.

5. PUBLIC FORUM:- TEMPORARY CLOSURE OF OLD COURTHOUSE GARDEN OUTSIDE BUSINESS HOURS: several members of the public spoke vehemently regarding the Town Council's decision, without any public notice having been given, to close the garden outside the business hours of the tenants. In particular there were objections that the garden was not open on Sundays. Residents pointed out that it was one of the few public spaces which was away from the noise and air pollution caused by traffic and a place where they could observe the birds and enjoy the trees and flowers in peace and quiet. They felt that other approaches to resolving the problems which had given rise to the need for closure should have been taken. One member of the public complained that there was insufficient signage indicating that the garden was open to the public and was not solely for the use of the tenants and their patrons.

The Town Mayor replied that there were two large signs indicating the presence of a public garden and local residents were well aware of its presence. She said that the Town Council had bought a new tree to replace one that had died the previous year and would be replanting the former Dyers' Garden with roses. She said that the decision to close the garden would be kept under review as it had been introduced to combat particular problems. A letter from two residents stating their objections to the closure was read and one from a resident supporting the Council's action was also read. The Mayor said that the two letters summed up the dilemma faced by most Councils.

6. PUBLIC FORUM – PROPOSED GRANT TO LIGHT UP AXMINSTER: A resident sought clarification regarding the amount approved at the last Town Council meeting to make up the deficit in this organisation's current year of £8000 and asked whether it had gone through the normal procedures. The Town Mayor replied that no decision to commit any money had been made as additional financial information was needed but £8500 had been suggested for the current year subject to all financial regulations being met. She added that the Town Council needed to review its Grant Policy to cater for applications of this scale and that the matter was on the agenda for discussion later in the meeting.

7. FINANCIAL MATTERS:

a) Grant Policy Reworking – the Town Mayor said that the request received from Light Up Axminster was the largest ever requested. Historically, grant requests had not exceeded around £1000. She said that the present policy was not sufficiently robust to cover the present situation and suggested that two separate policies were needed, one for sums up to £1000 which did not require full financial disclosure and one for sums above that amount which did.

The Responsible Financial Officer said that the present policy was two years old and replaced the previous situation in which the upper limit was £500. It was not clear why the upper limit had been removed.

Cllr. Farrow proposed that the maximum limit for small grants be set at £1500 and for these grants the information which had to be submitted could be fairly minimal but that for requests above that amount more stringent details should be required.

Cllr. Walden raised the matter of the money paid to the Guildhall Management Committee from the Town Council.

CLLR. YOUNG DECLARED A PECUNIARY INTEREST AS BEING AN EMPLOYEE OF THE GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE AND LEFT THE CHAMBER.

Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Hull, proposed that Cllr. Wales take the chair. Agreed.

Cllr. Walden said that if other organisations were expected to provide audited accounts in order to receive a large grant as part of the due diligence in use of public funds then this should apply to the Guildhall Management Committee, which had not been able to supply such information.

The Town Clerk pointed out that under its constitution the composition of the Guildhall Management Committee was such that there were 8 Town Councillors on the Committee and only four public representatives. This arrangement had been put in place specifically to ensure that there was oversight of the expenditure of public funds because the Town Council was legally bound to make good any deficit incurred by that Guildhall Management Committee.

Cllr. Mrs. Leat, Chairman of the Guildhall Management Committee said that the Guildhall Management Committee was awaiting the accounts from the Accountants and that to raise the issue was muddying the matter in question.

Cllr. Farrow said that the Committee was now up to full strength in terms of Council representation and doing its best to get things running on.

There was no further discussion.

CLLR. YOUNG RETURNED TO THE CHAMBER.

Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Walden, proposed that the grant applications policy be reviewed and separate instructions and application forms be designed for those requests below £1500 and those above £1500. Agreed.

Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Bourner, proposed that the Responsible Financial Officer prepare a draft for circulation to the Town Councillors and to the appropriate department at the District Council for their comment. Agreed.

b) Interim Internal Audit Report – this had been arranged for January.

c) Budget/Precept Preliminaries – the Responsible Financial Officer asked Committee Chairmen to let her know of any special projects they had in mind for the coming financial year. She said also that in order to facilitate the budgeting process she wished, with effect from October 2020, to revert to the previous policy of approving grants in October ready for the following financial year, rather than at the start of the Financial Year as had been done for the past few years. Regular applicants will be advised of these changes.

d) Grant Request from Light Up Axminster – the Responsible Financial Officer said that Councillors had just received that day, some more detailed information which would be better considered in committee as it involved the pay of an individual.

Cllr. Farrow said that she had not had time to scrutinise the document and wished to do so.

Cllr. Young proposed that a working party be convened to enable Councillors to discuss the documents received and draw up a list of points to discuss with the applicant. Councillors will advise the Responsible Financial Officer as to whether 4th or 18th November is their preferred date.

8. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS:

a **Guildhall:**

i) Update on Works Required: - the Town Clerk and the Deputy Town Clerk had had a meeting with a suitably qualified professional who was willing to take on the project management of the most immediate works needed at the Guildhall, namely the installation of automatic sliding doors between the outer foyer and the main foyer and the re-lining of the stage ceiling. His proposals will be discussed in committee.

ii) Update on Contractors contacted by Surveyor – subject to the Town Council's approval, the professional referred to in 8ai will liaise with those contractors approached already and approach any additional ones as required.

b **Old Courthouse**

i) Museum – quotes for the replacement of the defective water heater were referred into committee.

ii) Garden – the Town Mayor said that she would remove the unauthorised signage on the gate.

c **Cemetery**

i) Tree Works – The Deputy Town Clerk said that a limb had fallen from the Monkey Puzzle tree over the weekend. This had been cut into sections by the Lengthsman, She added that both the Lengthsman and the Handyman now had Chainsaw qualifications.

d **Amenities :**

i. Partial Removal of Hedge at Woodbury Park Lower Gate – Cllr. Walden said that this was the only realistic solution to improve the safety of vehicles exiting at this point. He said that about 4m of hedge-bank would have to be removed. He asked the Town Clerk to get quotes and to find out whether there would be a need for planning permission.

ii. Section 106 Projects – nothing to report.

iii. Community Garden – the Town Mayor said that she would like to be able to create a community garden on one of the allotment sites but at present there was no site where there were sufficient vacant plots adjacent to each other.

9. MATTERS OF URGENCY: None.

10. FUTURE PLAN CONSIDERATION: No matters were put forward.

Cllr. Mrs. Leat 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. Hull seconded the proposal. Agreed.

11. QUOTES FOR PROPOSED WORKS:

a) Replacement of Defective Water Heater at Former Museum – Cllr. Walden, seconded by Cllr. Wales proposed that the quote received for the sum of £654 including V.A.T. be accepted. Agreed. The existing heater which had been installed by a different contractor will be returned to the original contractor so that they can take the matter up with the manufacturer.

b) Options for Electricity Supply – the Deputy Clerk had circulated a summary of various options. Councillors requested that this information be represented with the names of the potential suppliers for further discussion on 11th November.

c) Project Management Advice and Surveying – A quote had been received in respect of professional services relating to the progression of electronic sliding doors at the Guildhall and a new ceiling over the stage and also for preparation of Auto Cad plans for the ground floor of the Guildhall in association with those two projects.. Cllr. Walden proposed that these quotes, totalling £2550, be accepted on the understanding that further costs may be involved should some unforeseen problems emerge during the course of the works being undertaken. Cllr. Young seconded the proposal. Carried.

12. TENANCY MATTERS: none.

13 STAFFING MATTERS: the Town Clerk reported that the Lengthsman had returned to full time work but on modified duties for the next six months.

Signed Date