

## AXMINSTER TOWN COUNCIL

### MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE VIRTUAL BUILDINGS AND FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD AT 7.00 p.m. ON MONDAY, 30<sup>th</sup> NOVEMBER 2020

1. PRESENT: Cllr. A.L.Young (Town Mayor), Cllr. J.J. Farrow, (Deputy Mayor), Cllr. Doherty, Cllr. Mrs. S.L.N.Leat, Cllr M. Mynard, Cllr. A.G. Sedgewick, Cllr. J.W. Walden, the Town Clerk, the Deputy Town Clerk/Responsible Financial Officer and the Administrative Assistant.
2. 1 members of the public, 0 representative of the press.
3. APOLOGIES: None.
4. NOT PRESENT: Cllr. A.E. Bournier, Cllr. Featherstone and Cllr. Spurway.
5. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:

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, ALSO A PERSONAL INTEREST AS A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION.

CLLRS. DOHERTY, FARROW, LEAT AND SEDGEWICK EACH DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING MEMBERS OF THE AXMINSTER GUILDHALL MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE IN RESPECT OF ANY ITEMS RELATING TO THE GUILDHALL.

CLLR. FARROW DECLARED AN INTEREST AS BEING A MEMBER OF AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION AND A GOVERNOR OF AXMINSTER COMMUNITY PRIMARY ACADEMY AND AS A JOINT TENANT OF A TOWN COUNCIL ALLOTMENT AT WOODBURY PARK ALLOTMENTS

CLLR. MYNARD DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS BEING A TENANT OF THE DISTRICT COUNCIL AND A MEMBER OF THE SALISBURY TO EXETER RAIL USERS' GROUP.

CLLR. SEDGEWICK DELCARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AST THE WIFE OF THE RECTOR OF AXMINSTER.

CLLR. WALDEN DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST AS A MEMBER OF THE LOCAL GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE OF AXMINSTER SECONDARY SCHOOL, AXMINSTER SKATE PARK C.I.C. AXMINSTER JOB CLUB AND AXMINSTER TWINNING ASSOCIATION.

4. MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 26<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2020: will be signed by the Chairman at a later date.
5. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF ABOVE MEETING: None that would not be covered later in the meeting.
6. PUBLIC FORUM: No matters were raised.
7. COVID 19 RELATED ADJUSTMENTS: no matters were raised.

#### 8. FINANCIAL MATTERS

a) Pre-budget Report: the Responsible Financial Officer had circulated a report prior to the meeting. She said that she had been mindful of the effect of COVID 19 on people's financial situation and had endeavoured to keep spending down. She had prioritised improvements to emergency resilience, enhancement and support of the town, enrichment for residents and health and safety and environmental issues. She added that the

budget had been pared back where possible, noting that there were good reserves and a number of earmarked funds. She said that it would be possible to precept for as much or as little of the budget as Councillors saw fit.

In terms of resilience she had included the £2000 additional money already agreed by Council to support A.C.E.R. through COVID 19 if needed and suggested that an additional sum be included to support the Emergency Plan. Under enhancement, she had made allowance for cleaning of the Jubilee Fountain, the Raymonds Hill Play Area, refurbishment of bus shelters and replacement of town centre benches with Heritage models as necessary. The budget for community grants had been increased to £15,000 and a sum for marking Her Majesty The Queen's Platinum Jubilee. £2000 had been included for health and safety and budget allowed for tree inspection. The Town Clerk mentioned the possibility of annual valuation updates. £2000 had been included to enable the Council to choose greener options. The Town Clerk mentioned items such as repairs to the Chapel stonework and that at the Old Courthouse.

The Responsible Financial Officer pointed out that she had been uncertain as to what sum to put in for support of the Guildhall Management Committee. Cllr. Young declared her interest as manager. Cllr. Walden said it was difficult to budget for that due to the lack of past running costs.

Cllr. Farrow said that she did not anticipate any costs for the Employment Committee other than staff costs themselves. In response to a question from the Town Clerk, the Deputy Clerk said that training costs were classified as Administration.

Cllr. Sedgewick proposed that funds be allocated to improving public communication. Cllr. Young endorsed that suggestion. The Town Clerk suggested that the letter could be mailed out by the District Council with the Council Tax request.

In response to a question from Cllr. Sedgewick, the Responsible Financial Officer provided some detail regarding the component costs of different cost centres.

The Town Mayor was absent from the meeting at this point for technological reasons and the Deputy Mayor assumed the chair until she was able to re-join the meeting.

Cllrs. Walden and Farrow suggested that some additional information would be helpful on the website.

b) Interim Internal Audit Report – further work on the Risk Assessment was needed. Cllr. Farrow said that in a recent discussion regarding this a trainer had suggested that the Councillors needed to focus on strategy and governance environmental and economic risk rather than smaller aspects.

The Town Mayor was able to reconnect to the meeting at this point. She welcomed the positive report from the External Auditor but said that there was always room for improvement. The Responsible Financial Officer said that because of the level of the precept the level of scrutiny was proportionately greater so Councillors could feel reassured.

c) Lap Tops for Administrative Staff: the Town Clerk said that the I.T. advisors had suggested that the Administrative Assistant and the Deputy Clerk both needed to have access to more up to date lap tops to ensure greater security of continuity of business. Following discussion, Cllr. Walden proposed that these be purchased with a budget of £1000 per computer. Cllr. Mynard seconded the proposal. Carried.

d) Grant Application from Axe Valley Ring and Ride – the Deputy Clerk said that at the Town Council meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> November members had approved the application received on the basis that it would be paid in the next financial year. A letter had been received stating that the funding was needed in the current financial year. The Town Clerk had had a telephone call from a member of the Committee stressing the need for the money. Cllr. Young said that it was important that Council adhere to its Financial Regulations and Grants Policy. The Responsible Financial Officer endorsed that view, adding that there was a facility to make a grant

on an ad hoc basis for one off costs. It was agreed, proposed Cllr. Young and seconded Cllr. Sedgewick, that she should make further contact with the applicant to try to achieve a resolution to the problem.

## 9. PROPERTY RELATED MATTERS

a **Guildhall**: routine inspections, such as emergency lighting, were being carried out by contractors. The report from the contractor regarding the damp in the Town Clerk's Office had been received.

### **b Old Courthouse**

- i) General Update on Repairs: the Town Clerk said that most items related to tenancy matters arising from the recent fire and would be discussed in committee. She added that she had been told by the tenants that they had had a verbal comment from the police which indicated that arson had been involved. However, no official formal report written report had been received so no action could be taken on the basis of word of mouth.
- ii) Change of Tenant – some thought would be needed on the future use of the vacated part of the building.

### **c Cemetery**

- i) Chapels – the Town Clerk said that the quotes received to date suggested that repairs to the stonework would be costly.

### **d Amenities:**

- i. Allotments – the Administrative Assistant said that she was getting no response from the agreed asbestos removal contractor and was now re-starting the process of finding a contractor and getting new quotes.
- ii. Jubilee Field – a third quote is being sought for restoration work. Cllr. Walden said that he was researching the possibility of having a light feature which is entirely solar powered and was awaiting the response from those he had approached. Cllr. Farrow said that such panels do need to be replaced on a regular basis and that should be included in future budgeting.
- iii. Jubilee Field – the Town Clerk said that the most recent letter from the District Council did not make clear how the hand over of the field would proceed. A letter will sent to the named officer by the Town Clerk asking for a timetable for the process. The Administrative Assistant said that she was getting enquiries as to when the field would be open again to the public. Cllr. Farrow did not feel it as acceptable to leave it closed until April. Cllr. Walden felt that the present owners were reluctant to hand over the site until they were sure they would have no continuing liability for the land. Cllr. Leat said that a timetable was vital to be able to manage public expectations of what would be happening. Cllr. Walden wanted to have assurance that the French Drains were working correctly.

## 10. MATTERS OF URGENCY: None.

Cllr. Farrow 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. Walden seconded the proposal. Agreed.

## 12. QUOTES FOR PROPOSED WORKS:

- a) Damp in Town Clerk's Office – the Town Clerk reminded Councillors of the detail of the report and its recommendations, which involve the provision of a damp proof course and on the front and side walls. A price was quoted for that work but not for the associated removal and replacement of the plaster.

Cllr. Young, seconded by Cllr. Farrow proposed that the quote of £590 for a damp-proof course plus £78.40 for a 10 year guarantee be accepted. Agreed. The Town Clerk will seek quotes from local builders for the removal and replacement of the plaster.

b) I.T. Quote – this was to enable the transfer of email hosting from the website provider to the firm which provides I.T. support in order to eliminate the problems being experienced at present. The Deputy Clerk said that the annual fee would be £729, almost three times the cost of the present arrangement and there would be a one off set up fee of £1600. Councillors would have their own log in details and could log in from any advice to access their emails. The Deputy Clerk will seek answers to Councillors' queries from the contractor. Cllr. Walden wanted a Members' Area as well. The issue is one of lack of compatibility of the website provider and the Microsoft Outlook mail system.

**13. TENANCY MATTERS:**

a) Old Courthouse – a letter had been received from one of the tenants which was essentially expressing an account of an incident which differed from that of another party to the same incident. Tenants had expressed concerns about the lack of overnight security at the Old Courthouse. Cllr. Walden said that a means had to be found of securing the property while still allowing public access, particularly during the summer months. Cllr. Leat said that the Council did have a duty of care for its tenants. The Deputy Clerk said that where appropriate complaints should be dealt with via the complaints policy but this should be done equitably. Arrangements were agreed for closing and opening the gates with a fall-back position when necessary.

The Town Clerk will draft a response to the letter received.

The Town Clerk asked Councillors to think about future use of the area which had just been vacated by Axminster Care Service. Cllr. Young said it may be time to consider the long-term future about the whole site as a Town Council amenity.

**14. STAFFING MATTERS: Nothing to raise.**

Signed ..... Date .....