

Axminster Town Council

Office Hours
Monday to Thursday
9am – 4pm

Mayor: Cllr Jill Farrow
Town Clerk: Paul Hayward

www.axminstertowncouncil.gov.uk



THE GUILDHALL
WEST STREET
AXMINSTER
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EX13 5NX

Tel. 01297 32088

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Minutes of the meeting of the Operations Committee held on Monday,
8th April 2024 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall

Minutes approved 5th August 2024: Part ONE version (Redacted)

Present: Cllrs. Walden (Chair), Brooker (Vice-Chair) and Farrow.
Meeting was quorate.

Also in attendance was the Clerk to the Council, Paul Hayward.
Two members of the public in attendance.

Meeting began at 7.00pm.

The Chair of the Committee, Cllr. Walden, welcomed all in attendance and outlined fire precautions, exits etc and ran through the agenda procedure and protocol, noting the agenda statements as published.

Public Forum:

Mary Darlow (former Guildhall Manager, and Chair of the former Guildhall Management Committee) spoke in support of the retention of the Guildhall catering/kitchen facilities (agenda item OC24/023iii refers). Chair thanked the speaker for their participation and insight.

Bryan Ball spoke in relation to maintenance and upkeep of planters, and to applaud the work of volunteers in planting and horticultural works across the town. Chair thanked the speaker for their representation.

Chair subsequently closed the public forum session at 7.15pm.

OC24/013

To note members of the committee present:

As detailed above.

OC24/014

**To note and, if thought fit, to approve apologies (and reasons for absence):
(LGA 1972 S.85 (1))**

Apologies had been received from Cllrs. Burrough, Paice & Willey.

These were noted (as were the reasons for the absences) but there was no proposal put forward to approve the absences. Chair to raise this subject at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 13th May in conjunction with the Chair of the Council; meeting calendar for the year to be circulated to all members.

OC24/015

To note members of the committee not otherwise in attendance.

Cllr. Langdon's absence was noted.

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OC24/016

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. This does not preclude the need for members to declare any additional interests that may arise during the meeting.

None declared.

OC24/017

To consider and, if thought fit, approve the minutes of the Operations Committee meeting held 15th January 2024.

Chair proposed approval of these minutes. Seconded by Cllr. Farrow albeit with two small typographical errors corrected. Substantive minutes resolved unanimously.

Chair to sign the approved (substantive) minutes as soon as re-printed.

OC24/018

To consider any matters arising (not included within this agenda as business to be attended to) from the meeting of the 15th January 2024 and to receive progress report from Clerk:

Clerk outlined those matters outstanding/arising from the previous meeting that had not been included in this meeting agenda.

Summary:

Cemetery compound/stockade fencing to be completed in-house to minimise costs to taxpayer. Clerk to continue seeking external grant funding towards Millwey Play Area Extn. Project.

Noted by Chair with thanks.

OC24/019

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.

No such matters raised or considered other than those also shown on the agenda under items OC24/028 to 030 (IC) inclusive.

Operations Committee business to be considered:

OC24/020

To consider matters pertaining to the Town Cemetery:

i) To consider the introduction of a memorial indemnity form (Reason; to avoid the use of the generic interment indemnity form currently in use); *Clerk to provide report.*

Subject to the correction of one small typographical error, the adoption of the indemnity form was proposed by Chair, seconded by JF. Resolved unanimously.

ii) To consider dates for the Cemetery site visit (see previous minutes).

It was suggested that the Operations Committee undertake a site visit to the cemetery in June (to coincide with the scheduled meeting planned for 10th June 2024)

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OC24/021

To consider matters pertaining to Town Amenity and services:

i) To ratify recent purchase of a community defibrillator in Abbey Close (purchased under Chair's delegated authority) and in conjunction with a grant received from London Hearts defibrillator charity and the DHSC. *Nil (£0) cost to the Town Council.*

Ratification proposed by Chair, seconded by ABr. Resolved.

ii) To note the agreement of the Hunters Lodge Inn to host the AED cabinet and defibrillator which will be removed from the Raymonds Hill Post Office imminently.

Noted. Clerk to write to the landlord to thank them for hosting the defibrillator and also to the owners of the former Post office for their kind agreement to host the defibrillator since its original installation date.

iii) To consider a proposal for the Town Council to provide an additional VAS (SSID) device for use in the parish to promote slower driving speeds in the town centre and in residential areas.

Proposed by Chair, seconded by JF, that no further expenditure be incurred in relation to the VAS amenity. Clerk to continue to liaise with Deputy Clerk and GMO team to ensure existing unit is rotated around the fixed positions across town to maximise efficacy of the device. Resolved.

iv) To consider whether the Town Council wishes to apply to DCRF for initial start-up funding in order to assist towards the creation of an Axminster Community Emergency Plan.

Proposed by JF, seconded by Chair, that Council apply for the £250 set-up grant funding. Resolved. Clerk: please action accordingly.

v) To receive an update from Clerk on progress with the installation of enhanced Gateway / Fingerpost signage in the town.

Correspondence had been received from members of the Twinning Association regarding the absence of any reference on the new Gateway signage to Axminster's Twin Town of Douvre. JF asked that this matter be added to the business listed for the 13th May annual meeting of the FULL Council so that this subject could be discussed in greater depth. It was observed that the design and wording of the new signage had been agreed at a meeting of the Council (open to the public) and that the decision had been by a democratic vote.

Clerk also provided an update on the timetable for the erection of the fingerpost signs (where there was some ongoing dialogue with the PCC and churchwardens). **Noted.**

OC24/022

To consider matters pertaining to Administrative matters within the Town Council.

i) To receive a report from the Clerk on matters pertaining to IT infrastructure and operational administration delivery within the Council.

Report received and noted. Clerk was directed to obtain quotations for a "Cloud" based data-storage option from our IT providers and bring this back to committee with a further report as soon as possible.

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OC24/023

To consider matters pertaining to the Guildhall building and venue.

(some of these business matters have been deferred from the postponed Guildhall Sub-Committee meeting originally scheduled to take place on the 7th March 2024)

i) To note the revised bar prices from the 1st April 2024 and to confirm that all bar sales are now subject to VAT as per Council's self-registration for VAT

Noted. It was recognised that the prices charged were still very competitive compared to other hospitality venues in the town and that there could be some scope for an increase in soft drink prices later in the year if necessary.

ii) To consider existing and future storage challenges within the Guildhall building (both in terms of operational protocol, guest amenity and H&S compliance)

Chair proposed that agenda item iii) be considered first. Agreed.

iii) To consider matters pertaining to the existing and future provision of kitchen/catering amenities/facilities within the Guildhall building/venue.

After considerable debate, and mindful of the representations made earlier in the meeting, *it was proposed by Chair, seconded by ABr. (and fully supported by JF) that the kitchen amenity at the Guildhall be retained and appropriate funds invested in the future maintenance and repairs as necessary. Resolved unanimously.*

Clerk was directed to liaise with the Guildhall Manager in this respect and to invite EDDC EHO to attend to provide guidance as to what works would be necessary to ensure that the amenity was compliant with legislation and fit for future hirer use. Noted.

ii) To consider existing and future storage challenges within the Guildhall building (both in terms of operational protocol, guest amenity and H&S compliance) RE-ORDERED AS ABOVE

The following recommendations were put forward by committee in relation to this agenda item;

i) That Guildhall Manager obtain quotes for the acquisition of a suitable trolley to facilitate the safe and secure transport of hall catering tables.

ii) That Guildhall Manager obtain clarity on the safe stacking height for GH banqueting chairs.

iii) That chairs continue to be stored/stacked in the kitchen area (when not in use) with the area adjacent to the tea-room being used as an alternative storage area when the kitchen is in use.

iv) That quotations be obtained for the creation of a storage mezzanine in the dressing room area with access to the mezzanine from the main hall via the stage frontage.

Noted. Clerk to liaise with GH Manager accordingly and to report back to committee.

iv) To consider proposals for upgrade/acquisition of venue AV/Lighting/technical/sound facilities to promote and encourage additional acts/performances; to consider what asset acquisition might be necessary to bring this forward.

Chair proposed that this matter be considered in Part Two as the discussion was likely to involve confidential and commercially sensitive information being disclosed/discussed. Resolved (see below).

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v) To consider requests for additional advertising / promotional expenditure from the Guildhall Manager.

JF stated that there was no conclusive evidence that the advertising spend proposed would yield commensurate income for the venue. Chair agreed and stated that we should continue to spend diligently, in a targeted manner, to maximise promotional publicity for the venue. **It was therefore proposed by Chair, seconded by JF, that the additional expenditure was not authorised. Resolved.**

Chair asked that the GH Manager prepare a working paper / briefing report outlining the current (and future) advertising strategy for the Guildhall, with costings for the various options proposed, and to bring this back before the committee for their consideration. Noted.

vi) To consider matters pertaining to building licensing and venue security requirements for building control and audience safety/management.

It was proposed that the Guildhall Manager, the Clerk and the Chair of OpsComm be afforded delegated authority to make decisions on any future expenditure relating to events at the Guildhall to ensure both audience safety, staff and building security and to comply with the requirements of the EDDC licence. Proposed by JF, seconded by ABr. Resolved unanimously.

Clerk: please note and advise GH Manager accordingly.

vii) To receive update report from RFO on building condition survey and works timetable/schedule.

Received and noted. Clerk confirmed that he was awaiting the survey and condition report for the Guildhall from the contracted surveyor and that this could be reviewed in greater depth by the committee once received.

viii) To consider proposal for replacement stage access amenity (on H&S grounds).

After discussion, Clerk was directed to liaise with the GH Manager to provide a more comprehensive report on the design and specification of such access equipment, details of where it would be stored, construction materials and estimated costs. Noted.

OC24/024

To consider matters pertaining to the Old Courthouse complex.

i) To receive a report from the Clerk on ongoing survey works and building maintenance issues that require committee consideration.

Noted.

ii) To receive an update on the provision of Wi-Fi/broadband connectivity into the OCH complex.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by JF, that this project be paused and deferred until a later date (to be decided by the committee). Resolved.

iii) To consider enhancements to the CCTV in and around the complex for the prevention of crime and protection of Council, and tenanted, property.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by JF, that this project be paused and deferred until a later date (to be decided by the committee). Resolved.

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OC24/025

Chair's Announcements / Matters of Urgency to be noted:

Clerk raised the issue of the insurance of (and responsibility/liability for) the War Memorial on the Minster Green. This heritage structure was purchased by way of public subscription after WW1 and sits on church land but members believe that it is not "owned" by the church and thus is not insured by them either.

Clerk was directed to make the necessary and appropriate enquiries and to prepare a report for the committee once more details are known. Noted.

Clerk also sought consent (after a request from the Allotment Association) that the Town Council office be used as a "pick-up point" for AA membership cards and nursery vouchers with the co-operation of the Admin. Assistant. Members of committee could think of no reasons why this could not be accommodated subject to staffing resource. Clerk to discuss with KE and action accordingly.

OC24/026

Date of next scheduled meeting for the committee; 10th June 2024 – possible site visit at cemetery.

Future committee meetings: 7th October 2024

OC24/027

The Vice-Chair of the Committee 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) should 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. Seconded by Chair. Resolved unanimously.

Matters to be considered in committee session (Part Two):

The items of business listed below and any others from this agenda to be agreed upon by members of the committee if and when appropriate (see OC24/019)

OC24/023

To consider matters pertaining to the Guildhall building and venue.

iv) To consider proposals for upgrade/acquisition of venue AV/Lighting/technical/sound facilities to promote and encourage additional acts/performances; to consider what asset acquisition might be necessary to bring this forward.

It was proposed by Chair, seconded by ABr., that the Council allocate up to £200 towards the costs of electrical wiring upgrades to facilitate the installation and connection of a generous donation of system-compatible lighting from a benefactor (this sum to be taken from the retained GH donation reserve). Furthermore, the committee resolved to not accept the offer of analogue lighting from a separate 3rd party benefactor as the costs of making these compliant (and the anticipated future maintenance/repair costs) was deemed financially unviable.

Clerk to write to both parties outlining the committee decision and thanking them both for their generous offers.

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OC24/023

To consider matters pertaining to the Guildhall building and venue (continued):

iv) To consider proposals for upgrade/acquisition of venue AV/Lighting/technical/sound facilities to promote and encourage additional acts/performances; to consider what asset acquisition might be necessary to bring this forward.

Furthermore, Clerk was asked to liaise with the GH Manager and our PA/Tech advisor to create a schedule for the appropriate level of equipment (lighting and AV) for the GH venue to minimise reliance on 3rd party providers and to enable the GH to commence a training programme for “grow-your-own” tech provision to mitigate any future risks of unavailability or cross-scheduling. Noted.

OC24/028 (IC)

To consider proposals for hosting of specific acts and performances that require committee discussion due to the financial conditions and commitments that would apply if such acts were booked to appear / perform.

These matters are deemed confidential as they pertain to commercially sensitive financial information.

After significant debate and consideration of the cost report from the RFO, it was proposed by Chair, and seconded by JF, that there was not sufficient financial certainty to justify booking the proposed act at the Guildhall; *the risk of poor ticket sales means that the event could run at a loss.* Resolved. Clerk: please liaise with GH Manager to convey this decision to the promoter. Furthermore, it was proposed that future decisions on the financial viability of act booking(s) be delegated to the GH Manager and Clerk, until such point as the fixed costs of such a booking rose above £2500 (but below £5000) whereupon the authority of the Chair of the Operations Committee would be required. Any financial commitment to secure a performer booking above and beyond £5000 would require the agreement of the Operations Committee, and subject ratification of the FULL Council. Resolved.

OC24/029 (IC)

To consider request for the temporary removal of a Guildhall asset from the building by a 3rd party.

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to confidential 3rd party information and commercially sensitive asset management data.

A request had been received from a 3rd party for the temporary removal of an asset previously donated to the Town Council by their relatives. The Chair highlighted concerns about the practicalities of moving the asset and transporting it safely to the venue (and then returning it, and re-installing safely).

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OC24/029 (IC)

To consider request for the temporary removal of a Guildhall asset from the building by a 3rd party (continued):

There was general agreement that this request would entail the services of professional movers, not to mention scaffolding, specific transportation packaging, insurance and potential remedial works to the Guildhall (the item having been in situ for over 40 years).

After debate, it was proposed that the Clerk liaise with the 3rd party to advise that the request could not readily be agreed to. As an alternative, the Town Council would be open to facilitating access to the asset by a professional photographer so that an image of the asset could be obtained and displayed at their event.

Depending on the response from the 3rd party, the final decision on the request was duly delegated to the Chair of the Operations Committee and the Town Clerk.

Clerk: Please note and action accordingly and update OpsComm as soon as the 3rd party replies.

Furthermore, the Clerk was asked to obtain a dedicated insurance valuation of the asset and to add that item to the Council's asset register (for FY24-25) as a specified item with the insurance cover value amended as necessary. Noted.

OC24/030 (IC)

To consider proposals for the replacement of the Town Council photocopier (admin. resource) and consequential renewal of the extant service / usage agreement

This matter is deemed confidential as it pertains to commercially sensitive supplier information.

Report noted. Clerk was authorised to proceed with the renewal project under his delegated authority as RFO, with final decision to be made by the Strategy & Finance Committee when it next meets. Noted.

With no further business to attend to, the Chair closed the meeting at 21.45hrs.

Signed Date: 5th August 2024

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8th April 2024 at 7.00 p.m. at Axminster Guildhall**

Minutes approved 5th August 2024: Part ONE version (Redacted)