

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE  
FINANCE COMMITTEE  
HELD ON TUESDAY 19 JANUARY 2021 AT 10.00AM**

- PRESENT:** Councillors Scicluna (Chairman), Barrie (Vice-Chairman), and Harry
- EX-OFFICIO:** The Mayor (Councillor Plowman), Deputy Mayor (Councillor J Hughes), Councillor Apel (Chairman of Community Affairs) and Councillor Joy (Chairman of Planning and Conservation)
- ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Property Manager, Member Services Support Officer and Terry Sutton (Save Money, Cut Carbon)

**98. APOLOGIES AND RECORD OF ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillors Dignum and K Hughes.

There were no absences.

**99. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 26 NOVEMBER 2020**

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 26 November 2020, having been circulated; be approved and signed as a correct record at a later date.

**100. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE IN MATTERS ON THE AGENDA FOR THIS MEETING**

The Mayor and Councillor Apel each declared a personal interest as Members of Chichester District Council.

**101. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES**

The Chairman noted that there were no significant updates to the following previous Minutes:

- **Minute 84** - Agenda and Minuting Software
  - The Member Services Support Officer advised that this was still under active consideration but was subject to finance and Officer time being available.
- **Minute 84** - Council House telephone system upgrade
  - The Member Services Support Officer advised that this was still under active consideration but was subject to finance and Officer time being available.
- **Minute 84** - Speed indicator device
  - The Town Clerk reported that details of the device had been received but that the order had not yet been placed although discussions had been ongoing about the processes and external contacts necessary to manage the device once it had arrived.

- **Minute 84** - Litten Gardens paving
  - Members were advised that this would be discussed at the next Property Sub-Committee meeting.
- **Minute 91** - Proposal for the installation of city centre queue shelters and respite points
  - The Chairman reported that Chichester District Council were holding a meeting at that time to discuss this issue. She advised that she believed that the issue would not progress due to concerns from the Fire Brigade and the amount of street furniture currently installed in the city centre streets.

**At this point the Chairman moved to take Agenda item 15 (Council House Energy and Water Audit) out of order.**

102. COUNCIL HOUSE ENERGY AND WATER AUDIT – APPLICATION FOR SALIX FUNDING

The Chairman and Property Manager introduced Terry Sutton from Save Money, Cut Carbon (SMCC) who had been invited to attend to brief the Committee on the recent Council House energy and water audit and the proposed next steps for this project.

The Chairman introduced Councillor Joy to Mr Sutton and informed him of the Councillor's strong interest in energy efficiency and conservation.

Mr Sutton gave a brief background about SMCC, their aims and examples of some of their existing clients. He advised that they had been working with SALIX for several years and that SALIX offered a number of interest free loan products for clients to implement energy saving projects through SMCC with the energy cost savings being used to repay the loans.

The Committee were further advised that SALIX had offered a round of grant funding for qualifying projects which meant that the SALIX element of the funding would not be in the form of a loan.

Mr Sutton informed the Committee that SMCC had undertaken an audit of the Council House and submitted a grant application which had been developed within a tight time scale and included installation of additional solar panels, completion of the LED lighting upgrade, replacement of taps with infra-red models and replacement of the toilets with infra-red flush, low flow units. He reported that the application had been successful and that the City Council had been awarded a grant of £8,884.86 towards the total project cost.

The Committee were also informed that, to help the project move forward, SMCC had agreed to provide an interest free loan facility to the City Council, with repayments starting on completion of the project and being spread over two financial years.

Councillor Joy thanked Mr Sutton for his update and asked, given the City Council's Climate Emergency declaration, would this project result in carbon neutrality for the City Council by the deadline of 2030.

Mr Sutton gave a short outline of the Savings Opportunity Report that had been compiled by SMCC based on the audit of the Council House that they had undertaken and highlighted the items that qualified for funding through the SALIX grant. Members were advised that this report provided a route map to how the Council could reduce its carbon footprint.

Members were further advised that additional data regarding the City Council's energy usage could be used to further refine the report and fine tune its recommendations.

Mr Sutton informed the Committee that he felt that the recommendations to date would have a positive impact on the City Council's carbon footprint as well as giving a positive image that pro-active action was being taken.

Members were advised that SMCC would be keen to work with the City Council on the other issues highlighted in the report, but not included in the initial project; as and when funding became available.

Councillor Joy commented on the presence of gas heating on the report and expressed concern that, with the imminent outlawing of fossil fuel heating, this was not being addressed.

Mr Sutton advised that this was one of the areas that needed further input from the City Council in order for SMCC to provide an appropriate roadmap for the future in terms of the use of natural gas. He also advised Members that the SALIX grants were set up with the aim of reducing the use of fossil fuels but that this became difficult where buildings, such as the Council House, did not lend themselves to alternative systems such as heat pumps. Members were further advised that there were structural issues with the building that needed to be rectified before alternative heating systems became viable.

Councillor Joy reiterated his concerns about gas being in the energy mix and suggested that the addition of battery storage and similar equipment would enable the Council House energy consumption to be offset by feeding back energy over longer periods than was currently possible. He also suggested that, while the longer term aims were planned and implemented, shorter term solutions such as energy tariff offsets could be used to help lower the carbon footprint of the City Council.

Mr Sutton clarified that the over all aim of their work with the City Council was to provide a roadmap designed to address the City Council's priorities, provide solutions and costs and help the City Council achieve those aims. He also clarified that, the project that was being presented had been designed on a short time scale to meet the deadlines for the SALIX grant and to include works that qualified for this funding. He advised Members that this would not be the end of the work but could be considered as a phase 1 with phase 2 covering the other concerns once all the information had been provided to SMCC to enable the analysis to take place.

The Mayor thanked Mr Sutton for the information provided. He agreed with Councillor Joy and asked whether the work being undertaken would realistically enable the City Council to meet its Climate Emergency goals while providing the City Council with future proof solutions where possible.

The Mayor also agreed that the first stage, as had been presented, was a good start but that he would be keen that the City Council moved to planning for the second stage as soon as possible to ensure that the targets were met.

Mr Sutton expressed his strong agreement with the Mayor and Councillor Joy and advised the Committee that SMCC were keen to move forward with the City Council to design phase two so that implementation could be planned to meet the 2030 deadline.

Members were then advised that SMCC also offered services to households to enable them to calculate energy usage, assess possible home improvements and purchase the equipment and services that they might need to be able to make their

homes more energy efficient. Members were further advised that, as part of this service, householders would be provided with an energy impact statement that could then be aggregated by the City Council to show how it had been supporting householders within the City to move towards a more sustainable footing for their energy and water consumption.

Councillor Barrie expressed her support for the direction being taken and said she hoped that, going forward, the phase two work could be planned to ensure that the City Council received the best return in terms of savings and progress towards carbon neutrality while bearing in mind the financial constraints that faced the City Council's budgets.

Mr Sutton agreed and reminded Members that, outside of the grants allocations, SALIX offered interest free loans for qualifying projects with repayments being structured around the savings made as a result of implementing those energy and water savings works. He advised the Committee that there were several ways forward in terms of financing the improvements that ensured minimal impact on the City Council's day to day budgets.

Councillor Apel asked if SMCC could make the reports that had been discussed available to Members for review outside the meeting.

Mr Sutton informed Councillors that he would be happy to do this once the additional information had been received and the report completed to give the most complete picture of the current situation and recommendations possible.

The Property Manager reminded Members that access to this report had been provided previously but that he would be happy to send out a reminder to the Committee.

Councillor Joy asked for confirmation that the current Feed In Tariff (FIT) that the City Council was receiving would remain because of the generous terms that this tariff included. He expressed concerns that the installation of the new panels would mean this tariff being cancelled and a less generous one being applied.

Mr Sutton agreed to confirm with his team what the situation with the FIT would be going forwards. He also highlighted that it appeared that the existing installation may be underperforming.

The Property Manager confirmed that, if the existing solar panel installation remained unaltered, the current FIT would apply to that installation. He also confirmed that the new solar panel project was intended as a stand alone installation and would therefore attract its own FIT. Members were also advised that the reason the existing solar panels may be underperforming was the shadows cast by the chimney stacks and that the overall array could only perform as well as the lowest performing panel.

Mr Sutton suggested that a separate meeting be held to include the solar energy expert from SMCC as well as Councillor Joy and the Property Manager.

The Committee was then advised that, in order for the grant to be formally awarded, the City Council would have to approve the proposed project prior to the deadline of 29 January 2021.

The Chairman thanked Mr Sutton for the information and support he had provided.

The Property Manager confirmed that the proposal represented phase one of the work and that the larger works would form phase two due to the increased complexity of the planning, financing and works required.

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified the proposed method for payment of the balance of the work not funded by the SALIX grant and informed Members that the Council House Cyclical Maintenance Budget had been identified as being sufficient to fund the repayments over two financial years.

After a short further discussion it was RESOLVED to proceed with the energy and water efficiency works as proposed by SMCC and elaborated on by Mr Sutton with the identified costs and funding sources as follows:

<b>Details</b>	<b>Costs</b>
LED lights, hand dryer replacement and additional solar panel	£12,351.80
Public taps (2 x inline) supply only	£16.58
Public toilets (supply only)	£1826.40
<b>TOTAL project cost</b>	<b>£14,194.78</b>
Salix grant award	£8,884.86
Grant shortfall – to be funded by monthly interest free payments from the Council House cyclical maintenance budget	£5,309.92

**The meeting then returned to the order of business as given in the Agenda.**

103. UPDATE FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

(a) **Minute 84** – Chichester City Council Business Plan

The Town Clerk advised Members that the outcome of the discussion at the Community Affairs Committee meeting held on 11 January 2021 was that there was no realistic chance of progressing this piece of work at the current time. He further advised that the reasons for this were two fold, namely the restrictions placed on meetings in person and the unknown aspect of offers of discretionary functions from Chichester District Council and West Sussex County Council as part of their respective budget discussions.

The Committee agreed that circumstances could change significantly over the coming year that it would be best to postpone further discussion on the business plan until the situation became clearer.

(b) **Minute 84** – Council House exterior works

The Property Manager reported that the work was progressing well with the repairs to the pointing on the front elevation and chimneys nearing completion and the replacement of the chimney pots about to take place. He advised that minor delays had been experienced due to the weather and its effects on some of the materials being used.

(c) **Minute 84** – Council House Portico

Members were informed that the Property Manager would be having a Zoom meeting with the architects the following day (20 January 2021) to receive an update on the work undertaken to date. He reported that the original lead architect was now on maternity leave and that the proprietor of the business had taken over the work.

Members were further advised that the outcome of the Zoom meeting would be reported to the next Property Sub-Committee meeting.

**Post meeting note:** The next Property Sub-Committee will be held via Zoom on Wednesday 3 February 2021 at 10am

(d) **Minute 84** – City Council website

The Member Services Support Officer informed Members that he had recently received an update from VoxIT, the website contractor. He advised the Committee that the launch date had been delayed due to pandemic related time constraints at the company. The Committee were further advised that the contractor had sent an updated task list indicating progress on the work needed to create the new website and that it was now hoped that the new website would be ready for launch in mid to late February 2021.

(e) **Minute 84(b)** – Chichester Street Naming Book

The Member Services Support Officer reported that over half of the original print run had now been gifted, sold or sent on in line with statutory obligations to the copyright libraries.

He further reported that orders were being received in steady numbers and that the sales to date had already covered nearly half of the original printing costs.

(f) **Minute 84(c)** – Civic and Covid 19 Awards

*Civic Awards*

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that, during ongoing discussions with Chichester Cathedral regarding the hosting of the Civic Awards in February; serious concerns had been expressed about the legality and safety of organising such an event given the current lockdown conditions which were not expected to be relaxed prior to the proposed 10 February 2021 date for the ceremony.

He further informed the Committee that, in discussion with the Mayor, it was felt that, given these restrictions; a Civic Awards ceremony could be held via Zoom with the physical awards being delivered by the Mayor at a later time on a one-to-one basis.

The Chairman expressed her disagreement with the proposal for an online Civic Awards ceremony. She also advised the Committee that she felt that the proposal being presented would detract from the special nature and meaning of the awards.

The Chairman then suggested that the ceremony could be postponed until just before the Mayor Making ceremony in May.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that, assuming the current date was retained, it would be illegal to hold the Civic Awards ceremony in person. He also advised Members that, due to the Mayor's unstinting support for the Chichester community during the pandemic; he (the Town Clerk) considered that every effort should be made to present the Civic Awards within his Mayoralty.

Members were further reminded about the effort required by Officers to organise events of this nature. The Town Clerk reported that the arrangements for the Civic Awards ceremony due to be held on 10 February 2021 were virtually complete. He advised Members that he would be led by their decision, but he expressed concerns that, if the decision were to be delayed until March

or April; the same restrictions could be in place and the situation would be no different. The Mayor supported these concerns.

Councillor Apel commented that it was still early in the year and that it was her view that the importance of the Civic Awards ceremony was such that she would support delaying the final decision until school half term in mid-February or March 2021.

The Mayor expressed his sympathy with the views being stated and that he would also prefer a physical ceremony for the Civic Awards. He also expressed the opinion that a line would have to be drawn and the best possible event staged rather than repeatedly delaying and postponing a decision and potentially creating a logjam of work later in the year.

The Mayor advised that he had attended Zoom based award ceremonies with other organisations and that these had been better than expected. He also commented that he felt the award itself and being able to get the awards to the recipients was probably more important than the ceremony itself.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the rules regarding holding Council meetings were in place until the first week in May 2021.

The Chairman supported Councillor Apel and reiterated her view that she felt that, while every effort would be made to hold the ceremony within the current Mayoralty; the Awards were too special to be held via Zoom with a follow up visit from the Mayor.

The Mayor reminded the Committee that they were yet to discuss the proposed Freedom of the City ceremony that had been scheduled to take place in April 2021. He also reminded the Committee that it had been suggested that an appropriate gap be maintained between the Civic and Freedom ceremonies to maintain the special and individual nature of each event. He agreed that the current proposals were not satisfactory but repeated his concern that delaying the Civic Awards would create a logjam later in the year.

The Town Clerk highlighted his concerns about having to contact current attendees to rearrange and try to find new, acceptable, dates. Members were asked that, if they decided to delay the decision and/or the ceremony; the delay should not go beyond the end of February 2021.

Councillor Barrie agreed with the Town Clerk and expressed her opinion that, as the future was so uncertain, it would be preferable to continue with the arrangements for the Civic Awards ceremony to be held via Zoom on 10 February 2021 so that the award recipients could be acknowledged.

She further suggested the possibility that, while the Civic Awards themselves should go ahead now, it could be possible to arrange an in person event in the future on a larger scale to further acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of the Award recipients.

The Chairman agreed that an in person celebration could happen in the future to allow recipients and the friends and family to enjoy the experience together.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that hosting an online ceremony would potentially permit larger numbers to attend the ceremony itself. They were advised that the Assembly Room capacity was currently 35 socially distanced attendees, rising to 70 at the Cathedral but with a potential for 100 attendees using the City Council's Zoom licence. The Town Clerk suggested to Members

the increased capacity via Zoom would potentially allow recipients to invite more guests which would hopefully make the event more enjoyable to everyone.

The Committee considered, at length, the concerns being discussed and the pros and cons of retaining the current arrangements or delaying the final decision and rearranging the event for later in the year.

The Mayor reiterated that it was likely that restrictions would still be in place in April and May 2021 which would limit the ability to hold a full in person Awards ceremony. He informed Members that he supported the idea of arranging a party or celebration later in the year that could be attended by all recipients, current and past, as well as invited guests.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the decision rested with the Committee. He further reminded Members that the role of Officers was to advise, support and implement decisions made by the elected Members.

The Mayor then proposed retaining the current plans for a Zoom hosted Civic Awards Ceremony to be held on 10 February 2021 with the addition of an in person celebration for all current and past Award winners to be held later in the year when Covid19 restrictions allowed. This was seconded by Councillor Barrie.

Following a split vote (For – Councillors Plowman, Barrie and Harry. Against – Councillors Scicluna, J Hughes and Apel), the Chairman used her casting vote to vote for the proposal.

It was therefore RESOLVED to accept the Mayor's proposal for the Civic Awards Ceremony to proceed via Zoom on the 10 February 2021, complimented by in person visits by the Mayor to hand over the Awards. This would then be followed later in the year by a full celebration to be attended by current and past winners and their guests, when restrictions permitted.

#### *Covid19 Awards*

The Chairman proposed that, as Covid19 was still very much an ongoing issue, the more specific Covid19 Awards be delayed. This was supported by the Committee.

#### *Mayor's Sunday*

The Town Clerk advised Members that Mayor's Sunday had been arranged for Sunday 7 March 2021. He further advised Members that this was on the proviso that the Covid19 restrictions continued to permit common worship.

Members were advised that, if this event went ahead, it would be very different from previous years in that only 10 attendees representing the City Council would be permitted, there would be no Civic processions and no singing in the Cathedral other than by the choir. They were further advised that Officers would deliver the robes to the Cathedral for those Councillors who would be attending.

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that, with the Mayor, the Mace Bearer and the Mayor's Chaplain; places for Councillors would be very limited. He advised Members that, on that basis, he would be willing to give up his traditional attendance at this event in favour of a Councillor.

#### *Freedom of the City*

The Committee were reminded about the proposed Freedom of the City that had been under discussion.



The Town Clerk advised Members that the Cathedral had proposed a date for the event of mid April, subject to Covid19 restrictions. He further advised that this would require a Special Meeting of Council would be held in mid February to formally approve the proposed Freedom presentation and allow for sufficient time for the even to be properly planned.

The Town Clerk emphasised to Members the importance of timely planning for such an event given the lead in times for ordering the Freedom Scroll and Book and the need for both of these elements to contain the date of the actual ceremony itself.

(g) **Minute 89** – Discretionary Grants Working Group

Councillor Apel advised the Committee that the recommendations of the Discretionary Grant Working Group had been adopted and minuted at the Community Affairs Committee meeting held on Monday 11 January 2021 (**Community Affairs Minute 46 refers**).

(h) **Minute 92** – Request from Chichester District Council to transfer ownership of bus shelters

The Property Manager updated the Committee on the request from Chichester District Council that the City Council take ownership of the bus shelters. Further to the previous meeting of the Finance Committee held on 26 November 2020, the Property Manager advised that the District Council request had intended to include all bus shelters within Chichester District and not just the shelters within the Parish of Chichester.

He informed the Committee that he had responded to the request on behalf of the City Council and declined the request as made by the District Council.

(i) **Minute 93** – Chichester street scene – finger post refurbishment

The Property Manager reminded Members about the background to the finger post refurbishment project. He advised them that, originally, the project had been initiated by the City Council and Chichester BID with the intention of it being a joint partnership between the City Council and Chichester District Council with each contributing £20,000 to the overall project cost.

Members were informed that the District Council had advised the Property Manager that their contribution would be transferred to Chichester BID to be taken forward in partnership with the City Council with the aim that Chichester BID would take the lead on the project.

The Property Manager reported that Chichester BID were reluctant to take on this role and that, with the Committee's agreement, he would take the lead on the project to take it to its conclusion.

He further reported that a pre-start meeting with the District Council, Chichester BID and the contractors (Leander Architectural, Crown Civil Engineering and Southern Fabrications) had been arranged for Thursday 28 January 2021 to discuss the logistics of taking the project forward and the proposed schedule.

Following a question from the Chairman, the Property Manager confirmed that the existing City Council finials that had been originally installed on the finger posts, showing a representation of the Market Cross; would be retained. He also advised Members that the finials would be repainted with the detail being picked out in gold paint.

The Chairman thanked the Property Manager for all his efforts in suggesting then pushing the finger post refurbishment project forward.

#### 104. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

**NOTE:** The summary of the monitoring report should say "...report shows a **surplus** of £12,331 against the budget to the end of November 2020".

A copy of the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to 30 November 2020 had been circulated to all Members with the Agenda.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that this report was currently showing a projected surplus of £12,331.

The Deputy Town Clerk outlined the cumulative variances that had appeared in the Monitoring Report for financial year 2020/21. Members were advised that most of the variances remained the same as the previous report with the following notable changes:

- St Pauls allotment water bill – the recent water bill had shown a jump in cost of 500% which had caused concerns. A possible reason that had been suggested was that one or more taps had been left on overnight. The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the Property Manager was reviewing the available options to tackle this situation.
- Neighbourhood Plan expenditure. The Deputy Town Clerk reported that, once the recent invoice for FERIA Urbanism had been paid; the expenditure would exceed the currently agreed £70,000 allocation from the City Council's CIL receipts. Councillor Apel asked for more details about the expenditure and was advised that this would be discussed under Agenda items 13 and 14.
- Cemetery costs – Members were advised that, due to increased burials and lower maintenance costs this budget was currently significantly underspent. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this could change at any time.
- Pavements Options Appraisal – the Deputy Town Clerk reported that £8000 had now been paid from City Council CIL receipts as a contribution to the West Sussex County Council Options Appraisal for pavements in the city centre.

The Mayor responded to the report and thanked the Deputy Town Clerk for managing the City Council's finances so effectively especially in view of the difficult times caused by the pandemic.

#### 105. EARMARKED RESERVES

A copy of the Earmarked Reserves Balances to date had been circulated to all Members with the Agenda.

The Deputy Town Clerk updated the Committee on the expenditure from each reserve with Members noting the current balances held.

#### 106. PUBLIC REALM PROJECTS

A copy of the Public Realm Projects to date had been circulated to all Members with the Agenda.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that the balances did not currently reflect the cost of the Speed Indicator Device that the City Council had agreed to purchase for community use.

The Mayor suggested that, as had been suggested for the finger posts project; the City Council may be able to take the lead on the city centre paving project. He further suggested that, as the Property Manager had undertaken a significant amount of work on this project, it may be appropriate for him to be involved in project leadership but without committing the City Council to any funding of the paving project at this time.

The Mayor also advised Members that a meeting would be held shortly with West Sussex County Council and Chichester District Council to discuss the options report that had been commissioned.

The Property Manager informed the Committee that, while he strongly supported the project moving forward, it represented a significant piece of civil engineering work. He also advised Members that he did not have the necessary experience or hold the specific qualifications for this particular project.

Members were advised that, despite having the in house expertise for such a project, West Sussex County Council appeared reluctant to take a lead on the work to push it forwards.

The Property Manager further advised that, if the City Council were to take on the project management lead, support in the form of a specialised consultant would be required.

The Mayor clarified that, as this project would be in the form of partnership working, it would not be the case that the City Council Property Manager would be expected to do all the work. He further clarified that he felt it was important that someone should lead on the project and make sure it moved forward.

The Town Clerk agreed with the Mayor and the concerns of the Property Manager. He suggested to Members that the City Council could propose seconding specialist staff from West Sussex County Council under the leadership of the City Council in order to move the project forward.

107. APPLICATION FROM CHICHESTER RUNNERS AND ATHLETICS CLUB FOR FUNDING FOR NEW RUNNING TRACK

The Chairman noted that no response had been received to the invitation to the Chichester Runners to attend the meeting and outline their request for funding for the new running track.

The Chairman and Committee also noted that, while the need for a community facility such as the running track existed, the supplied document did not provide enough information for the Committee to discuss and/or proceed to consider for funding by the City Council.

Members also noted that the overall costs of the project indicated in the document represented sums of money that the City Council could not consider allocating so further clarification would be needed.

The Chairman suggested that, subject to there being a New Homes Bonus allocation for the coming year, the Chichester Runners could apply using that route and formally present their case to the Council at the appropriate time.

The Mayor supported the project in principle and agreed with the Chairman that insufficient information had been received at this time. Councillor Apel agreed with the Mayor and also the suggestion that the New Homes Bonus route would be most appropriate for this project.

108. NEW HOMES BONUS – FURTHER EXTENSION TO THE NEW PARK CENTRE ALLOCATION (**Minute 65b refers**)

The Chairman reminded the Committee that, at the time of the last request for an extension on the New Homes Bonus deadline, she had suggested that she didn't think that the new deadline would be sufficient given the problems with getting contractors in to do the work during the current restrictions.

In response to a question from Councillor Apel, the Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that work that would be covered by the New Homes Bonus grant would not be completed in time for the reasons outlined by the Chairman.

The Deputy Town Clerk confirmed that the District Council would need to approve any such extension but that she had been advised by them to suggest an extension to September 2021, or 12 months after the original deadline for spending the grant.

The Mayor and the Committee agreed with the suggested 12 month extension.

It was therefore RESOLVED to agree to the requested extension to the New Park Centre's New Homes Bonus allocation to September 2021, subject to approval by Chichester District Council.

109. MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT FOR COUNCILLORS

The Town Clerk introduced the Model Code of Conduct document that had been circulated to Members with the Agenda and advised that it would be discussed by Chichester District Council's Standards Committee at their meeting on Monday 25 January 2021.

He advised Members that he thought there was merit in putting in to place a standard code of conduct for all the constituent Councils within Chichester District.

Members were further advised that, in the opinion of the Town Clerk, the model code of conduct would provide clarity for Councillors when undertaking their roles, particularly where interacting on social media was involved.

The Town Clerk recommended to the Committee that the model code of conduct, as proposed by Chichester District Council, be adopted by Chichester City Council.

The Mayor, who as a District Councillor was due to Chair the meeting of the Standards Committee; confirmed his support for the model code of conduct and advised Members of further advantages such as more clarity on the sanctions available and clearer and more up to date guidelines on bullying.

After a short further discussion, it was RECOMMENDED to Full Council, to be held on Wednesday 17 February 2021, that the Model Code of Conduct as included in the report with the meeting Agenda be adopted as the Chichester City Council Code of Conduct.

110. REVIEW OF CITY COUNCIL INVESTMENTS

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised her report regarding the review of the City Council's investments that had been circulated with the Agenda and that had been produced as a result of a meeting of the Investments Review Working Group that had been held on 7 December 2020.

She highlighted the two main accounts where the City Council had deposited or invested its funds.

Members were advised that, while the Public Sector Deposit Fund allowed the City Council instant access to the deposited monies, the interest rate that was paid on the balance was very low at 0.0788% (at the time of writing).

Members were further advised that it was preferable to have some funds on instant access and that the City Council's auditors' advice was to hold at least 50% of the annual precept amount in an instant access account to provide cover in the event that precept payments from Chichester District Council were delayed.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported to Members that the Working Group discussion had focussed on the longer term investment that the City Council had made with the Local Authorities Property Fund in case the City Council intended to make any changes to this investment.

The Committee was advised that a good rate of return had been received on this investment to date although the return was dropping given the financial difficulties created by the current pandemic situation. Members were also advised that any withdrawal of the funds invested would result in a substantial loss due to the current value of the investment units and the charges incurred on withdrawal.

The Deputy Town Clerk highlighted the example given in her report of the projected cost of withdrawing from the Property Fund based on 30 November 2020 prices. The loss on the investment would have been £46,097 although, to date, the investment had received over £71,000 in investment income with a recent average of £20,000 per annum.

Members were advised that, although this was a positive outcome for the investment so far, it was not recommended by the Working Group to withdraw the investment at this time due to the loss that might be realised and the difficulty in finding an alternative investment that would realise better returns.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the Working Group had recommended reviewing the Public Sector Deposit Fund due to the very small return it currently offered. The Group had suggested investigating other, short term investments or alternative accounts with better returns, while still retaining the easy access currently available to the City Council.

The Committee were reminded that, at the suggestion of the Mayor, Tim Reedman, a Specialist Financial Planner and Fellow of the Chartered Insurance Institute at Reedman Wealth Management, had been invited to attend a previous Finance Committee meeting (20 October 2020) and that Mr Reedman had offered to review the possibilities for the City Council's investments at no cost to the City Council for his services.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that she recommended accepting Mr Reedman's offer to undertake this work on behalf of the City Council, with a particular focus on the Public Sector Deposit Fund. Members were further advised that any of Mr Reedman's suggestions would be reported to the Working Group and subsequently to the Finance Committee.

The Mayor was supportive of this recommendation and welcomed the opportunity to try and realise stronger returns on the City Council's funds. It was therefore RESOLVED to accept the Deputy Town Clerk's recommendation and to ask Mr Reedman to undertake an options review on the terms stated with particular reference to optimising the funds currently deposited in the Public Sector Deposit Fund.

Councillor Harry left the meeting.

111. WEST SUSSEX PENSION FUND – UPDATE ON EXIT CAP CHANGES

The Deputy Town Clerk gave an overview of the report from the Local Government Association (LGA) regarding changes to the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS) that had been included with the Agenda.

Members were advised that this was for information and awareness due to the complexity of the issues it highlighted.

The Deputy Town clerk summarised the main issue of concern which was the change to the exit cap regulations and the impact this could potentially have on certain types of employee in the event of them being made redundant.

The Committee was informed that a new cap on exit payments of £95,000 had been introduced. The Committee were further informed that this cap was made up of the costs involved in making up pensions shortfalls in the event of a pension scheme member being redundant before they were due to retire.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that, although this amount seemed high, the costs accumulated rapidly and it would be likely to affect employees on lower incomes but still with some years of service left before retirement.

Members were informed that the LGA guidelines were now in conflict with the LGPS regulations which stated that anyone over 55 being made redundant should not be subject to a reduced pension benefit.

Members were further informed that, as a consequence of this conflict, the West Sussex Pension Fund had suspended issuing any further pension exit calculations until such time as this divergence was resolved.

In response to questions from Councillor Apel and the Mayor, the Deputy Town Clerk advised that, as far as the City Council were concerned, the briefing was for information only as this issue would only be relevant should the decision be made to make an employee aged over 55 redundant.

She further advised that, despite this, a redundancy could still occur but that this would involve a complex process including possible cash payments and potential reductions to the pension of the person being made redundant.

Councillor Barrie left the meeting.

112. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – EXPENDITURE APPROVAL PROCESS

The Deputy Town Clerk asked the Committee to confirm that any items, projects or other actions being proposed as part of the Neighbourhood Plan process be discussed at the Planning and Conservation and then recommended to the Finance Committee for approval prior to the work going ahead.

The Committee was advised that this clarification was being sought after recent issues had arisen where invoices were being presented for payment without prior knowledge of the Deputy Town Clerk and lacking a formal audit trail and sign off by the relevant Committees.

The Chairman expressed her support for the creation of a Neighbourhood Plan but also her concerns that the spending had not necessarily been fully documented through the full approval process.

The Mayor reported that a meeting had been held the previous day (Monday 18 January 2021) regarding a reboot of the Neighbourhood Plan process. He further reported that part of the discussions that had taken place included more robust processes for the decision making on the way forward for the Plan as well as the financial processes and audit trail.

Members were advised that, in the opinion of the City Council's Neighbourhood Plan consultant; there may be no further need for additional studies to be commissioned as part of the process and any that were would probably be smaller in scale.

The Chairman welcomed the Mayor's comments and reminded the Committee that, while the money being discussed was Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) and not City Council money; it was still public money and the responsibility of Councillors to manage correctly. Councillor Apel agreed with the Chairman's comments.

The Town Clerk clarified the situation and reminded the Committee that the original terms of reference he had written for the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group had included references to compliance with financial standing orders, the City Council's budgeting processes and reporting lines through the appropriate Committees.

The Committee confirmed the Deputy Town Clerk's request to clarify the processes involved with regards to spending on the creation of the Neighbourhood Plan.

113. NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN – RETROSPECTIVE APPROVAL OF EXPENDITURE ON NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN STUDIES

The Deputy Town Clerk presented the summary of the Neighbourhood Plan expenditure to date that had been included with the Agenda.

Staffing costs and the studies that had been commissioned to date were highlighted.

The Committee was advised that the Mayor had agreed to write a document detailing each report, their purpose and relevance to the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised the costs listed in her report and asked the Finance Committee to approve the spending to date as well as the projected spend as indicated in the quote from Feria Urbanism for taking the Neighbourhood Plan forward.

The Committee RESOLVED to approve the Neighbourhood Plan spending to date as well as the quote from Feria Urbanism, to be funded from CIL funds.

114. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

a. MONTHLY RECONCILIATION WITH EVIDENCE OF BANK STATEMENTS TO END OF NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED to note the monthly reconciliation with evidence of Bank Statements to the end of November 2020

b. LIST OF CHEQUES PAID FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED to note the cheques paid for October and November 2020

c. LIST OF BARCLAYCARD PAYMENTS FOR OCTOBER AND NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED to note the Barclaycard payments for October and November 2020

115. ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AGENDA

- Street paving replacement project

116. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960

RESOLVED that, in the view of the confidential nature of the subject to be discussed, namely confidential business and personnel matters, the public (including the Press) be excluded from the meeting for agenda items 19 and 20.

117. THE MARKET HOUSE – UPDATE ON CURRENT LETTING SITUATION AND COMMUNICATIONS WITH ORION DEVELOPMENTS (SOUTHERN) LTD

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that contact had been received both from Orion Developments (Southern) Ltd and their representative, Vail Williams. Members were advised that no formal written communication regarding these contacts had been received to date despite requests to do so from the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk.

Members were informed that the subject of the contacts was a request that the City Council revisit the base rent currently being paid by Orion Developments (Southern) Ltd for the Market House.

The Deputy Town Clerk expressed the opinion that it was not possible for the Committee to discuss the matter further without more detailed written proposals from Orion Developments (Southern) Ltd or their representative at Vail Williams.

The Chairman agreed that further discussion could not happen at this time.

The Town Clerk supported this approach and reminded the Committee that the written proposal was necessary to ensure that an audit trail supporting any discussion and decisions by the Committee was available.

118. FINANCE TEAM STAFFING UPDATE

The Deputy Town Clerk updated the Committee on the current status of the members of the Finance team. She advised Members that one of the Finance Assistants, who had been on sick leave for an operation; was recovering well and was now on a phased return and starting to undertake light duties with a view to working her full contract hours within the next couple of weeks.

Members were also advised that the second Finance Assistant had been offered a procedure at short notice and had gone on sick leave the previous day for a projected absence of approximately six weeks.

There was good news to give about two other members of staff who had felt unwell but had subsequently received negative Covid19 test results.

The meeting closed at 11.51am

DATE OF THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING: TUESDAY 6 APRIL 2021 AT 2PM