

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
FINANCE COMMITTEE
HELD ON TUESDAY 6 APRIL 2021 AT 2.00PM**

- PRESENT:** Councillors Scicluna (Chairman), Barrie (Vice-Chairman), Dignum 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 and Member Services Support Officer

119. APOLOGIES AND RECORD OF ABSENCE

No apologies were received from Members of the Committee.

Councillor K Hughes was absent from the meeting.

120. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 19 JANUARY 2021

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on 19 January 2021, having been circulated; be approved and signed as a correct record at a later date.

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

Councillor Apel declared a personal interest as Members of Chichester District Council.

The Chairman asked that, in future, a blanket declaration be noted for Committee Members who were also Members of Chichester District Council.

Therefore, it should be noted that the Mayor and Councillors Apel, Barry and Dignum are also Members of Chichester District Council.

122. UPDATES FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

(a) Minute 101 – Speed Indicator Device

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that an order had now been placed for the City Council's Speed Indicator Device and that it should be arriving shortly.

(b) Minute 103(b) - Council House exterior works

The Property Manager reported that the exterior works on the Council House were now nearing completion. He further reported that he had attended a valuation meeting recently with the City Council's surveyor and contractor to discuss the final costs that had been incurred.

Members were advised that some additional issues had been discovered, namely blown render on the west facing Assembly Room exterior walls, and

that it would be prudent to undertake this work while the scaffold was still in place.

Members were further advised that the additional work was not expected to increase the overall cost beyond the contingencies in the budget that had previously been agreed.

The Property Manager informed the Committee that he would be reporting further once the full costs had been calculated and agreed.

(c) **Minute 103(c)** – Council House portico

The Property Manager advised the Committee that the plans recently presented by 50.8 Architects, had now been presented to Chichester District Council for Listed Building Consent.

The Property Manager reported that he had recently had a meeting with the new Historic Buildings Officer at the District Council on a different matter and that he had also mentioned the portico project. Members were advised that the outline of the project had been received positively.

The Mayor informed the Committee that he had been receiving negative comments about the project from local residents and that he responded to these by explaining what the project was and why the City Council were undertaking it.

(d) **Minute 103(d)** – City Council website upgrade

The Member Services Support Officer confirmed that the work was ongoing and regular contact was taking place with the website contractor.

The Committee was informed that the bulk of the background work had been completed and it was now largely look and feel and refreshed photos that needed to be undertaken.

(e) **Minute 103(f)** – City Council Annual Awards

The Town Clerk reported that he felt that the Annual Awards, recently held via Zoom, had gone very smoothly and that the video of the event had been well received.

The Mayor added his thanks to the City Council Officers and others who had made the event possible and also informed Members that he had received positive feedback from those who had attended the Zoom ceremony.

(f) **Minute 103(i)** – Chichester street scene – finger post refurbishment

The Property Manager reported that he had now reviewed the final proofs for the new fingers that were to be installed on the refurbished posts. He further reported that the order had been confirmed with Leander Architectural and that it was hoped that the new fingers would begin to be installed in June 2021.

Members were advised that Crown Civil had started refurbishment of the posts themselves and that the posts and finger installation would initially be focussed on West Street and South Street where they would be of more use for visitors as the expected easing of lockdown commenced.

(g) **Minute 110** – Review of City Council investments

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that, further to a report commissioned from Reedman Wealth Management (**Minute 110 refers**), it had been recommended that the City Council should use the Flagstone Cash Management System to generate better returns on its investments.

Members were further advised that this would require a minimum investment of £250,000 and that Flagstone would suggest suitable investments for those funds.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that the investments within this scheme would be on short notice investment periods and that funds would be reinvested on the advice of Flagstone on expiry of each short term period.

The Chairman asked the Deputy Town Clerk to confirm she was happy with this proposal. Members were advised by the Deputy Town Clerk that this system may be more labour intensive than previous investments but that it was her opinion that this may help Council better realise a return on its money.

(h) **Minute 111** – West Sussex Pension Fund – exit cap changes

The Deputy Town Clerk referred the Committee to her updated report that had been included with the agenda.

Members were advised that, further to the earlier meeting, the Government had now scrapped plans to impose a £95,000 cap on exit charges following concerns raised by a number of organisations.

Members were further advised that, despite this, a reintroduction of a cap in the future had not been ruled out.

(i) **Minutes 112 and 113** – Neighbourhood Plan update

The Mayor updated the Committee on recent changes to the Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group.

Members were advised that the new Steering Group had had its first meeting and that the way ahead for the Chichester Neighbourhood Plan was now clearer.

Councillor Apel asked for a copy of the recording of the Steering Group meeting. The Mayor agreed to supply a physical copy to overcome issues being experienced with YouTube.

123. **REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING**

A copy of the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to 28 February 2021 had been circulated to all Members with the Agenda.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised the Committee that the summary in the monitoring report should say "...report shows a **surplus** of £10,153 against the budget to the end of February 2021".

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:

- Cemetery costs – Members were advised that, due to increased burials and lower maintenance costs this budget was currently underspent. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that this could change at any time as the final bill was often presented very close to the end of the financial year.
- Cyclical maintenance budget – the Committee was advised that the cyclical maintenance budget for 2021/22 and 2022/23 would be used to fund the City Council's contribution to the improvement works that were

being part funded by a SALIX grant and undertaken in conjunction with Save Money Cut Carbon.

- Hall booking income – The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the expected shortfall for room bookings in 2020/21 would be as much as £46,000. Members were reminded that room fees had been frozen for 2021/22 and also advised that the situation for 2021/22 was not expected to improve greatly, although this would depend on Government guidelines and lockdown easing.

The Chairman commented on the large increase in the water bill at St Pauls allotments. The Property Manager responded that this was likely to be the result of a small leak and also taps that had been left running for extended periods of time.

The Property Manager advised the Committee that, as a result of abuse of the water supply, a per rod charge for water was currently being considered as an addition to the allotment rent that was currently being paid. Members were further advised that Chichester City Council was among a minority of authorities that did not currently impose a water charge at its allotments.

The Mayor responded to the note about the contribution of £5000 from the City Council to help set up the Mayor's Hardship Fund. He thanked the Committee for this and reported that the Hardship Fund had now distributed approximately £11,000 to 70 people who asked for help.

124. 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.

The Committee were advised that, to date, £14,228.15 had already been paid for the external works on the Council House with the remaining bills expected in due course.

125. 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 informed Members that the additional expenditure that had been incurred since the last meeting was the gritting of the precinct in the cold weather as well as the cost of the Speed Indicator Device had been purchased since the agenda papers had been distributed.

Members were also advised that the balance of £7076.15 in the Public Realm budget would be carried forward to the 2021/22 budget year.

126. CITY COUNCIL FINAL ACCOUNTS – 2019/2020

The Deputy Town Clerk highlighted the document in the Committee papers that had been received from the City Council's external auditors.

She advised the Committee that this showed that the City Council's final accounts for 2019/20 had been approved by the external auditors.

Members' attention was drawn to the comments in the report regarding the minor error that had previously been made in the public display periods for the Annual Governance Statement.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that this had been noted and rectified for the most recent set of accounts.

127. NEW CITY COUNCIL FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

The Deputy Town Clerk asked the Committee to note the new Financial Regulations document that had been circulated with the agenda.

She advised the Committee that the document had had some minor revisions to the text since it had last been presented; and that the document now followed the same formatting as the City Council Standing Orders.

The Chairman noted the new document and thanked the Officers for their work.

Post meeting note: The Town Clerk has advised that, given the textual changes and significant reformatting since the previous regulations approved in 2017; the revised document should be presented to Full Council on 21 April 2021 for approval so that the new Chichester City Council Financial Regulations (revised February 2021) can be adopted as the governing document for the City Council.

128. MINUTES OF THE PROPERTY SUB-COMMITTEE MEETING – 24 MARCH 2021

The Committee noted the minutes of the Property Sub-Committee, held on Wednesday 24 March 2021, that had been previously circulated to Councillors.

Councillor Apel asked the Property Manager whether contact had finally been made with Hyde Housing with regards to the notice of termination of the lease on the Durnford Allotments site.

The Property Manager confirmed that contact had now been made and that Hyde Housing had accepted the terms of the termination.

Members were advised that, on termination of the lease, Hyde Housing had confirmed that the existing allotment tenants would be moved on to new tenancy agreements with Hyde Housing. The Property Manager also advised that he would be discussing the Data Protection implications of supplying tenant details to Hyde with the Member Services Support Officer.

Councillor Scicluna asked what would be happening about the water supply at the Durnford Close site once the termination had taken effect.

The Committee was informed that the water supply account would be cancelled in line with the date of the termination and that responsibility for it would then transfer to Hyde Housing.

Councillor Apel expressed concerns that the City Council might continue to be approached if allotment tenants experienced problems after the termination of the City Council's lease.

The Property Manager reported that he had suggested to the allotment tenants that they should consider setting up a tenants association to enable them to have a greater say in the running of the site.

The Property Manager thanked Councillor Apel for her help with establishing contact with Hyde Housing.

It was RESOLVED that the minutes of the Property Sub-Committee meeting held on 24 March 2021, having been previously circulated, be approved and adopted.

129. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

- a. MONTHLY RECONCILIATION WITH EVIDENCE OF BANK STATEMENTS TO END OF FEBRUARY 2021

RESOLVED to note the monthly reconciliation with evidence of Bank Statements to the end of February 2021

- b. LIST OF CHEQUES PAID FOR DECEMBER 2020 AND JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2021

RESOLVED to note the cheques paid for December 2020 and January and February 2021

- c. LIST OF BARCLAYCARD PAYMENTS FOR DECEMBER 2020 AND JANUARY AND FEBRUARY 2021

RESOLVED to note the Barclaycard payments for December 2020 and January and February 2021

130. ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AGENDA

- Preliminary discussion regarding potential future responsibilities of the City Council

131. 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 14 and 15.

132. CARDS FOR GOOD CAUSES

The Deputy Town Clerk informed the Committee that she had been contacted by Cards for Good Causes (CfGC) further to their 2020 room hire.

The Committee were advised that CfGC had outlined the pressures they were under owing to the difficulties experienced in the retail sector due to lockdowns and the Covid19 pandemic.

Members were further advised that CfGC had asked for a consideration on the fees that they had agreed for their 2020 room hire.

The Deputy Town Clerk reminded the Committee that the fees being discussed for 2020 had already been favourably reviewed against the 2019 fees and an agreement reached with CfGC on that basis. She advised that this consideration was agreed on an understanding of the Covid19 situation at the time but the reality had turned out to be much worse than expected.

Councillors discussed the issues that had been raised, with general agreement being expressed that, rather than retrospectively debating the 2020 fee with CfGC; consideration should be given to any booking they may wish to make in 2021.

Councillors also agreed that, while it would not be ideal to lose the booking of a long standing user of the Old Court Room; consideration should also be given to the City Council's financial situation.

After a further debate, it was proposed, seconded and RESOLVED that CfGC be offered a further consideration on any booking they wished to make for the run up to Christmas 2021.

The Committee also agreed that the Deputy Town Clerk should be given discretion to contact CfGC on behalf of the City Council to discuss this matter further.

133. FINANCE TEAM STAFFING UPDATE

The Deputy Town Clerk advised the Committee that one of the Finance Assistants in her team had handed in her notice since the last meeting of the Finance Committee and that Tuesday 6 April 2021 had been her last day working for the City Council.

Members were reminded about the background to the appointment of the second Finance Assistant and, particularly, the salary grading that had been applied to that post at the time.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed that Committee that the remaining Finance Assistant was now undertaking a large amount of the work previously undertaken by the retiring member of staff and it was her opinion that the salary grading should now be updated to reflect this increased responsibility.

The Committee was further informed that, while this would represent an increase in the salary bill for the second Finance Assistant, there would be an overall saving of £5,326.88 while the vacant post remained unfilled.

Members of the Committee expressed concern that the Deputy Town Clerk may be increasing her own work as a result of not immediately replacing the retiring member of staff.

Members were advised that, with support from other Officers, the Deputy Town Clerk would be able to manage the workload for her team in the short term. She also advised Members that she felt that trying to recruit to a 10 hour post in the current climate, in addition to any training workload, would create more difficulties than managing the vacancy in the short term.

It was therefore RESOLVED that the salary regrading as proposed (SP 11-17) be applied to the remaining Finance Assistant's post with the starting point being SP11 (£21,748 per annum) pro rata for 15 hours a week.

The Committee Members expressed their thanks to the Deputy Town Clerk.

The meeting closed at 2.51pm

DATE OF THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING: TUESDAY 15 JUNE 2021 AT 2PM