

**MINUTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE
FINANCE COMMITTEE
HELD ON THURSDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2020 AT 2.00PM**

PRESENT: Councillors Scicluna (Chairman) and K Hughes

EX-OFFICIO: The Mayor (Councillor Plowman), Deputy Mayor (Councillor J Hughes) and Councillor Apel (Chairman of Community Affairs)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor Sharp, Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk, Property Manager and Member Services Support Officer

80. APOLOGIES AND RECORD OF ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Barrie (Vice-Chairman), Dignum and Harry (part way through the meeting).

Councillor Joy was absent from the meeting.

81. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 20 OCTOBER 2020 AND THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE FINANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON 2 NOVEMBER 2020

RESOLVED that the Minutes of the meeting of the Finance Committee held on October 2020 and the Special Meeting of the Finance Committee held on 2 November 2020, having been circulated; be approved and signed as a correct record at a later date.

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

The Mayor and Councillors Apel and K Hughes declared a personal interest as Members of Chichester District Council.

At this point the Chairman moved to take Supplementary Agenda item 1 out of order.

83. CHICHESTER CANAL TRUST REQUEST FOR CIL FUNDING FOR REPAIR WORKS TO CANAL BANKS

The Chairman reminded the Committee about the application from the Chichester Canal Trust regarding CIL funds to assist with repair works to the canal banks in Chichester. Members noted the significant efforts being made by the Canal Trust to raise funds from alternative sources and all agreed that the match funding requirement had been met.

It was therefore RESOLVED to make the payment to Chichester Canal Trust in the amount of £10,000 to be funded from CIL receipts.

84. UPDATES FROM THE PREVIOUS MINUTES

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

- **Minutes 7(c), 47 and 64** – Chichester City Council Business Plan
- **Minutes 20, 47 and 64** – Agenda and Minuting Software

- **Minutes 21, 47 and 64** – Council House telephone system upgrade
- **Minute 64(c)** – Council House exterior works
- **Minute 64(d)** - Council House portico
- **Minute 64(h)** - City Council website upgrade
- **Minute 64(i)** - Council House energy and water audit
- **Minute 64(j)** - Litten Gardens paving
- **Minute 71** - Speed indicator device
- **Minute 74** - Neighbourhood Plan budget

(a) **Minute 67** – Draft infrastructure plan

The Deputy Town Clerk reminded Members that the recent revision of the City Council's entries on the Infrastructure Plan had resulted in the addition of the £10,000 allocation for the Chichester Canal Trust application which had now been approved for payment.

Members were advised that the consultation had finished on 16 November 2020 so no further changes could be made at this time.

(b) **Minute 64(l)** – Chichester Street Naming book

The Member Services Support Officer informed the Committee that the drafting process for the new edition of the Street Naming book had been completed and that the printing presses were rolling. Members were advised that the physical copies should be available within the next few days.

(c) **Minute 64(n)** – Civic and Covid19 Awards

The Town Clerk reminded Councillors about the notification previously circulated for both the Civic Awards and Covid 19 Awards being held on 10th February and 2nd March respectively in Chichester Cathedral. Advance planning for the Civic Awards would be commenced soon. It was noted that the present seating capacity in the Nave was 70 (the Assembly Room currently half this number) so the invitation list would need to be adjusted accordingly. Further details of the administrative arrangements would be sent to Councillors nearer the dates of the events.

(d) **Minute 79** – Remembrance Day videos

The Member Services Support Officer informed Members that the three videos that had been created to commemorate Remembrance Sunday 2020 had now been submitted to Screen Archive South East as part of a project they were running to gather together videos specifically produced in response to the Covid19 pandemic. Members were further informed that this initiative was supported by West Sussex County Council among others, with the Novium Museum also playing a role.

The Chairman and Members thanked Clive Hand of Chichester Film and Video Makers and the Member Services Support Officer for their efforts in producing the videos which had been well received and garnered some very positive feedback.

(e) **Minute 78** – Funding for Rotary Christmas tree.

At the Special Meeting of the last Committee held on 2nd November, the Committee had agreed to make a £500 contribution towards the Rotary Christmas tree. However, a few days after making the payment, it had been discovered that Rotary had made a separate grant application to West Sussex County Council for this amount and the County had likewise made a grant of £500. Further discussions had taken place with the Chairman of the Committee, the Mayor and Rotary and the City Council's £500 had been returned. Rotary had apologised for the confusion as the timeline between submitting the County

grant and hearing the outcome had been several months. It was hoped that valuable lessons had been learnt in this matter.

85. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING

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

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that this report was currently showing a projected deficit of £2,418. She advised Members that this was significantly lower than she had expected given the current pandemic and lockdown situation and that the large fall in Council House income had been primarily offset by significant underspends in other budgets such as Chichester in Bloom, Casual Staff hours and Council House cleaning.

The Deputy Town Clerk outlined the cumulative variances that had appeared in the Monitoring Report for financial year 2020/21.

The Mayor responded to the report and praised the Deputy Town Clerk for having managed to keep the budget under control during these difficult times. The Deputy Mayor added his further thanks for the efforts of the Deputy Town Clerk.

86. 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.

87. PUBLIC REALM PROJECTS

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

Members agreed that the Public Realm budget was a very important way for the City Council to be able to undertake projects to improve the environment within and look of the City.

88. CITY COUNCIL BUDGET 2021/2022

A copy of the budget for 2021/2022 and the Deputy Town Clerk's report had been circulated to all Members with the agenda. The report included the Earmarked Reserves Balance at 18 November 2020, the Planned Maintenance Programme for 2019-2029 and a Schedule of Fees and Charges for 2021/2022.

The Budget for 2021/2022 showed an 8.9% increase in the Precept. The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the draft tax base figure received from Chichester District Council had shown a 0.1% increase from 2020/2021. Members were advised that this was because the number of Council Tax reduction applications had increased despite the growing number of new developments and therefore the tax base increase had been flattened.

Members were advised that, for 2021/2022, the Band D Council Tax would show an increase of £5.15 per annum on the 2020/2021 figure. This represented an increase of 9.9p per week for Band D properties.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that the Officers recommended that the City Council fees and charges be frozen at 2020/2021 levels as it was felt that any

increases in the current climate would be inappropriate. This was supported by the Committee.

The Mayor asked that the Gold level membership for the Chichester City Band be renewed for 2021/2022. He expressed his strong support for the City Band and its work and felt that, as one of the few organisations authorised to use the City Council crest, it would be appropriate for the subscription to be continued.

Members discussed the challenges faced by low income households in the current climate and agreed that, while any increase in the City Council precept would be bad news, the size of the increase for the City Council was relatively small and had been kept as low as possible.

Councillor K Hughes asked about the Council Tax bands and what effect the precept increase had on the other bands. The Deputy Town Clerk explained that Band D was used as the median and properties in that band paid nine ninths of the precept while lower bands paid a smaller proportion and higher bands paid gradually increasing ratios with the top band paying 18 ninths, or effectively double.

The Chairman and Members thanked the Deputy Town Clerk for her efforts in managing the budget and presenting a moderate increase on the Precept despite the various challenges facing the City Council's revenue and expenditure, in particular the loss of income caused by the Covid19 pandemic lockdowns.

It was RECOMMENDED to Full Council that:

- (i) the City Council budget for 2021/2022 be £806,406 resulting in a Precept Demand of £702,156 and a Band D Council Tax payment of £62.94 (an increase of 9.9p per week); an overall increase of 8.9% on the Precept - providing the Draft Tax Base remained unchanged at 11,155.5;
- (ii) the Earmarked Reserves Balances to 18 November 2020 be approved;
- (iii) the Planned Maintenance Programme for 2019-2029 be noted;
- (iv) the Schedule of Fees and Charges for 2021/2022 be approved.

89. DISCRETIONARY GRANTS WORKING GROUP

The Chairman updated the Committee on the recent meeting held by the Discretionary Grants Working Group which had been formed by the Community Affairs Committee to discuss the challenges experienced during the recent Grant application processes including the increasing number of regular and large applications.

Members were given a summary of some of the discussions that had taken place including a proposal to split the grants applications according to the amount being asked for and assessing larger grants using a process similar to the New Homes Bonus Grants with organisations asked to present a case to the Committee in support of their application.

The Committee was advised that the Working Group felt it was more important than ever that smaller local organisations be supported by the Discretionary Grants and that the Group proposed that the smaller applications were assessed first with remaining funds being allocated to the larger applications.

The Committee was further advised that the Group had agreed that it would be a more effective use of the Grant budget if the applications were only accepted once a year, in the Spring.

Councillor Apel, as Chairman of the Community Affairs Committee, asked for confirmation that this would be a trial change to the process lasting one year and that any decisions on the proposals would be taken by the Community Affairs Committee.

The Chairman of the Finance Committee confirmed both of the questions from Councillor Apel and the Member Services Support Officer further confirmed that the outcome of the Working Group discussion would be presented for debate and decisions at the next meeting of the Community Affairs Committee on Monday January 11 2021.

90. TREES – UPDATE ON FUND RAISING FOR PUBLIC TREE PLANTING IN CHICHESTER

The Chairman thanked Councillor Sharp for the information regarding the recent community fund raising efforts for the planting of new street trees, a summary of which had been circulated with the agenda.

Councillor Sharp informed the Committee that, through these fundraising efforts and combined with funding from the charity Trees for Cities; 70 new street trees would be planted in the Whyke, Parklands and Orchard Street areas of the city.

Members were advised that funds were still available for the planting of additional trees in other areas of the City. However, Councillor Sharp felt that, as Chichester District Council had recently advertised for a Trees Outside Woodlands Officer, whose job it would be to source funding for and the management of the planting of additional trees in the District; the broader community involvement in tree fundraising might reduce in favour of this new role's activities.

Councillor Sharp went on to suggest that the currently postponed Chichester Tree Summit could be reworked to allow a more limited event, involving landowners and other stake holders, to be hosted online. She advised the Committee that she felt it was important that this discussion went ahead as soon as possible.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Sharp and all the donors and volunteers for their efforts in increasing the number of street trees around the city.

91. PROPOSAL FROM CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL AND CHICHESTER BID FOR FUNDING TOWARDS INSTALLATION OF CITY CENTRE QUEUE SHELTERS AND RESPITE POINTS

Members were referred to the proposal document that had been circulated with the agenda.

The Chairman advised the Committee that she had recently attended a meeting of the District Council's Recovery Group and that she had submitted a list of questions about the project but had not to date received any responses.

Councillor Sharp gave further background to the proposal and emphasised that it had been put forward in an effort to make Chichester more individual and more attractive for visitors in the wake of the Covid19 pandemic and lockdowns.

After a lengthy debate, Members agreed that additional information would be needed before any more discussion could take place. It was agreed that the item would be deferred to the next Finance Committee on 19 January 2021.

Officers were asked to request more detailed proposals from Chichester BID and Chichester District Council as well as answers to the questions set out by the Chairman. This information would then be presented to the January 2021 Finance Committee.

92. REQUEST FROM CHICHESTER DISTRICT COUNCIL TO TRANSFER MANAGEMENT OF CITY BUS SHELTERS TO CITY COUNCIL MANAGEMENT

The Mayor expressed his support for the principle of discussing the ownership of the bus shelters in the city as he thought it would provide for greater continuity of service for the city centre facilities.

Members expressed concern that the proposal from Chichester District Council appeared to involve transfer of all the bus shelters across the District to the City Council rather than just those shelters within the City Parish boundary.

The Committee agreed that further discussion could not take place until there was greater clarity about the proposal and the underlying reasons for the approach from the District Council.

Members asked the Property Manager to make enquiries with the District Council on this subject and to report his findings back to the Finance Committee meeting to be held on 19 January 2021.

93. CHICHESTER STREET SCENE – REFURBISHMENT OF CITY CENTRE FINGER POSTS. REQUEST FOR RELEASE OF CIL FUNDING UNDER THE INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

The Deputy Town Clerk introduced this item and the Property Manager, who had spent considerable time on this project with BID colleagues, gave the Committee an synopsis of the work done.

After further discussion, the Committee agreed that it would be preferable to proceed with the finger post refurbishment to help improve the street scene in Chichester.

It was therefore RESOLVED that the City Council should agree to part fund the finger post refurbishment in the amount of UP TO £20,000, to be paid for from CIL receipts.

94. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

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

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

b. LIST OF CHEQUES PAID FOR AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED to note the cheques paid for August and September 2020

c. LIST OF BARCLAYCARD PAYMENTS FOR AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER 2020

RESOLVED to note the Barclaycard payments for August and September 2020

95. ITEMS TO BE INCLUDED ON THE NEXT AGENDA

- Street/queue shelters proposal
- Bus shelters
- Finger posts

96. 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 matters, the public (including the Press) be excluded from the meeting for agenda item 17.

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

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised the confidential documentation regarding the current negotiations between Orion Developments (Southern) Ltd and Bills Restaurants on the matter of their tenancy in the Market House that had been circulated with the agenda.

The Committee discussed the issues raised in the documents. The advice given by the City Council's Property Consultant in response to the request from Orion Southern Developments (Southern) Ltd with regards to the matters at hand was noted.

Members further noted that this issue should be considered within the wider context of the existing head lease as well as the current difficult economic environment under the national lockdowns and the Covid19 pandemic.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed the Committee that the City Council's solicitor had advised that, with the existing moratorium on rent arrears due to end shortly, there should be no reason for concern regarding ongoing payments under the lease terms.

In response to a question from the Chairman, the Deputy Town Clerk assured the Committee that any changes to unit leases proposed by Orion Developments (Southern) Ltd had to be submitted to the City Council for approval.

The Mayor expressed his support for granting the request and informed Members that, in his opinion, he felt it was better to have a tenants in the units paying some rent rather than risking further vacancies in the Market House.

The Chairman asked Members to confirm that it was their understanding that the City Council's advisers had supported the proposal and also to confirm their support for the proposal from Orion Developments (Southern) Ltd.

Following a short additional discussion it was RESOLVED to accept the side letter variation to the unit lease as outlined in the agenda papers.

The meeting closed at 3.44pm

DATE OF THE NEXT ORDINARY MEETING: TUESDAY 19 JANUARY 2021 AT 2PM