



CHICHESTER CITY COUNCIL

NOTES OF THE VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FINANCE WORKING GROUP HELD ON THURSDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 2.00PM

- PRESENT:** Councillors Scicluna (Chairman), Barrie (Vice-Chairman), Dignum and Harry
- EX-OFFICIO:** The Mayor (Councillor J Hughes), the Deputy Mayor (Councillor Joy), Councillor Apel (Chairman of Community Affairs) and Plowman (Chairman of Planning and Conservation).
- ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:** Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk (Responsible Finance Officer), Member Services Support Officer, a member of the public.

The Chairman advised Members that she was still experiencing technical problems with her internet connection and asked that the Mayor take over chairing the meeting should any difficulties be experienced.

59. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor K Hughes

60. MINUTES OF THE FINANCE WORKING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 19 OCTOBER 2021 AND THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE FINANCE WORKING GROUP HELD ON 28 OCTOBER 2021.

AGREED that the minutes of the Finance Working Group meeting held on 19 October 2021 and the Special meeting of the Finance Working Group held on 28 October 2021, having been previously circulated, be approved and signed as a correct record at a later date.

61. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP IN MATTERS ON THE AGENDA FOR THIS MEETING

Councillors Apel, Dignum and Plowman declared an interest as Members of Chichester District Council.

Councillors Plowman and Scicluna declared an interest as members of the Murray Club.

62. UPDATE FROM PREVIOUS MINUTES

a) **Minute 29(a) – Speed Indicator Device (SID)**

The Town Clerk reminded Members that he had been working with residents in St Pancras to try to gain approval for the installation of the SID in that area.

Members were advised that Scottish and Southern Electricity (SSE) had declined to give permission to use their lampposts and that there had been no response from Balfour Beatty regarding costs of the installation of a new post.

Members were further advised that the Property Manager had now taken over the process and was liaising with the resident groups to try to resolve the issues.

The Chairman informed the Working Group that residents in Broyle Road had been complaining about traffic moving at excessive speeds.

The Town Clerk responded by reminding Members that the residents would need to form an action group and liaise with the Police about the use of SIDs in their area.

The Chairman queried whether Parklands Residents Association had committed to purchasing an additional SID for use in the city.

The Town Clerk advised Members that this was also his understanding but that no updates had been forthcoming.

Councillor Plowman informed the Working Group that he would get an update from the Parklands Residents Association and advise Members accordingly.

b) Minute 46(iii) – Remembrance Sunday

The Town Clerk advised Members that the event had gone well with a good turnout and a lot of appreciation from those attending.

The Chairman said that she considered the photographer who accompanied the MP had not treated the event with respect; this was a solemn occasion and not a photo opportunity. Several other members, including the Mayor, echoed this view and it was agreed that the MP's office be advised of the Council's concern and the request made that this inappropriate behaviour is not repeated.

The Mayor recorded his frustration at the noisy lorry that had caused interruption to the Gospel reading he was delivering at the service.

Councillor Plowman also expressed his disappointment that the reporting on the event had focused on the main parade and not the solemn Remembrance at Litten Gardens: with no coverage of the Mayor laying the wreath on behalf of the city of Chichester.

The Deputy Mayor suggested that, in the future, the City Council appoint an official photographer to record the event and that these photographs could be used in press releases rather than relying on others to supply them.

Councillor Harry advised Members that she felt that the event had been very successful.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Working Group, asked that the Officers and volunteers who had planned and staffed the event be thanked for their efforts in helping it run smoothly.

The Mayor commented on a problem with a very noisy vehicle passing Litten Gardens at the same time that he had been speaking. He advised Members that he felt that this had been unnecessary.

The Town Clerk advised that the driver of the vehicle had been spoken to about his behaviour and that it was unlikely to happen again.

c) Minute 58 – Neighbourhood Plan – request from the Steering Group for funding for administrative support

The Chairman reminded Members that the funding had been agreed subject to the new Steering Group (SG) being formed and an assessment of the workload undertaken.

The Town Clerk advised the Working Group that the SG had met earlier that week and that the positive news was that approximately 20 volunteers had so far come forward to get involved with the Chichester Neighbourhood Plan.

He also advised that the meeting had been largely successful but had presented some challenges when discussing the way forward.

Members were further reminded that the Finance Working Group decision had specified that the SG should appoint a Secretary for the group who would be responsible for producing the meetings agendas and minutes.

Councillor Plowman informed the Working Group that he had agreed to undertake this role for the time being as no volunteers had been forthcoming at the meeting.

He further informed Members that those present at the SG meeting had discussed the use of a virtual assistant to act as secretary and that a resolution had been passed to proceed with the recruitment of this additional support with the SG Chairman and himself being tasked with looking at the recruitment process.

The Chairman referred Members to the SG Terms of Reference and its stipulation that the SG should have a Secretary in place as part of its constitution.

In response to a question from Councillor Apel about the recruitment process, Councillor Plowman repeated his earlier comment that the SG had delegated this to himself and the SG Chairman.

Councillor Plowman informed the Working Group that, looking beyond the Secretary discussion, the SG was in the process of forming a group of Organisers with the task of mounting a public exhibition in early 2022 to keep the public informed about the work of progress of the Neighbourhood Plan.

The Town Clerk reminded Members that the SG Secretary and the potential administrative assistant were two distinct roles with the latter providing clerical support to the former.

He also reminded Members of the text of the Finance Working Group minute that had given the approval for the possible recruitment of a virtual assistant (**Special Meeting, October 28 2021, Minute 58**) and that this had stipulated an open recruitment process if the need for the resource had been identified.

The Deputy Mayor asked whether the SG had been monitoring potential changes to Planning law and regulations and any potential effects this may have on the Neighbourhood Plan. He advised Members that there had been discussion about Neighbourhood Plans no longer being included in the proposed Planning White Paper.

Councillor Plowman responded that he had discussed this issue with the Head of Planning at Chichester District Council who had advised him that work should continue with the Neighbourhood Plan as their future position in Planning regulations had not been decided.

The Chairman informed Members that she had been impressed with the volunteers who had attended one of the recent SG meetings and that she felt that their contributions would be very positive for the Neighbourhood Plan.

She also reiterated the importance of the SG adhering to its Terms of Reference.

Councillor Plowman expressed his agreement and advised Members that, whilst the additional volunteers were a positive step, the formal make up of the core SG had yet to be decided.

The Chairman informed the Working Group that she was sceptical about the need for a virtual assistant but that she was prepared to allow the process to proceed.

63. REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING TO OCTOBER 2021

A copy of the Revenue Budget Monitoring Report to 31 October 2021 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 £27,092.

She advised Members that this was higher than she had expected but that this figure also included the balance of the Public Realm budget.

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised the cumulative variances that had appeared in the Monitoring Report for financial year 2021/22. These included a significant increase in the Street Naming income and higher expenditure on tree works due to ash die back.

Members were advised that it was hoped that the reduced floral planting budget would remain sufficient going forward and that the City Council would be receiving a grant to the value of 75% of the £13,897 that had been spent on the Save Money Cut Carbon initiative.

Members were further advised that the City Council had received £334,000 in CIL receipt monies so far this financial year.

The Chairman expressed the opinion that the report was encouraging and the Deputy Town Clerk responded that she was pleased with the current situation.

In response to a question from Councillor Apel, the Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that she had been cautious with her income projections due to the ongoing uncertainty around the future.

Councillor Plowman responded to the report, highlighting the better than expected position of the City Council's finances at this point in the year. He also agreed that with the cautious approach being taken.

64. 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.

Members were advised that the Deputy Town Clerk was recommending an increase in the annual amount being allocated to the Council House Reserve to ensure that sufficient funds were available should work on the building be needed.

65. 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 summarised the expenditure to date on Public Realm projects.

She advised Members that the contribution to the BID Rangers was likely to rise in the new financial year as a discount had been applied in 2021/22 when the Rangers patrols had been suspended. It was expected that this would cost approximately £17,000 in 2022/23.

66. CITY COUNCIL BUDGET 2022/2023

A copy of the budget for 2022/2023 and the Deputy Town Clerk's report had been circulated to all Members with the agenda. The report included the updated Planned Maintenance Programme for 2019-2029 and a Schedule of Fees and Charges for 2022/2023.

The Deputy Town Clerk reminded Members that this document had been updated since the draft budget presented at the October meeting of the Finance Working Group.

She advised Members that a significant increase in the Council Tax Base of 3.19% had allowed for increases to be made in some budgets while keeping the increase for band D Council Tax payers to 1.79%, or 2.1p per week.

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised the other changes that had been made since the draft budget including an extension of Chichester District Council funding for the Wardens service, an increase in the annual set aside for the Council House Reserve to £28,000, a provision for energy efficiency projects of £16,000 and an increase in the Computer Replacement Budget of £4,000.

The Deputy Town Clerk then recommended to Members that the City Council's budget for 2022/23 be agreed providing that the tax base remained unchanged from the draft figure provided by Chichester District Council at 11,512.10.

The recommended budget to be agreed would be £851,965 with a Precept demand of £737,615 and a band D of £64.07, an increase of 1.79%.

Councillor Plowman expressed his support for the budget as presented.

He also expressed concerns about the Council's spending on utility bills given the current market conditions and asked whether this had been taken in to account in the new budget.

The Deputy Town Clerk informed Members that she had reviewed this expenditure and advised Members that, as previous years had been in surplus as a result of the renegotiated energy contracts, the current budget level should be sufficient.

It was then AGREED TO RECOMMEND to Full Council that:

- a. the City Council budget for 2022/2023 be £851,965 resulting in a Precept Demand of £737,615 and a Band D Council Tax payment of £64.07 (an increase of 2.1p per week); an overall increase of 1.79% on the Precept - providing the Draft Tax Base remained unchanged at 11,512.10;
- b. the Earmarked Reserves Balances to 18 November 2021 be approved;
- c. the updated Planned Maintenance Programme for 2019-2029 be noted;
- d. the Schedule of Fees and Charges for 2022/2023 be approved.

Councillor Apel advised Members that at a recent meeting on the subject of the Season of Culture, methods for making the approach from the theatre carpark to the city centre more attractive had been discussed.

She further advised that Councillor Dignum had indicated that the City Council should be financially involved in such a project.

Councillor Dignum raised the issue of the condition of the main streets in the city centre and expressed the strong opinion that the City Council should make the funds available for the resurfacing work to go ahead by significantly raising the Precept or borrowing the money to fund the work.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised Members that she was strongly opposed to this and stated that she did not feel it was proper that the City Council's finances should be used in this way when it was the County Council who were responsible for the Highways.

After a short further debate, it was agreed that this discussion would be more appropriate for consideration at the Property Working Group.

The Deputy Mayor asked why the City Council was moving forward with a boiler replacement project when it should be looking to install a battery system, charged by the solar panels and cheap overnight electricity tariffs; to significantly reduce its utility costs and carbon footprint rather than looking to install new gas boilers.

The Member Services Support Officer explained that the Property Manager had been working with Save Money Cut Carbon on the proposals and that the projects being looked at were considered to be the best way forward. He further explained that the boilers being proposed were significantly more efficient than the current devices and that they were also hydrogen ready should the national gas network move over to hydrogen supply from natural gas.

After a short further debate, the Chairman suggested, and Members agreed, that this discussion should be taken to the Property Working Group.

67. UPDATE ON NEW HOMES BONUS APPROVALS

The Deputy Town Clerk summarised the letter that had been received from Chichester District Council confirming the New Homes Bonus allocations for 2021/22.

She reminded Members that the Chichester Shed had been allocated £5,000 and the Chichester Runners, following the rejection of a sum allocated by the City Council; had been allocated £43,000.

Members were advised that the letter also stated that the determination process for New Homes Bonus allocations would be referred to the District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee following concerns raised by the City Council about money being allocated against the City Council's wishes and the amounts being discussed being above the previously stated limits.

The Chairman expressed her disappointment at what had happened but advised Members that she felt there was very little that could be done on this occasion.

Councillor Apel, as Chairman of the District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee, informed Members that, subject to the availability of New Homes Bonus allocations in 2022/23, her Committee would definitely be reviewing the process and the comments made by the City Council.

After a short further discussion during which Councillor Plowman clarified the process, it was AGREED TO RECOMMEND to Full Council to accept the terms of the City Council's New Homes Bonus allocations for 2021/22 as outlined in the letter from the District Council dated 8 November 2021.

68. EXTERNAL AUDIT OF ANNUAL ACCOUNTS – 2020/2021 – BY MOORE UK

The Deputy Town Clerk advised the Working Group that the External Auditor had signed off the City Council's accounts for 2020/21 with no items of concern being raised as of the 28 September 2021.

69. RISK MANAGEMENT ACTION PLAN

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that the Finance Assistant had now updated the Risk Management Plan.

She briefly reminded Members about the review process and summarised some of the action points that had been identified.

The Working Group was informed that some new actions had been included in the report and that these had largely arisen because of the pandemic.

Members were also informed that, as a consequence of this, there was very little that could be done to resolve the action points at the current time.

70. MINUTES OF THE PROPERTY WORKING GROUP MEETING HELD ON 8 NOVEMBER 2021

The Chairman noted the following items:

- a) **Damp in the Town Clerk's office** – immediate works required to rectify rising damp in the Town Clerk's office to be undertaken by DB Damp Proofing Services at a cost of £1,670 to be paid from Council House Maintenance.
- b) **Lidl to Story Road link** – strictly limited further work by the Property Team to lay additional aggregate as a short term repair to the path.

The Chairman informed Members that she was aware that the City Council's Property Team had undertaken remedial works to improve the condition of the path in the short term while a longer term solution was sought.

The Mayor thanked the Property Team for their efforts and advised the Working Group that he felt that the work undertaken so far improved the situation significantly.

AGREED to adopt the minutes of the Property Working Group meeting held on 8 November 2021.

71. ITEMS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

- a) MONTHLY RECONCILIATION WITH EVIDENCE OF BANK STATEMENTS TO END OF OCTOBER 2021

RESOLVED to note the monthly reconciliation with evidence of bank statements to the end of October 2021

- b) LIST OF PAYMENTS MADE FOR JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2021

RESOLVED to note the payments made for July, August, September and October 2021.

- c) LIST OF BARCLAYCARD PAYMENTS FOR JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2021

RESOLVED to note the Barclaycard payments for July, August, September and October 2021.

72. ITEMS FOR INCLUSION ON NEXT AGENDA

- Neighbourhood Plan
- IBABS agenda and minuting software demonstration
- Staffing structure

73. CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting due to the confidential nature of the business to be transacted, namely commercial and staffing matters.

74. UPDATE ON THE MARKET HOUSE

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the new lease on unit 4 of the Market House (the former Patisserie Valerie site) had been signed following the completion of the agreement of the terms.

She also reported that developments involving the Bills restaurant still appeared to be progressing.

75. STAFFING REPORT

- a) The Town Clerk reminded Members that the Mayoral Secretary/Administrative Assistant would be retiring at the end of December 2021.

He reported that, as this was 18 months before normal retirement age, the Working Group would need to consider any associated Pension Strain Costs.

Members were advised that, in the short term, the Front of House Supervisor would assume responsibility for Mayoral administration while a new post holder was sought.

After a short debate it was AGREED TO RECOMMEND to Full Council that the Pension Strain Costs as reported be met by the City Council.

- b) The Town Clerk then summarised his report that had been circulated to Members and that outlined proposals for a restructuring of staffing and responsibilities following the retirement of the Mayoral Secretary/Administrative Assistant.

The Working Group was further advised that the proposals in his report included a reset of the Mayoral Secretary's role and the transfer of all committee and working group work to a new post that would also include responsibility for environmental and community initiatives.

The Mayor and Councillor Plowman agreed that the proposal to separate the Mayoral duties into a single post was a positive step forward.

Members were informed that the Member Services Support Officer would take over responsibility for agendas and minutes for Full Council.

The Town Clerk informed Members that the new job description was being drafted and that it would be sent to Councillors in due course.

He also informed the Working Group that the revised Mayoral Secretary job description and that of the new post would be independently reviewed by South East Employers for the purposes of salary grading.

Councillor Plowman expressed his support for the approach and, in particular, the inclusion of a community element in the new post.

DATE OF NEXT ORDINARY MEETING: MONDAY 24 JANUARY 2022
NOTE CHANGE OF DAY

The meeting closed at 3.09pm