

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE MEETING

7 SEPTEMBER, 2021

MINUTES

Open Pages 1 - 4

Present:  
Councillors:

|                  |         |
|------------------|---------|
| Coles (Chairman) | Jackson |
| Curtis           | Lee     |
| Dowling          | Vos     |
| How              |         |

Clerk: Responsible Financial Officer

Press: None

Public: None present (meeting was streamed live via YouTube)

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16. To Accept Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Dyer and Cllr Fojtik and accepted for the reasons given. Mayor Taylor was unable to attend.

17. Declarations of Interest on items on the Agenda

There were no declarations of interest.

18. To Receive Written Requests for Dispensation for Disclosable Pecuniary Interests.

There were no written or verbal requests for dispensations.

19. To Grant Any Requests for Dispensation

There were no requests for dispensation required.

20. Public Participation

No one wished to speak during public participation.

21. Presentation on Investment Funds

A presentation was given by Mark Davies, Relationship Manager – Local Government of CCLA, including an update on Council's investments, particularly the Local Authorities Property Fund. Mark confirmed that Council have received over £50,000 in net dividends since October 2016. The Council's fund valuation at 31/08/2021 is £257,789 (NAV) compared to an original investment of £250,000 so there is also some capital growth.

Mark answered a number of questions from Members. The Chairman thanked him and he then left the meeting.

22. To Approve Draft Open Minutes of the Finance & Scrutiny Committee Meeting held on 8 June, 2021

A query was raised on the action arising from Minute 13 regarding the possibility of applying to the Public Works Loan Board for funding towards the substantial costs for the Town Hall external maintenance and repairs. A verbal update was given at the subsequent Town Council meeting in June advising that WALC had confirmed that an application would not be possible as reserves were available to fund this work.

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Open Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee Meeting held on 8 June, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

23. External Audit Report for the financial year 2020/21

Members were advised that the report from the External Auditor was still outstanding and that this matter would be deferred to the next meeting.

*Note – the External Auditor Report and Certificate was subsequently received the day after the meeting. Members were advised that the External Auditor had raised no queries or matters of concern. The Notice of Conclusion of Audit for 2020/21 has now been published on Council's website, along with a copy of the External Audit Report and Certificate, which is attached to these minutes as **Appendix 'H'**.*

24. Management Accounts for the period 1 April 2021 – 31 July 2021

The report was noted.

25. Review of Reserves Policy as part of the Budget process for 2022-23

A verbal update was given.

The requirement of the Reserves Policy to maintain a General Reserve of a minimum of 25% of budgeted expenditure is dependent on some values which cannot be confirmed at this time. The impact of the current year's budget deficit on the level of the General Reserve carried forward will not be confirmed until May 2022 as part of the year end accounts process, while the budgeted expenditure will fluctuate as the budget process progresses over the next four months.

After further discussion, it was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Reserves Policy continues to be reviewed as a rolling part of the budget process.

26. Budget Strategy for the financial year 2022-23

A verbal update was given. The first draft budget will be available for all Members to review later in September. The initial forecasts indicate most of the General Reserve will be used to fund the current year's budget deficit. The implications are that budgeted expenditure will need to be reduced or the precept raised.

The requirement to replenish the depleted Building Maintenance Designated Reserve has not been included in the initial draft budget forecast and will potential cause further pressure on the budget requirement going forward.

After much debate, it was AGREED that Members should be advised to adopt a cautious approach to next year's budget expenditure requirements and aim for a return to a balanced budget. Different scenarios will be included to enable Members to consider the impact of expenditure reductions or precept increases. Each standing committee will be asked to prioritise expenditure requirements for the activities and projects within their Terms of Reference.

It was further AGREED that an update on this budget strategy guidance to other Members who are not on the Finance & Audit Committee should be given at the next Town Council meeting.

27. Deputy Town Clerk's Verbal Report – for information only

Members were advised that the restoration work for the Shakespeare statue, which had been removed from its plinth on the outside of the Town Hall last month, would not commence until funding sources had been identified. Applications for grant funding are ongoing but cannot be awarded retrospectively if work has already commenced.

28. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is Tuesday 16 November, 2021 at 6:30pm at the Town Hall.

*The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 7:50pm*