

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE FINANCE & AUDIT COMMITTEE

In accordance with s78 of the Local Authorities and Police Crime Panels (Coronavirus) (Flexibility of Local Authority and Police and Crime Panel Meetings) (England and Wales) Regulation 2020

9 MARCH, 2021

MINUTES

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Present:
Councillors:

Alcock	Fojtik
Coles (Chairman)	Jackson (Mayor)
Curtis	Lee
Dyer	Vos

Clerk: Responsible Financial Officer

Press: None

Public: None

(The meeting was live streamed on YouTube)

68. To Accept Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cllr How and Cllr Dowling and accepted for the reasons given.

69. Declarations of Interest on items on the Agenda

None.

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

There were no written or verbal requests for dispensations.

71. To Grant Any Requests for Dispensation

There were no requests for dispensation required.

72. Public Participation

No one wished to speak during public participation.

73. To Approve Draft Open Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee Meeting held on 12 January, 2021

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED:

That the Open Minutes of the Finance & Audit Committee Meeting held on 12 January, 2021 be approved as a correct record.

In accordance with current procedures, the Chairman's signature and the date will be appended electronically to the Minutes.

74. Management Accounts for the period 1 April – 28 February, 2021

It was mentioned that the latest report indicates the YTD Net Deficit will be lower than the forecast used when the budget for 2021-22 was approved in January, which will affect the reserves going forward.

Members noted the report.

75. Budget Virement for funding the Strategic Partnership Initiative Concept Design

There was a consensus that Council should continue to support the Town Centre Bridge Street and High Street concept design initiative and therefore to underwrite the funding shortfall plus a contingency for further costs which may be identified as the project progresses.

This funding was required in addition to use of the Community Infrastructure Levy funding which Council had previously approved, and would include funds for communications.

It was noted this would enable funding of £7,000, which had been agreed at other meetings, not to be taken from the Climate Change Initiatives budget.

After discussing the options, it was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: that Council underwrite the project funding shortfall and add a contingency using a budget virement from the underspend on the Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations budget for 2020-21.

76. Budget Virement for funding Equipment to support Live Screening of Council meetings

As Council had already approved the installation of the equipment at the meeting in September 2020, Members considered the options for funding this item, which was not included in the budget.

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RESOLVED: that Council fund the installation of equipment for live streaming of meetings using a budget virement of £10,000 from the underspend on the Events Security budget for 2020-21.

77. Designated Reserves for 2021-22

Existing Reserves

77.1) Building Maintenance Reserve

It was suggested that the Building Maintenance Reserve should be “fit for purpose” and therefore needed to be adequate to cover the detailed costs of maintenance works scheduled for the next twelve months at least. However, due to lockdown restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, there had been a delay to the tendering process for external repairs and the subsequent detailed planning process to schedule the works. Members were advised that

the budget figure for 2021-22 had been based on a previous “ballpark” estimate.

The Mayor advised that the tenders were due to be returned and opened on 1 April 2021, so it is possible that there will be a better understanding of expected costs for 2021-22 before the financial year end process for 2020-21 is completed in the next few months.

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Building Maintenance Reserve should be decreased to reflect additional Town Hall maintenance costs and professional fees relating to ongoing works, as determined by the total expenditure overspend at year end. However, this should not be reduced below £127,000, which was the figure included in the budget for 2021-22 for Town Hall Planned Maintenance and Repairs.

77.2) Cemetery Land & Building Reserve

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Cemetery Land & Building Reserve be increased by a virement of £20,000 from the Allotment Reserve to assist towards anticipated costs of acquiring additional burial land.

77.3) Allotment Reserve

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Allotment Reserve be decreased by a virement of £20,000 to the Cemetery Land & Building Reserve to assist towards anticipated costs of acquiring additional burial land.

77.4) Christmas Festival Reserve

No change required.

77.5) Vehicle Replacement Reserve

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Vehicle Replacement Reserve be increased by the budget provision of £2,500.

77.6) Election Expenses Reserve

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Election Expenses Reserve be increased by the budget provision of £5,000.

77.7) Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Reserve

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Reserve be increased by current year receipts to £13,351.

77.8) Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations Reserve

It was noted that, as in previous years, the Shakespeare Birthday Celebrations will be adjusted by relevant net expenditure in the current financial year.

New Reserves

Several new Designated Reserves had been requested and Approved during the budget process for 2021-22:

77.9) Holy Trinity Churchyard & Monuments £20,000

To be increased by estimated remaining costs for repair work to the riverside boundary wall if these are not completed in the current financial year 2020-21.

- 77.10) Events Reserve £ 5,000
- 77.11) Street Furniture Reserve £ 5,000
- 77.12) Climate Change Initiatives Reserve £10,000
To be increased by the budget underspend for the current financial year 2020-21, as determined at year end.
- 77.13) Community Support Reserve £ 5,000

Additional New Reserve

- 77.14) NDP Strategic Partnership Reserve
Further to agenda item 7.2, minuted as 75 above, a new Neighbourhood Development Plan (NDP) Strategic Partnership Reserve will be created for any unspent funds from the budget virement agreed, as determined at year end.

78. Risk Management

Due to the lack of progress with further review of this item because of the lockdown restrictions caused by the coronavirus pandemic, Members noted the report and AGREED with the recommendation to postpone the review.

79. Approved Suppliers & Service Providers List

It was confirmed that no suppliers or service providers had been removed from the list due to lack of activity in the last 12 months, given the unusual circumstances and general lack of economic activity because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Members were advised that Council's new conservation architect, Stephen Oliver of Oliver Architects Ltd, had not been included on the latest list because no invoices had been received to date.

A local structural surveyor, David Bishton, had also recently been appointed to assist with the work to repair the boundary wall at Holy Trinity churchyard and will also need to be added to the list.

Subject to the above modifications, it was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the updated Approved Suppliers & Service Providers List by Type be adopted by Council.

80. Financial Regulations and Finance & Audit Committee Terms of Reference

Subject to changes to the wording relating to the roles of the Responsible Financial Officer (RFO) and Deputy Town Clerk (DTC), Members noted the report and AGREED to approve and adopt these documents.

81. Banking arrangements and Investments

It was confirmed that no changes to Council's banking providers had occurred over the last 12 months.

Members were updated on the information recently provided by CCLA about the possibility of negative returns from the Public Sector Deposit Fund. It was confirmed that changes being made were precautionary and that Council's funds were not at risk and could be withdrawn within 24 hours if required.

It was noted that there was a potentially bigger risk of negative returns from a fall in the share price of the Local Authorities' Property Fund (LAPF), but this investment had continued to do reasonably well in the last 12 months despite ongoing economic uncertainty over Brexit and the devastating economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic. Members were reminded that this investment was made for the long term and that the yield from the LAPF had remained considerably higher over the period than returns from other savings and investments.

Given the detailed review of the Investment Strategy which would be required later in the year, it was suggested that CCLA's Relationship Manager should be asked to attend a meeting of the Finance & Audit Committee to discuss investment considerations.

Members noted the report.

82. Fixed Asset Register

Members noted the report.

83. Responsible Financial Officer's Verbal Report – for information only

Information relating to the possibility of negative returns had been reported under agenda item 7.8, minuted as 81 above, and there was nothing further to add.

84. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting is 8 June, 2021 at 6:30pm at the Town Hall or 6:00pm using Zoom software if virtual meetings are still in place.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 6.57pm