

MINUTES of the **FINANCE & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** meeting held online on **Wednesday 28 October 2020** at **7.30pm**

PRESENT: Cllr M Richardson (Chairman) Cllr S Harkin
Cllr S Bennett Cllr S Wiles
Cllr S Bird Cllr K Williams
Cllr M Deacon

OFFICERS: Mr A Tadjrishi (Town Clerk)
Mrs D Frost (Deputy Town Clerk)
Mr S Congi (Finance Admin Assistant)

IN ATTENDANCE:

293. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

There were none.

294. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from **Cllr T Green** and **Cllr A Smith**.

295. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Member(s)	Minute No.	Nature of Interest
Cllr S Bird Cllr M Deacon Cllr S Wiles	All	Local Non-Pecuniary (as Members of East Suffolk Council)
Cllr S Bird Cllr S Wiles	All	Local Non-Pecuniary (as a Members of Suffolk County Council)

As no Pecuniary declarations were made, there were no requests for dispensation.

296. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

It was **RESOLVED** that the **Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting held on 16 July 2020** be signed by the **Chairman** as a true record.

297. BUDGET MONITORING TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2020

Committee received the budget monitoring report to 30 September 2020. A report of any variance to budget estimates for the period greater than 10% or £500 was considered. It was reported that the IT Maintenance and Software budget was expected to overspend due to unforeseen “work from home” necessities, but some costs would be able to come from the IT Earmarked

Reserves, from which the Committee had been given delegated authority to spend up to £40,000 (*Minute #59iii 2020/21 refers*).

The Deputy Town Clerk gave an update on calculations which had estimated income from Weddings & Hirings this year. At 60.1% and 40% respectively if no further lockdowns in the area, considering the year's circumstances the estimates were higher than expected.

It was RESOLVED that the budget monitoring report to 30 September 2020 be approved, with no other action required at this time.

298. QUARTERLY BANK RECONCILIATION

It was confirmed that Cllr D Savage, as the Council's nominated Quarterly Bank Reconciliation Signatory (*Min #12 2020/21 refers*), had signed the reconciliation between the bank statement and Omega accounts to confirm the amounts agreed each month.

RESOLVED to note that the quarterly bank reconciliation for the period 1 April - 30 September 2020 had been carried out by Cllr D Savage.

299. ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN

Council noted that the External Audit for the Financial Year 2019/20 had been completed on 8 October 2020, with no formal or any other matters being raised.

Members recorded a vote of thanks to the Town Clerk, Deputy Town Clerk and the Finance Admin Assistant for their work to support Council's continuing clear and unqualified audits.

It was RESOLVED that:

- i. the Annual Governance and Accountability Return including Audit Certificate, be approved and accepted as presented; and,**
- ii. it be noted that, in accordance with the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 as defined by the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015 and the Accounts and Audit (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020, the Notice of Conclusion of Audit had been put on the Town Hall noticeboard from 16 October and will be displayed until 2 November 2020.**

300. LGBCE CONSULTATION ON SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL DIVISIONS

Committee considered the report on the LGBCE's proposals for the electoral review of Suffolk and welcomed the improvements to parish ward arrangements in Felixstowe. Members reviewed a draft response provided by Cllr A Smith and recorded a vote of thanks to Cllr Smith for his work in this response.

It was noted that the Commission's draft proposals stated an implementation date of May 2025, in time for the Suffolk County Council elections due to take place in that year. There was no indication as to whether the proposed revisions to the Town Council's warding arrangements would be implemented prior to this date and in time for the next Town Council election in May 2023. It was therefore a possibility that the Town Council's current warding arrangements would remain unchanged until 2027. Members agreed that any response to the consultation should seek to ensure that the Town Council's Parish Warding arrangements should be implemented in time for the 2023 elections.

Members requested that the Town Clerk finalise the draft response and present this for Council approval on 11 November.

It was RESOLVED that the draft response to the LGBCE's proposals for the electoral review of Suffolk be finalised by the Town Clerk and recommended for approval by full Council on 11 November.

301. DIGITAL COMMUNICATIONS AND CONFERENCING FACILITIES

Committee considered a report on a project to upgrade Council's IT and conferencing facilities, following provisions made by Council to the IT Earmarked Reserve (*Minute #59iii 2020/21 refers*).

It was noted that the project would see the withdrawal of some legacy on-site equipment – e.g. the Council's server (which was purchased in 2012) – and transferring services to the cloud. The Clerk anticipated that the ongoing cost of cloud-based services would be offset by an impending release from a long term telephone services contract in March 2021 and would represent either equal cost or savings for a greatly enhanced cloud-based system. The new cloud-based ecosystem would enable telephones to be answered from wherever staff happened to be working, through the internet. The plan would also include upgrades for Councillors to the full Microsoft 365 package which would enable files to be accessed without sending by email and full access to Office 365 applications. From a survey of Members, it was understood that some Councillors would benefit from being provided with a laptop and other peripherals to carry out Town Council business.

Capital and ongoing costs were being prepared and circulated in due course. Options to enhance conferencing facilities were also being obtained.

It was RESOLVED that:

- i. the report on improving digital communications and conferencing facilities be noted; and,**
- ii. Capital and ongoing costs were being prepared and circulated in due course. Options to enhance conferencing facilities were also being obtained.**

302. FELIXSTOWE BID BALLOT

Committee considered the business plan and ballot process for the proposed Felixstowe Business Improvement District and were asked to confirm the vote on behalf of Felixstowe Town Council due to the closing date for receipt of ballots being 10th November, prior to the next full Council meeting.

The Clerk advised that the action taken by the Committee would be reported to the next Council meeting on 11th November when it was also expected that the result of the ballot would be known.

It was RESOLVED that the Town Council should vote in favour of the BID and the Town Clerk was delegated the authority to submit the vote on Council's behalf.

303. FELIXSTOWE TAX BASE FORECAST 2021

Committee noted the potential impact of the coronavirus on the forecast tax base in readiness for preparations for budget setting for 2021/22. Though it was anticipated that there would be a drop in the tax base for Felixstowe, which would necessitate increase on the tax charge if the same – or higher – level of precept were to be received, Members were concerned that there should not be an additional tax burden on residents in the forthcoming year.

Committee unanimously agreed that there should be a 0% change to the tax charge to support the Community during this difficult time and requested that the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk prepare a budget on this basis, using Council reserves as appropriate to mitigate the impact of the reduction on the tax base in the forthcoming year. It was understood that the final tax base could change before the final budget was presented to Council in January 2021.

It was RESOLVED that the full draft budget be prepared on the basis of a 0% increase on the Town Council's element of the local council tax, using Council's reserves to meet any projected net shortfall for 2021/22, and presented for consideration at the next Finance and Governance meeting.

304. CLOSURE

The meeting was closed at 8.39pm. The next meeting was noted as being scheduled for Wednesday 09 December 2020 at 7.30pm.

Date: _____

Chairman: _____