

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Corporate Services Committee
25th November 2019 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: D Jones Chairman
D Abbott
C Copleston
M S Kennedy
S Thorne
K Wattingham

Officers: Debbie Marsh Corporate Services Manager
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillor: T Welch

11047 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllr Welch.

11048 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

11049 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

11050 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2019

Councillor Kennedy stated that he had given his apologies for the last meeting and that the minutes did not reflect this.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 23rd September 2019 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

11051 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS

Personnel Sub-Committee: 15th July 2019.

Resolved: To receive the Minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meetings of the 15th July 2019

11052 SCHEME OF DELEGATION

In accordance with Standing Order 4.j.iii. Council was required to review its Scheme of Delegation.

The Scheme of Delegation authorises the Proper Officer and Responsible Financial Officer, Council and Standing Committees of the Council to act with delegated authority in the specific circumstances detailed.

The approved Scheme of Delegation was reviewed at the Annual Council meeting held on the 15th May 2019.

Subsequent to this meeting further revisions were suggested, shown in bold and italics.

In order to not impede the running of the next Annual Council meeting Members of this committee were requested to consider the revised document and to recommend to Town Council that the Scheme of Delegation be approved.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Town Councils Scheme of Delegation be approved.

11053 BUDGET REVIEW

Members received the income and expenditure report, highlighting significant variances, for Corporate Services Committee to date.

Members discussed alternative telephone hardware which could prove to be more cost-effective long term with lower running costs. Members requested that alternatives be looked into as the current telephone system contract was coming to an end. In light of this, an amendment to officer recommendation 2 was proposed to read:

To vire £4000 from 190 to 199 to fund the capital purchase of a replacement server and investigate the capital purchase of office telephone hardware and system review subject to current BT lease.

The officer recommendation was:

To vire £4000 from 190 to 199 to fund the capital purchase of a replacement server and the capital purchase of office telephone hardware.

Members agreed the amendment, accordingly, this became the substantive motion.

Resolved:

- 1. To note that a new contract will be entered into for the maintenance of the photocopier;**
- 2. To vire £4000 from 190 to 199 to fund the capital purchase of a replacement server and investigate the capital purchase of office telephone hardware and system review subject to current BT lease.**

11054 DRAFT BUDGET 2020/21

Members received the officer draft budget for 2020/21 along with explanatory notes for the Corporate Services Committee.

The draft budget reflected on ongoing budgetary commitments along with anticipated budgetary commitments arising from the draft Council Vision 2020/24.

Members raised a query regarding the purchase of tablets to enable councillors to access council information, as it was thought that this was not going to be budgeted for, however had been included for 20/21. Members requested that this be looked into and clarified.

Members queried the 2% staff salary increase. It was clarified that although an increase of 2% had been budgeted for, precise figures were to yet be confirmed. Any increase would be in line with the NJC scales,

Members requested clarification on the provision of election costs. It was clarified that an amount was set aside each year to allow for elections. Concerns were raised that any by-elections would eat into this EMR.

Members requested clarification on the insurance ad-hoc add-ons. It was clarified that should the council decide to purchase any equipment, an increase in the annual insurance would be expected, additionally, some of the events that had taken place had been covered at no additional charge, this may change and would need to be included in the future.

11055 BANK AND CASH RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS

Members were requested to receive the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements from August to September 2019.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve the monthly Bank and Cash Reconciliation statements from August to September 2019;**
- 2. For these along with the original bank statements to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services Committee and the Council's RFO.**

11056 LIST OF CHEQUE PAYMENTS

Following the disbandment of the Accounts Sub-Committee, for information, Members received a list of cheque payments for the period August to November 2019.

Resolved: **To receive and note the list of cheque payments made in the period August to November 2019 approved for payment by the Town Clerk and two bank signatories.**

11057 INVESTMENT REPORT

The Corporate Services Committee were to oversee and manage the financial obligations of the Council, including:

To receive quarterly reports on investments containing a forecast of capital expenditure, investment opportunities and a recommendation for further investment including where, length and amount.

Resolved: To reinvest in both the long term and short-term investment accounts.

11058 COMMUNICATION POLICY & COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Members were advised that the Town Councils Communication Policy & Communication Strategy was last reviewed on the 12th June 2017.

Whilst this policy was on a 4-year cycle of review, due to some amendments it was thought advisable to present it for review sooner.

Members received a track change version of the Communication Policy & Communication Strategy.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Communication Policy & Communication Strategy be approved.

11059 COUNCILLORS' ALLOWANCES

Members received the latest information dated August 2019, issued by NALC LTN 33, in regard to Councillors' expenses.

Members were advised that currently the Town Council cover travel and subsistence costs associated with Members undertaking authorised work of the Council such as attended meetings of outside bodies on which they were a nominated representative. Historically Members had decided to not pursue a scheme of councillor allowances. However, the Town Council paid a Chairman's (Mayor's) Allowance to cover civic expenses.

Members discussed the difficulties faced by some councillors.

Members agreed to discuss this further at the upcoming members briefing session with a view to take to Town Council.

11060 CHEQUE CLEARANCE

At the previous meeting of the Corporate Services Committee, Members requested that further information be provided in regard to the length of time a cheque can remain valid, if not presented.

Research had been undertaken by contacting the Cheque and Credit Clearing Company Ltd, who manage the cheque and credit clearing system for England, Scotland and Wales.

A cheque is valid for as long as the debt between the two parties exists. In other words, cheques do not have an expiry date. However, it was common banking practice to reject cheques that were over six months old to protect the person who has written the cheque. This was in case the payment had been made another way or the cheque had been lost or stolen.

The six-month timeframe was at the discretion of the individual banks. It was not assumed that cheques older than six months would automatically be rejected as the only definite way to cancel a cheque was for the person who wrote it to request that a stop be placed on it.

Where there was a dispute, a cheque remains legally valid in order to provide proof of the existence of a debt for a period of six years, which was the Statute of Limitations.

At year end closedown, the Town Councils Financial Consultant and the Finance and Cemetery Officer reviewed outstanding payments. Cheques remained on the list as proof of an existing debt.

In order to mitigate the risk of cheques remaining outstanding, the Finance and Cemetery Officer had now included, on the remittance advice, the following "*Please bank this cheque immediately as valid for 6 months from date of issue. Failure to do so will result in automatic cancellation. This is in accordance with our banker's conditions*".

Whilst there was this reminder, it should be noted that communication takes place with the payee prior to any cheque cancellations, as there was a cost to the Council, associated with cancelling cheques unless they had been lost or stolen.

Resolved: To note the report.

11061 REVIEW OF VISION – CORPORATE SERVICES COMMITTEE

Members received an extract from the Houghton Regis: Our 2020 Vision as it related to this committee which updated Members on the current status of the agreed Outcomes.

Members discussed item 5b and agreed that the team listening sessions delivered through Member Open Sessions was working well and that this section needed to be updated to reflect this.

11062 REVIEW OF TOWN COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP TO OTHER BODIES

In accordance with the approved Committee Functions and Terms of Reference the Corporate Services Committee was required to annually review the Council's and/or employees' memberships of other bodies.

<i>Membership</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Annual Subscription</i>
Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)	Annual	£350 approx.
Bedfordshire Association of Town & Parish Councils (NALC)	Annual	£2,101 approx.
Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management	Annual April to March	£95
Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT)	Annual	£99
Association of Local Council Clerks	Annual	£30
Information Commissioners Officer (ICO)	Annual	£55

Resolved: **To note the report.**

11063 REVIEW EXISTING CONTRACTS

In accordance with the approved Committee Functions and Terms of Reference the Corporate Services Committee was required to annually review existing contracts.

IT Support & Hosting	9069	Managed Service Support Contract – rolling annual contract. £ 1,944.20 p.a. Office 365 – 9 Licenses @ £ 112.80 each p.a. (Renews 1st Nov 2019) Exchange Online (Email only)- 16 Licenses @ £ 36.00 each p.a. (Renews 1 st Nov 2019) Solarwind Offsite	£4,320.40	<i>3rd October 2017</i>
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		Backup - £ 600.00 p.a. (Renews 1 st Nov 2019) McAfee Anti-Virus – 10 Licenses @ £ 18.50 each p.a. (Renews 1 st Nov 2019)		
Website hosting		Annual fee.	£150	
DCK Accounting		Annual arrangement.	£1,250	
Operation Hana	10125	Annual arrangement. Current contract to 31 st March 2020 – one month's termination notice. Then, 1 st April 2020 to 31 st March 2021	£33,000	4 th November 2019
Internal Audit	9690	Annual arrangement	£750 based on 3 days	
Human resources advisor	9942	1 st September 2019 for an initial 12-month period	£2,451.60	24 th June 2019
External audit		5 years from 2017/18 until 2021/22	£2,000	Appointed via Regulation 3 of the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015.
Town centre toilets	6846	1st July 2019 – 30th June 2021 Ongoing	£18,360 plus consumables per annum	13 th May 2019
Insurance	9829	Long term agreement until 31st May 2022	£11,907 plus additional premiums relating to any changes in circumstance.	13 th May 2019
Payroll		Ongoing Annual arrangement	£750	
Photocopier lease	9695	2018 to 2023	£396	21 st December 2018

BT telephones		5-year lease to Feb 2020		
Franking Machine		2019-2023	£330	
Accounting Software support		Ongoing Annual arrangement	£1,018 approx.	

11064 REVIEW OF INVENTORY OF TANGIBLE ASSETS

In accordance with Standing Order 2.12 and Financial Regulation 14.5 this committee was required to annually review the Council's inventory of tangible assets including land, buildings and equipment. Members received an extract from the Statement of Accounts for the year 2018/19.

Members advised that the report does not state whether the land had been registered with the land registry. Members were advised that the land had been valued. The forms were yet to be completed and the fee was still to be paid.

Members requested that title numbers were included, next to the land assets, in future.

Resolved: To note the Inventory.

11065 REVIEW OF CHARGES

In accordance with Financial Regulation 9.3 Members received a list of charges for 2019/20 under the control of this Committee. Members were advised that a comparable increase was proposed for the hire of the Council Chamber.

Members were informed that the Subject Access Request Fee had been removed as this information must be given free of charge under GDPR. The exception to this was if the request from a data subject was "manifestly unfounded or excessive" in which case a reasonable fee can be charged. A reasonable fee could also be charged for supplying further copies of the same information (but not for subsequent requests for different information). The fee must be based on the actual administrative cost of providing the information. Administrative cost was not defined but it was anticipated that it would not include staff time.

Resolved: To approve the charges for 2020/21 as attached.

11066 APPOINTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDITOR

In accordance with section 2.5 of the Town Councils Financial Regulations Members were requested to appoint Green Biro as the Council's Internal Auditor for 2019/20. This company was suitably qualified to provide internal audit services and was independent of the Town Council.

Resolved: To appoint Green Biro as the Council's Internal Auditor for 2019/2020.

11067 OFFICER/MEMBER PROTOCOL

Members received the Town Councils Officer/Member Protocol.

Although some slight amendments had been made, shown as track changes, this document remained fit for purpose.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Officer/Member Protocol be approved.

11068 TRAINING STATEMENT OF INTENT

Members received the Town Councils Training Statement of Intent.

This document remained fit for purpose.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Training Statement of Intent be approved.

11069 DATA PROTECTION POLICY

The Town Councils Data Protection Policy was approved on the 28th September 2015.

Members received an updated version of this policy following the change in legislation. Members also received the NALC Legal Topic Note 38 which provided information.

Members training would be provided on this policy in accordance with the External Auditors comments on the Annual Return 2018/19.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Data Protection Policy be approved.

11070 FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

For information Members were advised that NALC had recently issued revised Financial Regulations.

It was proposed that these revisions would be presented to Town Council at the meeting to be held on the 9th December 2019.

Resolved: To note the information

11071 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

- **Staff issue**

Resolved: In accordance with Section 1(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, the public and press be excluded from the meeting during the consideration of the item set out below on the grounds that publicity would be prejudicial to the general interest by reason of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted.

Proposed by: Cllr Wattingham, seconded by: Cllr Kennedy

All in favour.

11072 STAFFING ISSUE

Members received a verbal update at the meeting.

Resolved: To note the information

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.39pm

Dated this 2nd day of March 2020

Chairman