

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL

Corporate Services Committee

Minutes of the meeting held on
28th November 2022 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: D Jones Chairman
E Cooper
S Goodchild
K Wattingham

Officers: Debbie Marsh Corporate Services Manager
Louise Senior Head of Democratic Services
Clare Evans Town Clerk

Public: 0

Apologies: Councillors: J Carroll
C Copleston

Also present: Councillor: T McMahon

Absent: M S Kennedy

12259 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Cllrs Carroll and Copleston.

12260 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12261 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

Members were reminded at the last Corporate Services Committee meeting held on 4th October 2022, a query was raised whether councillors needed to declare an interest if they were in receipt of a Local Government Pension, it was confirmed that clarification had been sought and a declaration of interest was not required.

12262 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 18th August and 4th October 2022.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 18th August 2022 and 4th October 2022 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12263 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS AND CONSIDER ANY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED THEREIN

Personnel Sub-Committee: 11th July 2022

Resolved: To receive the Minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting of the 11th July 2022.

12264 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

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

Clarification was sought on budget heading 101-1091 - Misc. Income and what the wording of explanation, as contained in the officer's report, meant.

Under budget headings 190-4021- Communications Costs & 190-4026 - Computer Costs members suggested that these headings may require consideration when presenting the budget for 2023/2023 as they were on track to be overspent in this financial year. The proposed budget for 2023/2024 was, on first look, insufficient.

It was acknowledged that the staff overtime budget would have an overspend due to the recent NJC pay increase. This budget, at the time of setting, had been budgeted for a 2% increase in salaries, however the actual increase had been in the region of 6% across staff. It was also acknowledged this increase would have an impact to those budget headings that covered on-costs.

Members asked if enquires had been made as to whether there was any financial relief in place for public sector buildings, regarding utilities.

Members requested that the above queries be investigated and fed back to the committee.

Members received this report for information.

12265 BANK AND CASH RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS

Members received the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for August and September 2022.

Resolved:

- 1. To approve the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for August and September 2022;**
- 2. For these along with the original bank statements to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services Committee and the Council's RFO.**

12266 LIST OF CHEQUE PAYMENTS

Members noted the agenda stated that members would receive a list of payments for the period August and September 2022 (inclusive) however members received a list of payments for the period September and October 2022 (inclusive). It was requested that August be circulated via email.

Clarification was sought on whether the All Saints Tree works at £22,800 had been sufficiently budgeted for. Members acknowledged this budget heading was not under the control of this committee. Members were advised that this would be clarified and fed back to the committee.

Members received this report for information.

12267 INVESTMENT REPORT

In accordance with Committee Functions, Financial Regulation 8 and Banking Arrangements, Investment Strategy & Investment Arrangements.

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.

Members were informed that the CCLA would be exercising their discretion to extend the redemption notice period from the current 90 days to 6 months with immediate effect. This will need to be borne in mind when the Council considers accessing this fund. Members requested that the Clerk scrutinises the timetable of the Tithe Farm refurbishment programme to ensure the availability of funds as and when payment was required.

Members received this report for information.

12268 INSURANCE CLAIMS

Members were advised that there had been no insurance claims made against the council from the 1st September 2022 to date.

Members received this report for information.

12269 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 2023/24</i>
Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)	Annual	£446
Bedfordshire Association of Town & Parish Councils (NALC)	Annual	£2,122

Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management	Annual April to March	£100
Information Commissioners Officer (ICO)	Annual	£55
National Allotment Association	Annual	£56
Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)	Annual	£36

It was confirmed that the BATPC 3% increase had not been included in the above table as the agenda had been published before the announcement had been made.

12270 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.

<i>Service</i>	<i>Minute No.</i>	<i>Details</i>	<i>Cost / annum</i>	<i>Start date</i>
IT Support & Hosting		Support charge	£1,800	
		Microsoft 365 Business Standard - Annual Subscription	£1,015	3 rd November 2020
		Microsoft Exchange On-Line Plan1 - Annual Subscription	£576	10 th November 2020
		SolarWinds Cloud Backup - per month	£600	17 th November 2020
		McAfee Endpoint Protection Ess SMB 1:1 GL	£347	18 th October 2020
		Total / annum	£4,338	
Website hosting		Annual fee	£346	
DCK Accounting		Annual arrangement for year-end close	£1,250	

		down and year end accounts preparation		
Operation Hana	CC214	Annual arrangement	£34,990	1 st April 2022 to 31 st March 2023
Internal Audit	11965 (CS) 12082 (TC)	3-year arrangement	£1097.25	May 2022, 2023, and 2024
Human resources advisor	9942	Annual arrangement	£2,574.12	
External audit	12191	5 years from 1 st April 2022 and ending on 31 st March 2027	Cost TBC as SAAA central external auditor appointment arrangements process is currently being undertaken.	Appointed via Regulation 3 of the Local Audit (Smaller Authorities) Regulations 2015.
Town centre toilets	12119 (Com Serv) 12186 (TC)	3 years from 1 st September 2022 to 31 st August 2025	£19,600.00 plus consumables per annum	
Insurance	12048	Long term agreement	£13,034.97 plus additional premiums relating to any changes in circumstance.	13 th May 2019 - 31 st May 2024
Payroll	11454	Initial 6 months, then 30-day notice period	£145.25 pm	1 st April 2021
Photocopier lease	9695	Long term agreement	£396	2018 to 2023
Mobile Phones		10 x phones 12 month contract – Sim only	£1440	Oct 2022-Sept 2023
Telephone software		12 months then rolling	Set up £270 £65 month year 1 £88 month year 2 £276 cost of maintenance, annual fee after year 1	November 2020
BT Broadband		24 months	£611.40 p.a.	27/1/2021-26/1/2023
Franking Machine		Long term agreement	£300	1 st August 2019-31 st July 2023

Accounting Software support		Annual arrangement	£1018	1/4/21-30/3/22
Cemetery Software support		Annual arrangement	£290	1 st April 2021 onwards
Allotment Software support		Annual arrangement	£695 year 1 £175 year 2 onwards	17 th June 2022 onwards
Christmas Lights	9782	Long term agreement	£10,500 fixed (excluding tree)	1 st April 2019 to 31 st March 2024
Employee Assistance Programme	11774 (CS) 11879 (TC)	Long term agreement	£500	1 st March 2022 to 28 th February 2027

Members noted a mistake on the agenda for the cost per annum for the Town Centre Toilets contract. The cost was £19,600.00 plus consumables per annum and not £9,600 plus consumables per annum, as per the agenda.

Members received this report for information.

12271 REVIEW OF CHARGES 2023/2024

In accordance with Financial Regulation 9.3 Members received a list of charges for 2022/23 which were under the control of this Committee. In order to support users of these facilities, it was suggested that Members consider applying the same charges for 2023/24.

Resolved: To approve the charges for 2023/24 as attached.

12272 BUDGET 2023/24

Members received the officer draft budget for 2023/24 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 Council Vision 2020/24.

It was highlighted to members that a figure for the precept had not been included at this stage. However, in the explanatory notes members found information on the tax base for 2023/24 and a note outlining the arising implications.

The following points were highlighted:

- There was a predicted increase in interest and dividends receivable
- Bank and loan charges had increased to reflect the agreed account upgrade
- Additional software was required to support the council operations
- Additional budget was suggested to support member attendance at conferences and member training to reflect a new council from May 2023
- Continuation of the Digitalisation project re land transfer documents

- Professional support to the council to produce the next town council plan
- Additional budget to fund the May 2023 election
- Staff training
- Additional budget to support staff costs as progressed through the Personnel Sub Committee and the Corporate Services Committee
- Additional overtime budget to support council events

Members queried as to why the proposed figure for budget heading 190-4014 Electricity for financial year 2023/2024, had been shown as a decrease from the current 2022/2023 figure however, the justification was a request to increase the budget.

Members requested that codes 190-4021 & 190-4026 be re-examined when budget setting for financial year 2023/2024. Both of these budget codes have a proposal to be set lower, for the 2023/2024 financial year, than the current financial year. Members were concerned about these proposals as these codes were predicted to be overspent in the current financial year.

The month by month fluctuating photocopier charges were queried, it was explained that these fluctuations coincided with event promotions i.e. posters/flyers/leaflets.

It was queried whether it was known how much underspend would go into General Reserves, it was advised that this figure was currently unknown, more accurate information would be available in February 2023.

Members requested that costs associated with budget headings 190-4021 Communications Costs & 190-4026 Computer Costs be reconsidered when presenting the budget for 2023/20/24 as it was likely they both would be overspent this financial year and therefore, the proposed budget for 2023/2024 was, on first look, insufficient.

12273 LOCAL GOVERNMENT PENSION SCHEME: STATEMENT OF LOCAL DISCRETIONS

Members received the Town Councils Local Government Pension Scheme: Statement of Local Discretions.

There had been no amendments to the Regulations, therefore it was suggested that it remained suitable and fit for purpose.

For information this Statement of Local Discretions was applicable to Houghton Regis Town Council employees only. This statement was required to be effective from the 1st April 2014, the administrating authority and the employing authority were required to have individual statements setting out their local discretions.

Members were reminded that this item was deferred from the last meeting held on the 4th October 2022.

Members queried as to whether, under Regulation R30(6)*&Tp11(2), the age of attainment should be in line with government retirement age. As detailed on the agenda,

there had been no amendments to these regulations however, further scrutiny would be undertaken and reported back to members.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Local Government Pension Scheme: Review of Statement of Local Discretions be approved.

12274 BEDFORDSHIRE LGPS – TRIENNIAL VALUATION AND EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTION RATE 1st APRIL 2023 – 31st MARCH 2026

Members were advised that a valuation of the Pension Fund takes place every three years, this also included an assessment of employer pension contribution rate for the coming three year period (1st April 2023 to 31st March 2026).

The outcome of the valuation was that the Town Councils contribution rate was set at 26.8% for the next three years. Current contribution rate was 25.8% This rate had been included in the officer's draft budget for financial year 2023/2024.

Members received this report for information.

12275 EYE CARE POLICY

The law stated employers must arrange an eye test for display screen equipment (DSE) users if they ask for one and provide glasses if an employee needs them only for DSE use.

The Town Council Eye Care Policy was adopted on the 26th March 2018. This policy was to be reviewed every 4 years or as required by the Corporate Services Committee.

Members were advised that regulations had not changed since this time and therefore this policy remained fit for purpose.

Members were also advised that Town Council employees were fully aware of this policy.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the Town Councils Eye Care Policy be approved.

12276 LEAVE ENTITLEMENT POLICY

At the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on the 8th November 2022, Members were informed that the National Joint Council (NJC) reached an agreement on rates of pay applicable from the 1st April 2022. This agreement was reached on the 2nd November 2022.

The agreement was that from the 1 April 2022, there was an increase of £1,925 on all NJC pay points 1 and above (pro rata for part-time employees).

In addition, the National Joint Council (NJC) had agreed that from 1st April 2023, all employees covered by this National Agreement, regardless of their current leave entitlement or length of service, would receive a permanent increase of one day (pro rata for part-timers) to their annual leave entitlement.

Members were requested to note this minor amendment to the Town Councils Leave Entitlement Policy which had been revised to include the increase to the leave entitlement however, it was anticipated that a Family Friendly Policy would be presented to members at the next Corporate Services meeting which would specifically cover all leave entitlements other than Annual Leave and that the current Leave Entitlement Policy would just cover this one aspect of leave.

Members agreed to view the Leave Entitlement Policy and the Family Friendly Policy in the new year, however, would leave approval of these policies until the new municipal year for approval by the new council.

Resolved: To note the information and to await a revised Annual Leave Entitlement Policy that removes reference to all other leave entitlements other than Annual Leave and to receive a new Family Friendly Policy, that specifically covers all leave entitlements other than Annual Leave.

12277 HEALTH & SAFETY AT WORK POLICY

Members received the Town Councils Health & Safety at Work Policy which had been slightly amended.

These amendments covered the addition of employees working from home, names of those who were Appointed Persons for first aid and the word vaping had been added to section 4 Code of Practice paragraph 4.1XVII. Other than these amendments the policy remained fit for purpose.

It was confirmed to members that staff had received advice on Health & Safety matters regarding working from home.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Health & Safety at Work Policy.

12278 RISK MANAGEMENT STRATEGY & SCHEDULE

In accordance with Financial Regulation 17.1, the council was responsible for putting in place arrangements for the management of risk. The Clerk would prepare, for approval by the council, risk management policy statements in respect of all activities of the council. Risk policy statements and consequential risk management arrangements would be reviewed by the council at least annually.

Members received a copy of the Risk Management Strategy and Schedule.

Members were advised of the following amendments:

The addition of Allotments to the schedule ready for when the Town Council was responsible, information shown in red on the document.

Members supported an amendment to the Risk Management Strategy, under the Tithe Farm Sports Project heading, to take into account of the recent change to the redemption period for funds being withdrawn from the CCLA property fund, as per minute number 12267. Members agreed for the policy to go to Town Council subject to the amendments as discussed.

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council that the HRTC Risk Management Strategy & Schedule be approved with the approved amendments.

12279 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

- Staffing matters

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.

12280 STAFFING MATTERS

Members received a copy of the report presented to the Personnel Sub Committee on 17th November 2022. At this meeting the suggestions detailed in the report were supported and it was agreed to put these suggestions forward to Corporate Services Committee.

Resolved: To support the suggestions put forward.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.38pm

Dated this 27th day of February 2023.

Chairman