

HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL
Corporate Services Committee
Minutes of the meeting held on
4th December 2023 at 7.00pm.

Present: Councillors: D Jones Chairman
J Carroll
E Costello
W Henderson
M Herber
C Slough

Officers: Debbie Marsh Head of Corporate Services
Amanda Samuels Administration Officer

Public: 0

Absent: Councillor: C Rollins

12614 APOLOGIES & SUBSTITUTIONS

None.

12615 QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

None.

12616 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST & REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATIONS

None.

12617 MINUTES

To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023.

Resolved: To approve the Minutes of the meeting held on 11th September 2023 and for these to be signed by the Chairman.

12618 TO RECEIVE THE MINUTES OF THE FOLLOWING MEETINGS AND CONSIDER ANY RECOMMENDATIONS CONTAINED THEREIN

Personnel Sub-Committee: 10th July 2023.

Resolved: To receive the minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting of the 10th July 2023.

12619 INCOME AND EXPENDITURE REPORT

Members were provided with a copy of the Income and Expenditure Report, highlighting significant variances, for Corporate Services to date.

It was highlighted that the income received from interest and dividends appeared to show almost 100% of budget had been received. As the figure was expected to be lower at this stage of the year, it was requested that this should be checked for any anomalies.

12620 BANK AND CASH RECONCILIATION STATEMENTS

Members received the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for June, July, August, September and October 2023. Members were reminded that at the previous meeting, held on 11th September 2023, a discrepancy had been noted with the bank and cash reconciliation statement for June and that members had requested this discrepancy be resolved and for the statement to be represented.

- Resolved:**
- 1. To approve the monthly bank and cash reconciliation statements for June, July, August, September and October 2023;**
 - 2. For these along with the original bank statements to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services Committee and the Council's RFO.**

12621 LIST OF CHEQUE PAYMENTS

Members were provided with a list of payments for the period July to October 2023 (inclusive). Members queried a payment of £144 to Dunstable Town Council on 30th June and were advised that this was the levy on stalls for the Houghton Regis Carnival. Members requested that this figure was checked for accuracy.

12622 INVESTMENT REPORT

In accordance with Committee Functions, Financial Regulation 8 and Banking Arrangements, Investment Strategy & Investment Arrangements. The Corporate Services Committee were required 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 provided with the council's investment report and the quarterly reports from the Local Authorities Property Fund and the CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund. The reports demonstrated that returns from these investments had increased in the period.

The internal auditor had raised the point last year that the Council's approach to risk and investment should be made clear. In pursuance of this point, Cllr Jones and Cllr Herber had met with Arlingclose investment advisors and had discussions with the CCLA and the internal auditor. It was felt there was a lot of information to process and, therefore, the intention was to bring a report to the next Corporate Services meeting on 4th March 2024.

The Chair noted that surplus monies had not been moved to and from the deposit fund. It was highlighted that funds were to be transferred when each tranche of the precept were received (April and September).

Members discussed the recommendation, as contained on the report, but felt they could not support it on the basis that:

- investments are more likely to decrease in the future;
- it was unlikely that the return on investments would be sufficient to make the charges incurred by professional financial advice viable.

Therefore, an amended recommendation was proposed as followed:
To maintain budget provision, as it currently stood, in respect of investments.

This recommendation was proposed by:
Cllr E Costello

Seconded by:
Cllr M Herbert

Members voted unanimously in favour

Resolved: To maintain budget provision, as it currently stood, in respect of investments.

12623 INSURANCE CLAIMS

Members were advised of the following insurance claim:

Claim Number	Details	Repair cost	Date settled
27230000247	Date of incident: 15/6/23 Address of incident: Tithe Farm Skate Park, Tithe Farm Road, Houghton Regis Nature of incident: Stolen moped and other items, set alight causing damage to the concrete, due to high temperatures	£6708	26 th July 2023

It was confirmed that the claim had been settled and the work completed.

12624 INSURANCE RENEWAL UPDATE

Members were advised that the Town Councils insurance provision was due for renewal on 1st June 2024.

The insurance companies contacted were only able to provide formal quotations 90 days in advance and, therefore, the earliest they would be able to provide a quotation was 1st March 2024.

Due to the timescale for receiving the quotations and the date of the next Corporate Services meeting, which was due to be held on the 4th March, it was proposed a recommendation would be presented directly to Town Council at the meeting to be held on the 18th March 2024, in time for the renewal date.

12625 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. The following subscriptions were budgeted for:

<i>Membership</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Annual Subscription 2024/25</i>
Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)	Annual	£501
Bedfordshire Association of Town & Parish Councils (NALC)	Annual	£2,186
Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management	Annual April to March	£100
Information Commissioners Officer (ICO)	Annual	£60
National Allotment Association	Annual	£56
Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE)	Annual	£36

In addition to these costs Members were advised that:

- Bedfordshire Association of Town and Parish Councils would likely see a subscription rise of 3%;
- Should Council approve the domain name, this would incur an additional subscription cost to the LGA (Local Government Association).

12626 REVIEW EXISTING CONTRACTS

In accordance with the approved Committee Functions and Terms of Reference the Corporate Services Committee is 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	£1,850.25	3 rd Nov 2023
		Microsoft 365 Business Standard Annual Subscription -	£942	30th January 2024
		Trellix Standard Annual licence	£426	25 th October 2023
		SolarWinds Cloud Backup - per month	£660	17th November 2023
		Trellix Standard Annual licence	£118	12 th December 2023
		Total / annum	£3997	
Website hosting		Annual fee	£346	
DCK Accounting		Annual arrangement for year-end close down and year end accounts preparation	£1,300 (approx.)	
Operation Hana	12354 Community Services	Annual arrangement	£34,990	1 st April 2023 – 31 st March 2024
Internal Audit	11965 (CS) 12082 (TC)	3-year arrangement	£1097.25	May 2022, 2023, and 2024
Human resources advisor	9942	Annual arrangement	£2,703	

External audit	12191	5 years from 1 st April 2022 and ending on 31 st March 2027	£2100	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	Town centre toilets
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	Rolling contract	£396	2018 to 2023
Mobile Phones		15 x mobile phone lines £15/mth Sim only	£2700	No contract
Telephone software		12 months then rolling	£88 / month year 2 £276 cost of maintenance, annual fee after year 1 Total £1332	November 2020
BT • Phone lines			£234/mth	

• Broadband			£200/mth	
Franking Machine		Long term agreement	£300	1 st June 2023-31 st August 2029
Accounting Software support		Annual arrangement	£1018	
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
Energy supply Bidwell Sports Pavilion		2-year electricity supply agreement		15 th November 2023
CCTV monitoring		Annual fee	£2,700	1 st April (review date 12 th February)

Members raised the following queries:

- The figure of £34,990 for Operation Hana was thought to be incorrect. It was requested that a check was made to establish the current cost;
- The sum of £22,200, plus consumables, for the Town Centre toilets was queried as it was thought the contract had been renewed at a higher rate;
- The cost of redeployable cameras was not listed and it was requested that the figure relating to this item was established.

12627 VAT ON SPORTING FEES

Members were reminded that at the previous Corporate Services meeting held on the 11th September 2023, members received a report on VAT on sports services. At this meeting members agreed to stop charging VAT on sports services from 1st April 2023 and requested that the amount of VAT on sporting fees in the last four years be established, before considering a reclaim.

Members were provided with a report detailing the sums of VAT that could potentially be reclaimed for the period October 2019 to the end of the 2023 financial year. It was agreed that a claim should be made on behalf of any clubs still in operation.

Members requested advice be sought in regard to the reclaim for the use of Moore Crescent Pavilion as this building was registered as Option to Tax.

The Head of Corporate Services confirmed that an email would be sent detailing the outcome of this research.

Resolved **To support the submission of a reclaim of VAT for the period October 2019 to the end on the 2023 financial year and for any successful reclaim to be refunded to the end user.**

12628 STAFF EXPENSES POLICY

Whilst the Town Council had a Members Expenses Policy it did not have a policy on the reimbursement of staff expenses. A Staff Expenses Policy was proposed, and Members were provided with a report and draft policy.

Members agreed that this would formalise the procedure in relation to the reimbursement of legitimate business expenses.

Resolved: **To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Councils Staff Expenses Policy.**

12629 HOUGHTON REGIS TOWN COUNCIL DOMAIN NAME CHANGE

Members were requested to consider changing the town council's domain name to a .gov.uk domain name. This would incur a charge of £350 for the website provider to support us in establishing a new domain name, plus a further annual charge for the LGA subscription.

Members agreed that such a change would provide Houghton Regis Town Council with a stronger identity and approved the following domain name:

- houghtonregis.gov.uk This option was the most preferred option, however, should this option not be available members suggested the following as an alternative:
- houghtonregistowncouncil.gov.uk

Resolved: To recommend to Town Council a change to the Town Councils Domain Name – houghtonregis.gov.uk

12630 REFERENCES POLICY

Members were advised that the Town Clerk would normally respond to employee reference requests, regardless of the length of time an employee had left employment. Members were provided with a report and draft policy that would set a time limit on the period available for the provision of references.

Members discussed the time limit, as proposed, but felt that Houghton Regis Town Council should at least, confirm the dates a previous employee had worked for the Council, irrespective of the time that had elapsed. It was felt that further advice was required regarding this limitation period and requested that this policy be represented, at the next Corporate Services meeting.

Members received a revised Town Council Safer Recruitment & Selection Policy. It was highlighted that many companies automatically guaranteed a job interview to a candidate, where they met the essential criteria. Members felt that this needed to be reflected in the policy and therefore requested that advice be sought from the Town Councils Human Resources provider to allow for appropriate wording to be included in the policy and for this revised policy to be presented at the next Corporate Services meeting.

Resolved:

- 1) To defer the adoption of the proposed References Policy until further information had been gathered regarding limitations.**
- 2) To defer the adoption of the revised Safer Recruitment & Selection Policy until further information had been gathered.**

12631 TOWN COUNCIL OFFICE WORKS AND IT UPDATE

At the Town Council meeting held on the 2nd October 2023, members agreed (minute number 12570) for a sum of £10,000 to be taken from EMR Officer Provision to enable the upgrading of electrical and IT works in the offices. Members were advised that upgrades to the power cabling and office reconfiguration had been completed in October and the cost of these works was £3,000.

Further work to upgrade the IT cabling was scheduled for the Christmas period and the cost would be in the region of £3000.

Within the £10,000 budget allocated for this work it was also intended to upgrade to Rialtas Cloud. This would offer improved security, especially with remote working, and improve disaster recovery timescales. It would be necessary for the Council to enter into a contract for this service. As such members were asked to approve this contract, the terms of which would be a minimum of 3 years with an annual fee of £3600 for 5 users.

There was some discussion regarding the recommendation as Members stated that the funds had been agreed for works related to Health and Safety issues and had not

included a software subscription. While the allotted sum would cover the software cost, a 3-year contract would need to be budgeted for in the next financial year.

Members recorded votes were:

In favour:

Cllrs D Jones, W Henderson and C Slough

Against:

Cllrs J Carroll, M Herber and E Costello

Following the equality of votes, the Chairman (Cllr Jones) exercised his right of a casting vote therefore, the recommendation was agreed.

Resolved: To enter into a 3-year contract for Rialtas Cloud.

12632 SICKNESS ABSENCE POLICY

The Town Councils Sickness Absence Policy was last reviewed by the Corporate Services Committee at the meeting held on the 8th June 2020. Whilst this policy would not ordinarily be considered for review until 2024, due to the change in line management responsibilities and Covid restrictions no longer being in place, it was thought prudent to provide this document for review, earlier than expected.

Members were provided with a document showing the proposed changes and agreed to these, as slightly amended.

Resolved To recommend to Town Council the adoption of the Town Council's Sickness Absence Policy.

12633 ALLOCATION OF SALARY COSTS

Due to the growing size of the Council, it was suggested that the council begins allocating out staff costs to the respective committees. This would provide a more reflective picture of the cost of providing services within the community.

The council submitted a supplementary form to CBC with information for the council tax letter. The figures provided for last year would be amended to show this reallocation of salary costs so that the figures were comparable for 23/24 and 24/25.

It was confirmed that the costs relating to the appointment of a Head of Environment and Communities would be divided appropriately between the relevant categories.

Resolved: To note the allocation of staff costs across the respective committees.

12634 ONLINE PAYMENTS RECEIVED VIA TOWN COUNCIL WEBSITE

Members had indicated they would like to see residents being able to pay an invoice through the website. The Council's website provider had suggested a suitable platform to use, and the new website would include a page to enable people to pay an invoice.

The platform would charge per transaction, a similar format to the Council's payment machine. There was no upfront fee or monthly charge.

Pricing per successful charge for cards would be 1.5% + 20p, 1.9% + 20p for business cards (+1% for European Economic Area) and for international cards would be 3.25% + 20p.

The platform fee would be deducted automatically when the charge was received (pay-as-you-go). There was no setup or monthly fees or extra charge for failed transactions, storing and updating cards.

Resolved: To approve the website payment system using a suitable payment platform.

12635 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

- Staff Payments

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.

The administration officer left the meeting.

12636 STAFF PAYMENTS

Members were reminded that the resolution, at the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on the 24th April 2023, made under minute number PE267 (to recommend to Corporate Services that the list of the Salary Point number for all staff along with overtime rates, additional payments, mileage rates and employer and employee pension contribution rates be noted and signed by the Chair) had not been included on the Corporate Services agenda, for the meeting held on the 11th September 2023. Therefore, members requested this information be placed on the next Corporate Services agenda for the meeting to be held on the 4th December 2023.

Members received the list of the Salary Point numbers for all staff along with overtime rates, additional payments, mileage rates and employer and employee contributions rates.

Resolved: To note the list of the Salary Point number for all staff along with overtime rates, additional payments, mileage rates and employer and employee contributions rates and for this list to be signed by the Chair of Corporate Services.

The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8:52pm

Dated this 4th day of March 2024

Chairman

DRAFT