



Battle Town Council

MINUTES of the FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY, 23rd JUNE 2020 via Zoom at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs G Favell (Chairman), V Cook, J Gyngell, M Kiloh and C Would.

In Attendance: Cllrs A Brown, A Russell, L Samms and D Wheeler, one member of the public, C Harris (Town Clerk)

Public Question Time – nothing raised

1. Apologies for absence – None.

2. Disclosure of interest – None..

3. The minutes of the meeting held on 28th January 2020 were agreed and duly electronically signed by Cllr Favell.

4. Clerk's report

- Two **savings accounts** had been opened. Further accounts have been postponed due to the Covid-19 situation.
- The rebuild of the **boundary wall** to Western Avenue was completed just as lockdown was initiated.
- The **new grounds maintenance person** started later than anticipated, on 26th May, due to Covid-19 restrictions. She is settling in well although the usual work practices are clearly different at present. The **Trainee** will return to work next Monday, 29th June. This has been delayed due to the requirement of public transport and limits on car sharing. The **office staff** propose returning to the Almonry on 6th July. A Covid-19 Risk Assessment is being finalised and appropriate equipment has been purchased to facilitate this. The office will be open to the public for appointments only initially.
- A **new PC** has not yet been purchased. This will be actioned in time for the return to office working.

5. Almonry Development Project

- The notes from several **Almonry Development Working Group** meetings had been circulated to Members and were noted, as attached.
- Discussion papers had been circulated with an invitation for all Councillors to attend an ADWG meeting to discuss the results of the consultation and consider future action. It was highlighted that this project has been discussed for at least five years and a decision should be made to avoid further accusations of the building deteriorating further due to lack of action, particularly as a substantial amount of expenditure and a consultation of all residents had been undertaken. Members further discussed the recommendations from the ADWG meeting as three points:
 - a) Do Councillors agree that a programme of works to undertake selected agreed repairs, maintenance and improvement of services needs to be initiated, as soon as possible?
Members discussed items that had been identified as essential in the 2019 Surveyors Report and agreed that these and works to ensure the safe and efficient environment for staff, tenants and visitors are essential. It was highlighted that Council must meet its statutory and moral obligations and this must include accessibility for all. **Members agreed unanimously to recommend to Full Council that a programme of works to undertake selected agreed repairs, maintenance and improvement of services needs to be initiated as soon as possible, for efficient and safe working in a heritage building in order to fulfil statutory and**

Battle Town Council

moral obligations. The detail of works to be recommended to Full Council for approval at a future meeting.

- b) Do Councillors agree that the location of a Tourist Information Point in the Almonry is an important part of plans for the recovery of tourism in Battle and should be actioned as soon as possible?

Members acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused and is causing serious difficulties for the town: the lockdown of businesses; and the great reduction in tourism. It was noted that the Council has, initially on a short-term contract, employed a Marketing & Town Development Officer and this role together with existing staff, with training could provide a low cost Tourist Information Point within the Almonry. It was noted that this is not the only action required for the town's recovery.

With one abstention, Members agreed to recommend to Full Council that the location of a Tourist Information Point in the Almonry is an important part of plans for the recovery of tourism in Battle and should be actioned, at low cost, as soon as possible.

- c) Do Councillors agree that the Council should now put in hand the application for a loan of up to £600,000 from the Public Works Loan Board(PWLB), previously agreed and budgeted for?

Members were reminded that Council has on two occasions agreed the application of a PWLB loan for £600k and that the precept had been increased to allow for this. No further increase in precept is required. It was highlighted that loans are at a fixed rate and interest is only payable on the amount drawn down. Grants are being pursued and these would reduce the amount drawn down from the loan. Members considered reducing the amount of loan application but felt that, with the variables of costs post-covid-19; the possibility of further unidentified essential repairs; and the option to not draw down unrequired funds, that the full, previously agreed, £600k should be submitted.

Members agreed unanimously to recommend to Full Council that the Council should now put in hand the application for a loan of up to £600,000 from the Public Works Loan Board, previously agreed and budgeted for, on the understanding that only the amount needed to undertake the works in recommendation a) is drawn down.

6. Regeneration of High Street as a response to Covid-19 emergency

The notes of an informal meeting held with District Councillors, Chamber of Commerce, English Heritage and the MP had been circulated, as attached.

Members were reminded that banners had been erected to announce that Battle is open and plans are being progressed to hold a VJ and re-opening of Battle on 15th August. This will be subject to Government restrictions on social gathering. A further meeting to discuss how to work together to encourage people back to Battle will be held on Thursday. Suggestions of assistance were discussed including using General Reserves for grants for businesses to help purchase essential items required to comply with the Government guidance. It was agreed that the Chamber of Commerce should be encouraged to drive this initiative. The use of the Abbey Green by local cafes had been agreed in principle and this will be discussed this week. The Clerk was asked to confirm if the financial contribution of £100 for the Battle Food Bank is still required. Cllr Cook agreed to research the possibility of providing a local clothing and essential items 'bank' for parents of new babies. It was agreed that marketing and PR is a priority and the M&TD Officer is working on this. Members agreed that the Aims, Objectives and Terms for Grants to Businesses will be presented to External Relations & Town Development for consideration.

Battle Town Council

7. Professional Human Resources service

The Clerk reported that new employment laws were implemented from April this year. She recommended that a professional company be contracted to provide advice on contracts of employment and any queries that may arise. Two alternative methods of service had been sourced: a monthly 'retainer' with Peninsula at £109pm; or options with HR Services (SALC recommended) that include 'pay as you go' at £80ph or a 'bundle' of 5 hours at £355. **Members agreed that the Clerk be given delegated authority to agree a contract to bring our contracts and policies up to date.**

8. Action Plan

The draft **updated detailed Action Plan** had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting. Members agreed to the amendments, as attached.

The **Operational and Finance Risks Document** was readopted as attached.

9. Annual Meeting on 18th August 2020

In accordance with Government guidance, Members had previously supported the postponement of the Annual Meeting until face-to-face meetings may be held. As Zoom meetings are being held with more confidence and there is a possibility of being able to hold small meetings face-to-face in the near future **Members agreed that the Full Council meeting planned for 18th August be amended to an Annual Meeting; this will allow for the election/re-election of Chairman and Vice-Chairman.**

10. Financial matters

The Clerk reminded Members that current work commitments has resulted in a delay to complete year end accounts. The **provisional budget report to 31st March 2020** was therefore noted, as attached.

The Clerk reported that HMRC guidance suggests a tax free payment of £26 per month post April, £18pm for March, for all staff working from home during the Covid-19 lockdown. **Members agreed unanimously to recommend this to Full Council on 21st July 2020.**

11. Matters for information and future agenda items

- To consider new Reserves Policy
- To review insurance cover

12. Date of next meeting: 28th July 2020

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 9.05pm.

**CLLR G FAVELL
CHAIRMAN**

Minutes agreed & signed electronically 28th July 2020 – *G Favell*