GF

Battle Town Council

MINUTES of the FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE held on TUESDAY, 24th NOVEMBER 2020 via Zoom at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs G Favell (Chairman), V Cook, J Gyngell, M Kiloh and H Sharman.
In Attendance: Cllr A Russell, 3 members of the public, C Harris (Town Clerk)

The Chairman welcomed everybody to the meeting and reported that the meeting will be recorded to aid minutes taking.

Public Question Time
A written question had been received from a member of the public in relation to the tender figure for the **Almonry project being exclusive of VAT** and a request for clarification of the liability and impact on budgeting process. The Clerk confirmed that advice has been received that it is possible to register an option to tax. This will allow for the reclaim of VAT. It will also require income from the facility to incur VAT. This has been reflected within the budget setting process for 2021/22, although Council is still to agree this course of action formally. Clearly, the income for 2019/20 has been severely impacted by Covid-19 and the VAT element is unlikely to have a high significance for this period.
A second submission raised concern at an item in Appendix I to the **draft Strategic Plan**, raised previously. It was reported that, although the full Appendices had been published with the Agenda, the Almonry Development Working Group do not propose a further full Plan and therefore the Appendices will be reduced for the abridged Plan and the item in question will not be required.

On behalf of the **Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group**, Mr Marks highlighted concern at the confusion of when the percentage of **Community Infrastructure Levy**(CIL) is due to the Town Council for larger developments in Battle and its substantial impact on income for community infrastructure. The lack of direct improvements in the Battle area on the Rother District Council CIL Regulation 123 list was identified. The BCPNPSG requested that this be an item for the next Full Council meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence** – None.

2. **Disclosure of interest** – None.

The minutes of the meeting held on 22nd September 2020 were agreed, subject to an amendment that Cllr A Russell left the meeting at item 6, and duly electronically signed by Cllr Favell.

4. **Clerk's report** – Nothing that is not an agenda item.

5. **Correspondence and communications received post agenda publication** – None.

6. **Almonry Development Working Group**

- Cllr Kiloh presented the **notes from the meeting of 5th November**, previously circulated and attached. These were noted. She confirmed that at a further meeting earlier in the day, it had been reported that planning authority permissions had been applied for and a grant application for the Historic England Covid-19 Emergency Heritage at Risk Response Fund was progressing and would be submitted prior to Friday's deadline. **Members agreed unanimously to recommend to Full Council that the Almonry be registered to option for VAT.**

- It was highlighted that the **draft Strategic Plan** remains in draft as some information, for example a breakdown of professional fees, is still awaited. A project plan, detailing the management of the project, will be the responsibility of the architect. Members were reminded that a Public Works Loan Board Loan of £600,000 will be applied for but successful grant applications will reduce the amount drawn down and therefore the costs. It was noted that, whilst interest rates remain low, they have increased from the initial Council agreement to apply for a PWLB loan. **Members agreed unanimously to recommend the draft Strategic Plan to Full Council as attached.**
- Members agreed unanimously to make an application for a **Rother Community Grant of £30,000** for the provision of wheelchair access and accessible toilet facilities.

7. Personnel sub Committee

- **Minutes of the meeting on 17th November 2020** were presented by Cllr Gyngell and noted.
- Cllr Gyngell reported **verbally on the meeting earlier** in the evening to discuss staff matters following the recent appraisal process, prior to the Government lockdown restrictions, for all staff excluding the Marketing & Town Development Officer. It was noted that several complimentary comments had been received about the condition of the cemetery and **Members agreed unanimously that Shania Arnold be offered the permanent Grounds and Maintenance position with particular responsibility for the Cemetery and that, subject to further satisfactory improvements, a one point salary point increase be applied in April 2021.** Members were reminded of the amount and high standard of work the Clerk undertakes, despite constant calls on her time from other staff, Councillors and some members of the public. **Members agreed unanimously to award the Clerk a pay scale increase of two points from April 2021.**

8. Budget and Precept for 2021-22

Each Committee had discussed Action Plans and agreed a request for budget. The Responsible Financial Officer had analysed every budget line for potential savings and income loss. A general increase of 1% had been applied to services. An initial budget for 2021-22 had been circulated to Councillors with the agenda. A further examination of projects had been undertaken resulting in postponement, reduction in budget and two items considered as appropriate for funding from the CIL Ear Marked Reserve. This revised budget was discussed by Members.

It was highlighted that there is no cap to Town and Parish Councils precept increase, however, the Council had agreed to consult with residents if an increase over 3% was necessary. Members noted that there is no precept increase for the Almonry project. The Committee acknowledged the current difficulties that everyone is facing and felt that it is also particularly important to provide services for the whole community to enjoy. After some discussion **Members agreed to recommend to Full Council a Precept of £383,968, an increase of approx. 7p per week for a Band D property; 2.49%**, as detailed at appendix A**.**

One member of the public left the meeting.

9. Almonry Garden

- The Chairman of **Beautiful Battle** had reported that the rebuilding of the compost heap is ongoing but had been delayed due to social distancing restrictions; the roses had been removed from the Battle Twinning Association bed and replanted temporarily in the rose bed by the fire station; and mixed bulbs had been planted for winter.

- The **Battle Twinning Association** had submitted a request to provide a replacement sundial base and four shrubs for the rear garden. **This was agreed.**

10. Boundary wall at 21 Tills Courtyard / George Meadow

As previously reported, an independent Surveyor had indicated that, without contrary information, the wall is of joint ownership and the cost of repair will therefore be shared; recommended to be paid from General Reserves. The Clerk was authorised to discuss with the third party and to obtain three quotes for Council to consider to allow the works to be carried out as soon as possible.

11. Action Plan

The Council's four-year plan was noted. Cllr Russell suggested that the wording of the Battle Civil Parish Neighbourhood Plan item should be amended to include the monitoring and implementation. It was agreed that it was appropriate to add this item to an Action Plan.

12. Financial matters

- The **budget report to 30st September 2020** (half-year) was noted as attached, appendix B.
- The Clerk reported that, due to home working, it had not been possible to circulate the **Bank reconciliation to 30th September 2020** and this would be carried forward to the Full Council meeting.
- Members noted that the renewal of the combined membership to **Sussex Association of Local Councils and National Association of Local Councils** for 2021-22 will increase by almost £55. It was highlighted that advice and training had been beneficial and **Members agreed to renew membership for a further year.**
- There had been no applications for **Post Covid-19 Recovery Grant.**

13. Matters for information and future agenda items

- Reserves Policy
- Remaining policies for review
- Maintenance and Management Plan for the Almonry Building

14. Date of next meeting: 26th January 2021

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.47pm.

CLLR G FAVELL
CHAIRMAN

Minutes approved and signed electronically 26th January 2021 - *G Favell*