

Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **FRIDAY, 13th OCTOBER 2023** at 10.25 a.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor T Foster (Town Mayor) – Chairman

Councillor J Bishop
Councillor A Harris
Councillor C Moreton
Councillor WS Trite

Also in attendance: -

Dr M Ayres Town Clerk
Miss A Spencer Finance Manager

There were no members of the public present at the meeting.

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for their inability to attend the meeting were received from Councillors Bonfield, Tomes and Whitwam.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with Section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

No declarations were made on this occasion.

3. **INTERNAL AUDIT – UPDATE ON APPOINTMENT OF IA AND CONSIDERATION OF INTERNAL AUDIT PLAN 2023/24**

Further to Minute No. 7 of the Finance & Governance Committee Meeting held on 26th July 2023 and Minute No. 107(a) of the Council Meeting held on 18th September 2023, consideration was given to three options for the internal audit plan for the current financial year, as follows:

- **Option 1:** Core testing only (as per Practitioners' Guide): 7.5 days.
- **Option 2:** Core testing plus detailed testing on high value income streams: 10 days.
- **Option 3:** Swanage specific audit plan: 13 audit days.

Consideration was given both to the level of audit coverage provided under each of the options and the comparable cost. It was noted that some testing can be carried out remotely, thus potentially reducing the total travel costs. This would be determined on a visit-by-visit basis, but cost reduction would be maximised during the year. The need to have additional in-house auditing of certain service areas was noted should options 1 or 2 be agreed. It was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by Councillor Trite and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

To approve audit plan option 2: core testing plus detailed testing on high value income streams, to be trialled for a two-year period, with delegated authority being granted to the RFO and Finance Manager to commission additional audit work if areas of concern arise in-year.

It was noted that a change to the reporting format would also be implemented. Members would receive an informative but summarised report, highlighting medium to high level risk assessed actions, with a more detailed report being issued to managers. This would enable Members to focus on any significant issues raised through the audit process.

4. **DATA PROTECTION ACT 2018 – TO CONSIDER ADOPTION OF:**

- a) **Draft Data Protection Policy**
- b) **Draft Revised Privacy Notices**
- c) **Draft Records Management Policy**

The Town Clerk reported that further to the annual review of the Town Council's data protection procedures, advice had been received from the council's appointed Data Protection Officer, One West, that consideration should be given to adopting the above named policies and privacy notices. The committee was informed that these had been reviewed by the Town Clerk and that some amendments had been made, in consultation with the Data Protection Officer. It was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Bishop and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND:

That the draft Data Protection Policy, Privacy Notices and Records Management Policy be adopted.

It was noted that the Draft Records Management Policy would have a detailed document retention schedule attached, which required further revision. It was AGREED:

That delegated authority be granted to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Data Protection Officer, to finalise the document retention schedule, ensuring that it was tailored to the Town Council's requirements.

5. **TO CONSIDER DRAFT AGREEMENT BETWEEN THE TOWN COUNCIL AND THE KING GEORGE V PLAYING FIELD TRUST**

Further to Minute No. 12 of the Finance & Governance Committee Meeting held on 9th November 2022, consideration was given to a draft management agreement between Swanage Town Council in its capacity as a local government body and Swanage Town Council as corporate trustee of the King George's Field, Swanage. It was noted that the Council had been advised that it should adopt an agreement to formalise existing arrangements for the management of the property. It was noted that if the committee were to recommend that the Council should put such an agreement in place, it would next have to be considered by the Council acting as Trustee, in order to ensure that it would be best for the Trust and its beneficiaries.

It was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

TO RECOMMEND:

That the draft management agreement in respect of King George's Field be adopted, subject to approval by the King George's Field, Swanage, Charitable Trust.

6. **ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING AGENDAS**

The following were listed as matters for forthcoming agendas.

- a) Civility and Respect Pledge

- b) Ethical Investments
- c) Vexatious correspondence policy
- d) Medium Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2026/27 – as noted at the July Committee Meeting a councillor workshop would be arranged in the later in the autumn.

EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Proposed by Councillor Harris, seconded by Councillor Bishop and
 AGREED:-

That, under Standing Order No. 1 c), in the public interest, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted under agenda items 7 & 8 (in relation to legal and contractual matters).

7. **PURSUIT OF AGED DEBTS**

a) **Beach Ice Cream Kiosks – To determine next steps**

Further to Minute No. 88 (a) of the Council Meeting held on 24th July 2023, and Minute No. 110 (a) of the Council Meeting held on 18th September 2023, consideration was given to a briefing note that set out the steps taken to date to pursue the debt outstanding in relation to the beach ice cream kiosks, together with legal advice in connection with the Council’s options in respect of debt recovery. During the debate it was noted that the Town Council had an obligation on behalf of local precept payers to pursue the sum outstanding and reference was made to the Town Council’s Sundry Debtor’s Management Policy. Therefore, it was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by the Town Mayor and
 RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That, in light of the information available to the Town Council and legal advice received, solicitors should be instructed to take further steps to pursue the debt, as set out in the briefing note.

It was noted that the Town Council remained open to considering a repayment plan which would see the debt cleared over a reasonable period of time.

b) **To consider request from Greengage Community Garden and Swanage & Purbeck Development Trust to waive re-charge of water bill**

Consideration was given to a briefing note, which summarised the case put forward by Swanage & Purbeck Development Trust and the Greengage Community Garden Project to dispute a water recharge of £495.26 which had been raised in respect of their occupation of Prospect Nursery. This included payment for a water leak that had occurred during September 2021.

Although it had been confirmed that the water usage had been correctly billed, and the leak had been swiftly addressed, the Greengage Project had written to request that a significant proportion of the recharge should be waived in light of their charitable status and positive work in the community.

Members gave the matter detailed consideration, noting that if the Council were to raise a credit note for a significant part of the recharge, then the Greengage Project would need to undertake more frequent meter readings to ensure that a leak could be identified more quickly in the future. It was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by Councillor Harris and
 RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That delegated authority be given to the Town Clerk to agree a reduction in the recharge of the water bill to the Swanage and Purbeck Development

Trust/Greengage Community Garden Project in respect of the period September 2021 to March 2022, based on the charge for the comparable period for 2022/23, subject to the Trust/Project instituting measures to identify a water leak more quickly in future.

9. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as 1st November 2023.

The meeting concluded at 11.05 a.m.
