

Minutes of the Extraordinary meeting of the **FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE** held at the Town Hall, Swanage on **THURSDAY, 25th APRIL 2024** at 10.30 a.m.

PRESENT:- Councillor T. Foster (Town Mayor) – Chair

Councillor J. Bishop
Councillor A. Harris
Councillor C. Moreton
Councillor M. Whitwam

Also in attendance: -

Dr M. Ayres Town Clerk
Mrs E. Evans Democratic Services Officer

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 Trite.

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.

There were no declarations to record on this occasion.

3. **REVIEW OF DRAFT VEXATIOUS CORRESPONDENCE AND COMPLAINTS POLICY FURTHER TO COUNCIL MEETING, 25TH MARCH 2024 AND WORKING PARTY MEETING, 22ND APRIL 2024**

Further to Minute No. 207 of the Council meeting held on 25th March 2024 and a subsequent meeting of the Vexatious Correspondence Policy working party held on 22nd April 2024, Members considered a revised draft Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy. It was noted that the working party had proposed minor amendments further to suggestions made by Members, shown in italics as follows:

Vexatious complaints and correspondence can be characterised in one or more of the following ways:

1.1 Behaviour which is *perceived* as obsessive, persistent, harassing, prolific, repetitious.

...

1.3 Displays an insistence upon pursuing meritorious complaints or issues in an unreasonable manner, *for example failing to focus on addressing the issue in a harmonious and pragmatic way.*

It was noted that the adoption of the policy would not affect the rights of individuals to request information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and that the policy would be reviewed in six months' time.

It was therefore proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Moreton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the revised draft Vexatious Correspondence and Complaints Policy be taken forward to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 29th April 2024 for adoption.

4. **REVIEW OF DRAFT SAFEGUARDING POLICY**

Consideration was given to a briefing paper, prepared by the Assets and Compliance Manager, which outlined the feedback received following a recent visit by WorkNest, the Town Council’s health and safety advisors. The feedback had been positive regarding the Council’s systems. However, a recommendation had been made to implement a Safeguarding Policy to set out the principles and responsibilities for safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults. A draft Safeguarding policy had been circulated prior to the meeting and it was noted that a training session would be provided to the appropriate team members in due course.

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

That the draft Safeguarding Policy be taken forward to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 29th April 2024 for adoption.

5. **REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS**

Consideration was given to revised draft Standing Orders, which had been amended to take into account the National Association of Local Council’s (NALC’s) most up-to-date model document. It was noted that the most significant changes included an introduction, clarification of the role of working parties and the inclusion of a section entitled ‘Responsibilities under Data Protection Legislation’. Members commented on the importance of the practical guidance that Standing Orders provides to the Chairman of a meeting and it was, therefore, proposed by Councillor Whitwam, seconded by Councillor Bishop and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the revised draft Standing Orders be taken forward to the Extraordinary Council Meeting on 29th April 2024 for adoption.

6. **TO CONSIDER DRAFT ARMED FORCES COVENANT PLEDGES**

Further to Minute No. 3 of the Personnel Committee meeting held on 17th April 2024, consideration was given to draft Armed Forces Covenant pledges, which had been informed by examples supplied by the Wessex Reserve Forces’ and Cadets’ Association and those adopted by Blandford Forum Town Council. Support was expressed for the signing of the covenant, but it was noted that a number of the pledges might benefit from further discussion. Members were, therefore, minded to agree that the signing of the covenant should be placed on the agenda of a Council meeting in the summer, with a view to holding a covenant signing event in the autumn. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Moreton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:**

That the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant be placed on the agenda of a future Council meeting to be held in the summer of 2024, with a signing event to be held in the autumn.

7. **ARRANGEMENTS POST-ELECTION MAY 2024, INCLUDING INITIAL COUNCILLOR INDUCTION SESSION**

Members noted the contents of a briefing paper, prepared by the Town Clerk, which outlined the timeframes for actions between the local elections and the Annual Council Meeting being held on 13th May 2024, as follows:

Date	Action
Thursday 2 nd May	Election day
Saturday 4 th May	Count for Town Council seats. Welcome e-mail sent to all elected members.

Tuesday 7 th May	Outgoing councillors retire and newly elected councillors take office.
Wednesday 8 th May	Agenda issued for Annual Council Meeting.
Wednesday 8 th – Friday 10 th May	Councillors invited to complete declarations of acceptance of office forms and register their interests.
Friday 10 th May	Initial councillor induction session – overview of Swanage Town Council; introduction to the management team; summary of Annual Council Meeting.
Monday 13 th May	Annual Council Meeting. Current mayor and deputy mayor retire and new mayor and deputy mayor are elected.

It was noted that the Mayor and Deputy Mayor would remain in office until the Annual Council Meeting, being held on 13th May 2024, and therefore would be a point of contact for all newly elected councillors, should this be required.

In terms of selecting a Mayor, Deputy Mayor, committee members and chairmen, as well as representatives on working parties and outside bodies, it was noted that recent custom and practice had been for all councillors to meet informally post-election to agree a list of appointments for confirmation at the annual meeting. Members were supportive of this approach continuing, as was the practice in many other councils, but recognised that as this was not set down in Standing Orders participation in this process was voluntary. It was acknowledged that if different groups of councillors wished to put forward alternative names for Council positions then that would be the subject of a vote at the Annual Council Meeting.

8. **TO REVIEW THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL**

Consideration was given to a preliminary report on the findings of the annual review of the System of Internal Control (SIC) 2023/24. Members acknowledged the Council's continued commitment to take measures to improve its SIC to ensure that public funds are used economically, efficiently and effectively. The significant volume of work undertaken during the year to review policy documents and agree a Medium Term Financial Plan was highlighted. The content of the report was noted, it being acknowledged that an updated version will be submitted to the Town Council, prior to the approval of the Annual Return at the Final Accounts meeting being held on 29th May 2024.

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

There were no matters raised.

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 item 10 (in relation to legal and financial matters).

10. **AGED DEBTORS - UPDATE**

Further to Minute No. 11 of the Finance and Governance Committee meeting held on 20th March 2024, an update was provided in respect of measures being taken to collect the Council's most significant aged debts.

Particular attention was given to a proposal that had been put forward by Swanage Bowling Club in respect of sums outstanding in relation to a disputed water bill in connection with the bowling green at Beach Gardens. The Club's proposal also related to payments due

to the Council for the use of the Pavilion. It was noted that both parties had invested significant time in negotiations in order to identify a settlement that would be acceptable to all. It was proposed by the Chairman, seconded by Councillor Moreton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That Swanage Bowling Club's proposal be approved in principle, subject to officers having delegated authority to make final arrangements with the Club for the allocation of sums between the water bill and the pavilion licence fee and presenting a further report to the Extraordinary Council Meeting to be held on 29th April 2024.

11. **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The date of the next scheduled meeting was noted as 24th July 2024.

The meeting concluded at 11.25 a.m.
