

Minutes of the **SPECIAL MEETING** of the
Swanage Town Council held at the Town Hall, High Street,
Swanage on **WEDNESDAY, 29th MAY 2024** at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor T. Foster (Town Mayor) – Chairman

Councillor M. Bonfield
Councillor S. Brookes
Councillor J. Dorrington
Councillor D. Monkhouse
Councillor C. Moreton
Councillor C. Sutton
Councillor C. Tomes
Councillor W. Trite
Councillor S. Vile

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

25. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for her inability to attend the Meeting were received from Councillor Coward. Councillor Lejeune attended the meeting remotely.

26. **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.

27. **TO CONSIDER THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR AND TO CONFIRM THERE IS NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST WITH THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR**

It was reported that the external auditor required affirmation of the independence of the internal auditor. Although this was not a statutory requirement it was noted as good practice, as per Section 4.9: Independence within the JPAG *Practitioners' Guide*, which recommends a review of the personal, financial and professional independence of the internal auditor on an annual basis.

It was further reported that the external auditor, BDO LLP, requires evidenced confirmation on an annual basis that there are no conflicts of interest with the aforementioned auditor. Following consideration of these matters, it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Sutton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

To confirm the independence of the appointed internal auditor, Darkin-Miller Chartered Accountants, and that there are no conflicts of interest with the external auditor, BDO LLP.

28. **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2023/24**

(a) **Visit 5 of 5**

The final interim Internal Audit Report for the year 2023/24 prepared by Darkin-Miller – Chartered Accountants was presented. It was noted that one high priority and two medium priority level recommendations had been made, with a further matter for information, all regarding the operation of the market.

It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Vile and
RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the final interim Internal Audit Report 2023/24
and the recommendations contained therein be
accepted and approved.

(b) **Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24**

Consideration was given to the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2023/24,
prepared by Darkin-Miller Chartered Accountants, supplementary to the Annual
Internal Audit Report (AIAR) 2023/24, page 3 of the AGAR. The document
provided background information and explanations regarding the
recommendations made and conclusions reached in respect of the Council's
services, in accordance with the internal audit's objective to provide an appraisal
function for the review of the Council's internal control system.

It was noted that the internal auditor had concluded that the Council's 'central
systems and internal control arrangements appear to be effective' and that the
Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24 did not identify any significant control
weaknesses for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement.

Following a question regarding recommendation 5.1 of the report, clarification
was given to Members over the composition of the aged debt over 120 days.

It was proposed by Councillor Trite, seconded by Councillor Bonfield and
RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Internal Audit Report 2023/24 and
the recommendations contained therein be accepted
and approved.

29. **TO REVIEW THE SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL 2023/24**

In accordance with paragraph 6(1)(a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations
2015, a Report on the Findings of the Review of the System of Internal Control 2023/24
was submitted for consideration. It was noted that a draft of the report had previously
been reviewed by the Finance & Governance Committee in April 2024. The report set
out the steps taken during the year to enhance the Council's system of control, including
the review of policy documents and charitable trust governance. The importance of the
internal audit process and the scrutiny role played by the Finance & Governance
Committee were highlighted. It was proposed by Councillor Dorrington, seconded by
Councillor Monkhouse, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Report on the Findings of the Review of the
System of Internal Control 2023/24 be approved and
accepted.

30. **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2023/24**

(a) **Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2023/24**

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

That the Annual Governance Statement 2023/24 be
approved and signed for submission to the Council's
external auditor with the Annual Governance &
Accountability Return 2023/24.

(b) **Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2023/24**

Following a question regarding the provision for bad/doubtful debtors,
clarification was given to Members regarding the level provided for within the

accounting statements. It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Sutton and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Accounting Statements 2023/24 be approved and signed for submission to the Council's external auditor with the Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2023/24.

31. **ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT 2023/24**

A question arose regarding the formulation of the Council's Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Policy. It was reported that due to the complexities of this issue, the current policy was that when investing in banks and funds, the Authority will prioritise banks that are signatories to the UN Principles for Responsible Banking and funds operated by managers that are signatories to the UN Principles for Responsible Investment, the Net Zero Asset Managers Alliance and/or the UK Stewardship Code. It was proposed by Councillor Monkhouse seconded by the Town Mayor, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Treasury Report 2023/24 be approved and accepted.

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

(a) **Procurement of Utilities** - the Town Clerk reported that further to the decision made by Council at the Monthly meeting held in March 2024 to procure electricity from September 2024 via the LASER framework flex basket, that the 100% green basket option had been withdrawn and would not be available until September 2025. It was reported that alternative purchasing options and quotes would be sourced.

It was further reported that quotes had been received for the procurement of gas through Utility Aid, an energy broker for the not-for-profit sector. The quotes varied between 100% renewable and a 50/50 mixed renewable/non-renewable option, with contract terms between 1 to 3 ¼ years. The lowest quote received was 100% renewable as standard. It was reported that the estimated cost for the next 12 months would be significantly lower than that incurred over the previous 12 months. Furthermore, the broker had stated that prices were at the lowest point in the last 3-4 years, and it was not anticipated that they would drop much, if at all, in the near future. It was noted that the quotes received were on a daily basis and could be subject to change given any shocks in the market.

Following a brief discussion where the desire for Council to procure 100% renewable energy was affirmed, it was proposed by Councillor Sutton and seconded by Councillor Tomes:-

That in light of the ongoing uncertainty over energy prices, delegated authority be given to the Town Clerk to enter into a contract to procure gas from 100% renewable sources at the earliest opportunity.

Upon being put to the meeting, NINE members voted IN FAVOUR of the Proposition, and there was ONE ABSTENTION, whereupon the Proposition was declared CARRIED.

The meeting closed at 7.40 p.m.