



# MINEHEAD TOWN COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND STAFFING COMMITTEE MEETING

held on Monday 9 March 2020

at the Council Offices: 3 Summerland Road, Minehead at 7.30pm

*The Meeting was digitally recorded*

**Present:** Chair: Cllr C Palmer\*  
 Councillors: Cllr P Bolton\* (Deputy Mayor) *arrived after start of the Meeting*,  
 Cllr A Kingston-James, Cllr A Lawton, Cllr J Malin, Cllr T Bloomfield,  
 Cllr S Slade (Mayor)  
 (\* denotes Somerset West and Taunton District "SWaT" Councillor)

**Officers in Attendance:** Mr A Giles – Acting Responsible Finance Officer ("RFO")  
 Mrs L Thornton – Finance Administrator and Notetaker

**Councillor in Attendance:** Cllr M Palmer

**Members of the Public and Press:** 0 members of the public  
 0 members of the press

### 485 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [LGA 1972 s85 \(1\)](#)

Apologies were submitted from Cllr N Hercock, Cllr B Mandley, Cllr D Prosser and Cllr T Venner, and approved by Councillors.

### 486 TO RECEIVE COUNCILLORS' DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

[In accordance with the provisions of the Localism Act 2011 in respect of members](#)

To receive and record any Declarations of Interest in respect of any matters included on the Agenda for consideration at this Meeting.

Member	Item	Interest	Time Period	Speak/Vote
Cllr P Bolton	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	491.9	Officer, Gateway Events	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke, did not vote
Cllr T Bloomfield	491.9	Officer, Gateway Events	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke, did not vote
Cllr Kingston-James	491.9	Gateway Events	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke, did not vote
Cllr C Palmer	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	491.9	Former officer, Gateway Events	2019	Stayed in the room, did not speak or vote
Cllr A Lawton	491.6	Personal Interest	2020	Stayed in the room, did not speak or vote
Cllr S Slade	491.3	Personal interest	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke, did not vote
	491.4			

DISPENSATIONS [Localism Act 2011](#)

No dispensations were requested.

487 TO ADJOURN THE MEETING FOR PUBLIC INCLUSION

No members of the public were in attendance.

488 TO AUTHORISE CHEQUES

**488.1 To approve Direct Debit payments between 1 February 2020 and 29 February 2020**

Cllr C Palmer asked the Committee to approve the Direct Debit payments. The Finance Administrator advised that further information regarding items 6, 7 and 8 was awaited.

***Approval of the Direct Debits, items 1 to 24 on the listing, was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer, subject to more information being provided – this was Seconded by Cllr Kingston-James and unanimously agreed.***

**488.2 To approve payments under £1,000**

There were no questions.

***Approval of cheques under £1,000, items 3 to 12 on the listing, was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.***

*(Cllr Bolton arrived and joined the Meeting. Cllr C Palmer revisited items 485 to 488.2 briefly, whereupon Cllr Bolton gave his Declaration of Interest).*

**488.3 To recommend to Full Council payments over £1,000**

This included urgent payments, item 1 & 2 over £1,000.

The RFO explained the pension deficit relating to a shortfall in funds due to extended life expectancy. He confirmed that this related to both outside and inside staff. He proceeded to advise that Minehead Town Council (“MTC”) could consider not offering/closing the superannuation scheme to future employees but would then have to offer an alternative pension scheme.

***Recommendation to Full Council of cheques 13-18 over £1,000 was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr T Bloomfield and unanimously agreed.***

**488.4 To receive the Income Report for February 2020**

Received with thanks.

#### 488.5 **To receive a Verbal Update on the Action Monitoring System**

Cllr C Palmer explained how the Action Log worked – that a record of actions was required to show what had been done and by whom, as requested at Meetings. He explained the colour-coding, status and dates. The Finance Administrator distributed a printed copy of the file. Cllr C Palmer also explained that an email function had been added. How to use the Action Log, how Officers compile it, and the need for involvement was discussed.

Officers and Cllr C Palmer were thanked for providing the facility which was much appreciated.

#### 489 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT REGARDING BANK RECONCILIATIONS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 29 FEBRUARY 2020

Cllr Bolton confirmed that he had been unable to sign reconciliations from 15 January 2020 to 29 February 2020 due to the Finance Administrator being on annual leave when he had attended the office. An appointment would be made, and reconciliations signed before the auditor's visit on 26 March 2020.

#### 490 TO RECEIVE THE CHAIRMAN'S MONTHLY REPORT

Cllr C Palmer discussed the purpose of the Chairman's verbal report. He raised the Grant Application Policy, emphasising that, as it was using public money, MTC should follow it as closely as possible.

Cllr C Palmer suggested MTC could approve the full request, and/or a lesser amount - or if MTC felt an application fell short of its requirements could ask for full accounts or more information.

Cllr C Palmer suggested that the Committee could:

- defer this to Full Council for consideration;
- turn down an application if it clearly did not meet MTC's criteria; and
- approve any applications up to £500.

The Committee discussed that an application could be a grant or a guarantee against loss under the current policy and that this month's applications fell under the current policy - although this policy could change in the future. If an event made a loss, the guarantee would cover the loss only, up to the limit of the grant. It was also suggested that non-urgent grants could be deferred to next year if time was running out with the year-end approaching.

#### 491 TO CONSIDER GRANT APPLICATIONS

The RFO confirmed sufficient funds in the budget to cover all applications received. Cllr Bolton advised that the Cadets had not at that time planted the trees, and this should be added to the Action Log.

The RFO suggested any underspend in this year's budget for grants would be put into reserves and credited to next year's budget.

Cllr Malin requested Grant Application, items 7.1 to 7.6, be voted for approval *en bloc*, however Cllr C Palmer preferred to discuss each one individually.

#### 491.1 **Minehead Boxing**

Cllr C Palmer referred members to page 4 of the application, questioning the financial paperwork provided and suggesting more information was required. The RFO advised that the Committee may not have delegated authority to approve the grant application if the grant policy criteria had not been met. It was noted that no constitution or letter of written agreement was provided

***It was Proposed by Cllr Slade that the applicant be asked to re-apply next year to be considered in the next rounds of grants - with a full set of accounts or detailed bank statements and at least a signed letter of agreement. They should also be advised that they may need to meet a new policy next year. This was Seconded by Cllr C Palmer and unanimously agreed.***

#### 491.2 **West Somerset Stroke Club**

Cllr C Palmer observed from page 2 of the application that the activity included non-residents, helpers and carers, so not entirely for the benefit of Minehead residents. He also observed that they were affiliated to a national group. It was confirmed that the constitution covers applications from West Somerset.

***Approval of a grant of £300 was Proposed by Cllr Malin – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.***

*Finance Administrator to raise cheque and Administrator to send out with letter.*

#### 491.3 **The 1<sup>st</sup> Minehead Girls' Brigade**

It was confirmed that the second page of the application, which had been missing, had arrived in the office on 9 March - the day of the Meeting. The requested grant had been amended to £250 as the Rotary Swimathon had donated £150.

Cllr C Palmer observed that the current MTC Grant Policy referred to strictly non-religious and/or non-political groups and read from the Girls' Brigade Articles of Association provided with the application, 3.1 and 3.2 regarding promotion of the Christian faith. The matter was discussed and Cllr C Palmer asked the Committee to consider if they viewed the Girls' Brigade as a religious group.

Cllr Bolton advised the need to consider discrimination in any new policy.

***Approval of a grant of £250 was Proposed by Cllr Malin – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and agreed, with one abstention.***

*Finance Administrator to raise cheque and Administrator to send out with letter.*

**491.4 Minehead and Exmoor Music Festival**

CLlr C Palmer observed that the constitution and 2 years' accounts were in order.

***Approval of a grant of £500 was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Bloomfield and unanimously agreed.***

*Finance Administrator to raise cheque and Administrator to send out with letter.*

**491.5 Minehead Male Voice Choir**

CLlr C Palmer confirmed the withdrawal of the application as the event had been re-scheduled for the Autumn: they will re-apply next year.

**491.6 Minehead and District Gardeners' Association**

CLlr C Palmer observed that they were affiliated to a national society but presumed not grant-funded by that society and that the constitution and accounts were in order.

***Approval of a grant of £200 was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Slade and unanimously agreed.***

*Finance Administrator to raise cheque and Administrator to send out with letter*

**491.7 Exmoor Youth Club**

CLlr C Palmer confirmed the application would not be considered as paperwork had not been submitted.

**491.8 Accessible Transport West Somerset ("ATWEST")**

CLlr Bolton asked if he should declare an interest as he had been approached for support as a SWaT Councillor. Members agreed CLlr Bolton could vote.

Councillors discussed the finances of ATWEST. No accounts or constitution were submitted with the application. CLlr C Palmer advised that the application did not meet MTC's criteria.

***Refusal of the grant and a request to ATWEST to re-apply with all necessary paperwork and a full explanation of their finances was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was seconded by Cllr Kingston-James and unanimously agreed.***

**491.9 Gateway Events**

CLlr C Palmer deferred to the Committee rather than speak on the application, having declared an interest.

Cllr Slade confirmed a constitution and budget had been received. Cllr Kingston-James enquired as to the staffing element of the budget. As a Gateway representative, Cllr Bloomfield explained that the staff costs related to staff paid to operate the kiosk due to a lack of volunteers. Cllr Slade asked whether all events in the budget were booked and Cllr Bloomfield confirmed they were fixed costs.

Cllr Slade praised last year's event suggesting it promoted community spirit.

Cllr Kingston-James declared an interest on reading the application and did not vote.

***Approval of a grant of £500 was Proposed by Cllr Slade – this was Seconded by Cllr Malin and unanimously agreed.***

*Finance Administrator to raise cheque and Administrator to send out with letter.*

#### 492 TO DISCUSS THE GRANTS POLICY

Suggested alterations to the revised Small Grants Policy were discussed. Members agreed that the policy needed to be tightened-up to be less vague. Any application/activity should meet MTC's criteria and ethos. The minimum amount of grant will rise from £50 to £100, so, in future, small grants would range from £100 to £500. Cllr Bolton advised that the new policy should be checked for discrimination. It was agreed any unused grant money should be returned within 60 days of the event. MTC would need to see accounts of the event and could reclaim any grant monies if accounts are not provided. Applicants should be encouraged to make representations to the Committee, giving 5 days' notice. Applicants should be 'not for profit' organisations.

The RFO suggested applicants could be invited to MTC Meetings to provide an in person or written report of a completed event. The Committee would meet every three months to discuss grants. Grants could be offered in various ways as 'Arts Grants', 'Community Grants' etc. The RFO confirmed that the budget for Community Grants in 2020/21 was £10,000. Councillors discussed the proposed use of these funds and agreed that their intended purpose was for the delivery of a small number of larger scale community projects.

The Grants Policy will continue to be reviewed.

#### 493 TO RECEIVE THE RISK MANAGEMENT REPORT

The RFO explained that the policies must be put in place to satisfy our insurance. The policies are based on documentation from the Somerset Association of Local Councils (SALC) and The Health & Safety Executive (HSE): they can be changed but provide a legal minimum. The RFO explained how the staff should deliver the policies, and that what is currently done differs from what we say we do. The RFO continued that MTC needs the right personnel to deliver the policies and that the appointment of a Safety Officer may be required.

Working practices and responsibilities, and the stresses new practices might put on staff were discussed.

The RFO provided information on a possible action list and Cllr Bloomfield suggested a monthly meeting between staff and Councillors plus the need for everyone to work together in a supportive way.

The RFO stated the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) requirements and asked whether members of staff should have a uniform displaying the MTC logo. This will be referred to the Risk Management Group.

The RFO confirmed that the Cemetery Manager will work from the depot in future.

***It was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer that the Report should be referred to Full Council for approval – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.***

494 TO RECEIVE THE ASSET MANAGEMENT REPORT

The RFO confirmed that the Report was not yet available.

495 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT ON THE ELECTRIC VEHICLE

The RFO circulated a picture of the electric vehicle and confirmed he would email Councillors a link to the video. He explained how it could be used/converted to safely water the flowers in the Summer and used/converted for other uses for the rest of the year. He confirmed it would be £35,000 new but a reconditioned vehicle was available for purchase for £15,000 plus a £200 per month maintenance charge over a 3-year contract. The RFO asked the members to consider whether the maintenance charge could be funded from the budget to lease vehicles and suggested that the £15,000 purchase cost could come from the earmarked reserve for vehicles. He confirmed there was a sufficient budget for both. The Amenities and Environment Committee would discuss the suitability of the vehicle and the Finance and Staffing Committee were asked to consider whether to spend the money subject to suitability.

Cllr C Palmer commented that it met MTC's 'Green' criteria and would be good publicity. The RFO confirmed that any vehicles added to our insurance would not cause a price rise until next renewal. He also confirmed that the maintenance contract could be extended after 3 years and that the water tank, whilst a little smaller, could be refilled from the standpipe being installed in Wellington Square. It was indicated that the Amenities Staff liked the idea of using the vehicle.

Cllr Malin questioned the known credentials of the vehicle and seller and cautioned that due diligence must be exercised.

***It was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer that in principle the Finance and Staffing Committee should recommend to Full Council using the leasing budget for the maintenance cost and***

***to support the cost of buying subject to costings and suitability – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.***

496 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT ON THE ONLINE BANKING FACILITY

The RFO confirmed that the Bank Mandate had been updated with the correct signatories.

The Finance Administrator confirmed that she had set up the online banking account and log-on but was waiting for the card reader which was ordered on 3 March 2020. Once received, hopefully within 3-5 working days, there should be full access to online accounts and the ability to make online payments. However online payments will not begin until after the end of the current financial year, starting its use for the new tax year for accounts and wages. The RFO confirmed this was preferable.

497 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY OF SUPPLYING COUNCILLORS WITH TABLETS/IPADS

Cllr C Palmer explained that he and Cllr Bolton had consulted SWaT, obtained quotations and received feedback from MTC Councillors. Cllr C Palmer confirmed that a quotation had been received from AR Computing to supply Samsung tablets at £178 each, plus VAT. He reported receipt of 10 Councillor replies, which indicated they would use a tablet if supplied. Cllr C Palmer felt that Councillors should be encouraged, not forced, to use the technology.

It was suggested that sufficient tablets be purchased to cover any future need and possible breakdowns.

The Committee discussed a variety of issues associated with the introduction of iPads/tablets for Councillors. Concerns were expressed regarding the security and 'future-proofing' of the technology used. Partnership arrangements and technical support issues were also debated.

It was agreed that further work was necessary before this matter could be referred to Full Council.

Cllr C Palmer advised that in accordance with Financial Regulations (10) and (11), market testing would be required prior to purchasing equipment or entering into any contractual arrangements for IT Support.

Cllr C Palmer detailed the options and suggested that iOS is more secure and future-proofed than Android. He confirmed that SWaT did not want to partner MTC, although this was a decision of the Officers not the Councillors, and that file-sharing via "Modern.Gov" was too expensive. The Committee discussed the need for secure file-sharing, security, IT support, what the technology should achieve and the practicalities of using digital documentation.

Cllr Bolton advised that AR Computing could support Android tablets but perhaps not iPads. It was advised that iPads would cost twice as much as Android tablets.

Cllr C Palmer suggested that an alternative to AR Computing for all or some of our general IT support should be sought.

498 TO RESOLVE TO EXCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No press or public were present.

499 CONFIDENTIAL ITEM

The Meeting closed at 9.50 pm.