



MINEHEAD TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND STAFFING COMMITTEE MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 12 OCTOBER 2020 AT 7.30 PM

a Remote Virtual Meeting via Zoom, streamed live on MTC Facebook page

The Meeting was digitally recorded

Members are reminded that Council has a general duty to consider the following matters in the exercise of any of its functions: Equal Opportunities (race, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and any disability), Crime & Disorder, Health & Safety, Human Rights and Biodiversity

Present: Chair: Cllr C Palmer*
Councillors: Cllr M Palmer, Cllr T Venner*, Cllr T Bloomfield, Cllr A Lawton, Cllr P Bolton* (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

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

775 TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [LGA 1972 s 85 \(1\)](#)

Apologies were submitted for Cllr A Kingston-James, Cllr J Malin, Cllr B Mandley and approved by Councillors.

776 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 C Palmer	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
Cllr T Venner	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	10 & 12	Representation	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	15	Personal	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke, did not vote
Cllr P Bolton	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted

DISPENSATIONS Localism Act 2011

Cllr Venner advised that he had received representations from the public about the tennis court fees item 10 and about the allotments item 12 and was personally involved with item 15 on the Agenda.

777 TO ADJOURN THE MEETING FOR PUBLIC INCLUSION

No members of the public were in attendance. Cllr C Palmer welcomed those watching on Facebook.

778 TO AUTHORISE PAYMENTS

778.1 **To approve Regular Payments between 1 September 2020 and 30 September 2020**

Cllr Lawton queried the two payments for Initial for the same amount, direct debits 6 and 18. The Finance Administrator explained these were for additional orders for toilet rolls, stock having run low twice within a short period. The Finance Administrator advised that we were looking into whether we had simply underestimated the amount of toilet rolls required on the standing order when the Initial contract was set up originally or whether the toilet rolls were being stolen, for instance, so the Amenities Team would be monitoring the usage.

Approval of the Regular Payments, items 1 to 30 on the listing, was Proposed by Cllr Bloomfield – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

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

Cllr C Palmer noted the two urgent payments, items 1 and 2. There were no questions.

Approval of payments under £1,000 items 3 to 14 on the listing, was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.

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

This included two urgent payments, item 1 and 2 over £1,000, paid under the provision of Financial regulation 5.1.1.

There were no questions.

Recommendation to Full Council of payments 15-18 over £1,000 was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

778.4 **To receive the Income Report for September 2020**

There were no questions.

Cllr C Palmer proposed receipt – this was seconded by Cllr M Palmer and unanimously agreed.

778.5 **To approve the wages for October 2020**

There were no questions.

Approval of wages for October 2020 was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr M Palmer and unanimously agreed.

779 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT REGARDING BANK RECONCILIATIONS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 31 AUGUST 2020

Cllr M Palmer confirmed she had been into the office and had checked and signed the reconciliations for the Current account, the Savings account and the CCLA account.

780 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE ON THE ACTIONS LOG

The Finance Administrator explained that the Actions Log was up to date for all Committees. The Finance Administrator suggested that, as the Actions Log was also to be used to publish the Actions of the Council and we now had 6 months of data, we could publish the half yearly activity. Cllr C Palmer agreed on behalf of Finance and Staffing as meeting the Council's obligation towards openness and transparency.

781 TO RECEIVE THE CHAIRMAN'S MONTHLY REPORT

Cllr C Palmer said he had nothing to report this month.

782 TO DISCUSS THE INTERNAL AUDIT CONTRACT TO APPOINT THE INTERNAL AUDITOR

The RFO explained that we currently use the company Auditing Solutions for our internal audit and that we can appoint our own internal auditor whilst the external auditor is appointed for us. The external auditor had not raised any concerns regarding the internal auditor. He further explained that we have previously tried to test the market but had found no other options. The RFO recommended we re-appoint Auditing Solutions as our internal auditor for another year.

Cllr C Palmer confirmed he was not aware of any problems regarding our current internal auditor but asked if we could look into alternatives in the coming year. Cllr Venner felt there would be problems finding alternatives.

Cllr Venner proposed to reappoint Auditing Solutions as the internal auditors for a further year and to investigate alternatives going forward – this was Seconded by Cllr C Palmer and unanimously agreed.

783 TO RECEIVE A REPORT REGARDING AN ONLINE PAYMENT FACILITY AND/OR CREDIT CARD

The Finance Administrator summarised her Report regarding online payments, the need for a credit card to negate the need to use personal credit cards to pay for online purchases and subscriptions such as the Microsoft licences, and the fuel card currently being used.

Cllr C Palmer stated that we definitely need to move away from using the Fuel card due to high administration costs. Cllr Bolton agreed, asking if we could buy diesel in bulk and store in a tank, or if we could get an account with a local garage. The RFO suggested that, as we are moving towards electric vehicles, diesel was hopefully not a long-term requirement. He said

he would prefer a prepaid card and confirmed that it would be the 'driver' from the Amenities Team. The RFO explained that the Financial Regulations only permit the use of a card by the Clerk or RFO so an amendment would be needed so they could delegate its use.

Cllr C Palmer asked if we could look into getting an account with a local petrol station but warned there may be charges and a minimum fuel use.

Cllr Venner stated that personal credit cards should not be used and said we should investigate getting a credit card from different banks.

Cllr Bolton asked why we did not try applying for a debit card and Cllr C Palmer suggested we investigate this. The Finance Administrator suggested we may not be eligible for a debit card from our bank as it requires three to sign like our cheques. Cllr M Palmer did not think using a debit card had the same safeguards built in as using a credit card.

Cllr Venner proposed we look into getting a credit card and a fuel account or prepaid card – this was Secoded by Cllr C Palmer and unanimously agreed.

784 TO DISCUSS AND APPROVE THE USE OF STRIPE FOR ONLINE COLLECTION OF TENNIS FEES

The Finance Administrator summarised her Report regarding Stripe to collect fees for the Tennis Court bookings through the Lawn Tennis Association (LTA), and why Stripe had to be set up in a person's name as a sole trader as Minehead Town Council does not have a Company registration number. She explained that the Stripe account had, therefore, been set up in her name with her personal details but the account could only be used to collect money which was paid directly into the Minehead Town Council bank account, less fees.

Cllr Venner questioned why we are charging fees to use the tennis court when we had not done so previously and had had 106 money to help refurbish the tennis courts.

The Finance Administrator explained that the booking system provided by the LTA/ ClubsPark may not be possible to use if we did not make some charge and that any charge was subject to fees from Stripe, so needs to be cost effective.

It was confirmed that there was no booking facility previously. It was generally felt by Councillors that the courts needed to be locked to avoid damage and misuse and therefore the booking system and a charge was required.

Cllr Venner felt £3 per person per hour (based on £6 per court) was not too much but asked why we were not charging for the Outdoor Gym and the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA), adding that charges needed to be fair for all. Cllr Bolton stated that people were already riding bikes in the MUGA, potentially damaging it which emphasised the need to prevent the same happening to the tennis courts. Cllr Lawton felt the tennis courts were a specialist facility and that users might expect to have to pay a fee to use them.

The Finance Administrator confirmed she would be reporting on the usage and income from the tennis courts and the Community Building monthly to Finance and Staffing.

The RFO suggested an introductory offer in the first year of a 50% discount. The usage has since been confirmed as 8 users in the period 21 September, when they were opened, to 12 October 2020.

Cllr Bolton proposed to set the fees at £6 per court per hour with a 50% discount until April pending the Financial Administrator reporting on Stripe costs, and to then reassess the discount in April 2021 depending on usage – this was Seconded by Cllr C Palmer and unanimously agreed.

785 TO RECEIVE A REPORT REGARDING THE ELECTRIC CHARGING POD

The Finance Administrator summarised her Report regarding The Electric Charging Pod explaining that a charity had provided the charging Pod Point, owned by EDF, which is installed at the Community Building and connected to its electricity supply.

The Finance Administrator confirmed that people were already using the PODPoint via their phone app which allowed them to use our electricity to charge their cars. We therefore need to set the rate at which they are charged if we want to cover our costs. She further added that the information she had provided in her report was taken from the PODPoint website and from our online account for our PODPoint. She confirmed that, going forward, details of usage and costs would be reported to Finance and Staffing monthly. Currently, we have not seen how charges made to users are paid into our account or what effect making a charge has had on usage.

The Finance Administrator suggested that if the charging point was free to use, people may just leave their vehicles plugged in overnight or for long periods preventing others from using it. She also confirmed that the first 15 minutes were free, as she understands, to provide an emergency charge until a user had installed the app and confirmed their charge.

Councillors queried the cost of fully charging a vehicle as they thought it would be less than reported. Cllr Bolton suggested that a rapid charge point was cheaper. He asked if the charge could be set for hourly use to dissuade people from being plugged in for long periods. The Finance Administrator agreed to investigate and report back.

Cllr C Palmer proposed to accept the recommendation in the report to set the charge fee at our cost plus 15% and review in 6 months – this was Seconded by Cllr Venner and unanimously agreed.

786 TO RECEIVE A REPORT REGARDING RENEWING OF ALLOTMENT AGREEMENTS FOR 20/21

The Finance Administrator summarised her Report regarding renewing the Allotment Agreements for 20/21 explaining that she would need to send out invoices inviting allotment holders to renew their tenancy for a further year before 1 November 2020 as that was when the new tenancy year began. She confirmed that the allotment details had been entered into the sales ledger of the accounts software so invoicing would be generated directly from the accounts this year with a fully integrated reconciliation and debtors process in place. She added that, having spoken to the Temporary Clerk and RFO, it was felt that it would be better to set out any changes in the terms and conditions of use and any decisions that were to be made by the Amenities and Environment Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 13 October, to be included with the invoices, as that was essentially when the tenancies were renewed.

Cllr Lawton asked how long an allotment holder had to pay. Cllr M Palmer checked the current tenancy agreement which states, 'The rent must be paid within 30 days and failure to do so will result in the termination of the tenancy.'

Cllr Bolton suggested more regular inspections were needed and Cllr Bloomfield said monthly inspections were needed.

Cllr Venner asked why the tenancies ran from November to October. The Finance Administrator explained that from her point of view November was a better time for invoicing as at a quieter time in Finance and it also meant the plots could be re-let for a whole growing season if someone decided not to renew. Cllr M Palmer confirmed there may be legislative reasons preventing an allotment tenancy being terminated in the period April to September.

787 TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE BUDGET CONSULTATION

The RFO explained that limited public consultation regarding the budget had previously been considered to get indicators about how the public would like their money spent by the Council. Therefore, the RFO asked whether the Council wanted consultation before setting the budget this year, confirming this was not mandatory.

Cllr Lawton asked how much leeway or flexibility there was in the budget to offer people a choice. The RFO said that the Council had raised the precept in their first year to fund the toilets and had the power to raise the taxes and/or can change where the funds are spent. He also advised that the Council would not be obligated to the findings from any consultation but they could inform decisions.

Cllr M Palmer asked if there would be a Budget Seminar as last year as she felt this was very helpful. Cllr Venner agreed. Cllr C Palmer felt that it would be good to involve the public but by paper was a bit cold and it would be better to have a public meeting which is not currently possible. He hoped that the Annual Public meeting next year in May would be able to go ahead and thought this would be an ideal occasion to consult on the budget. He did not think there was time for consultation this year.

Cllr Bolton felt a full public consultation, contacting every resident in writing would be very costly in money and administration time. Cllr Venner felt Councillors were elected to act on behalf of the residents so did not think a full written consultation was worthwhile.

Cllr C Palmer proposed to try and set something in motion for the May meeting – this was Seconded by Cllr Venner with 4 votes in favour and 2 abstentions.

788 TO DISCUSS MONITORING THE PROGRESS OF THE BUDGET

The RFO explained the timetable had been agreed to set the budget and that a Seminar would allow the Council to deal with a number of items on the timetable. He confirmed that fees and charges would be agreed in November.

Cllr C Palmer asked the RFO to set up the Budget Seminar. The RFO suggested an evening meeting starting at 7.30pm and said he would email Councillors with options of dates.

789 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT REGARDING THE POSTPONEMENT OF THE PROPOSED DRIVE-IN MOVIE

Cllr Venner thanked the Council for the grant. He advised that the Drive-in Cinema had been planned for September 2020 but Safety Advisory Group and Highways problems had delayed things and it was now felt it was too late in the year to be viable. It was now planned for 15, 16 and 17 April 2021, he believed.

Cllr Venner confirmed that the event had not been cancelled, only postponed and that everything was now in place to allow it to go ahead.

Cllr C Palmer confirmed that the grant does not have to be repaid as not a cancellation, being only a postponement.

Cllr C Palmer proposed to leave the grant money in place – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

790 TO RESOLVE TO EXCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No press or public were present.

Cllr C Palmer proposed to exclude the press and public and end the live Facebook feed – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

(The live feed to Facebook ended).

791 CONFIDENTIAL ITEMS

The Meeting ended at 9.50 pm.