



MINEHEAD TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF THE FINANCE AND STAFFING COMMITTEE MEETING

HELD ON MONDAY 13 JULY 2020 AT 7.30 PM

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 P Bolton*(Mayor), Cllr A Lawton, Cllr B Mandley, Cllr M Palmer, Cllr J Malin (*arrived after start of the Meeting*), Cllr T Bloomfield, Cllr T Venner*, Cllr A Kingston-James,
(* denotes Somerset West and Taunton District "SWaT" Councillor)

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

Members of the Public and Press: 1 member of the public (*arrived after start of the Meeting*)
0 members of the press

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

Apologies were submitted for Cllr N Hercock and approved by Councillors. It was confirmed that Cllr Malin would be joining the Meeting after 8pm.

609 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 P Bolton	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	9.2	Assisted with Letter of Support for ATWEST grant application to Hinkley Point	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
Cllr T Venner	All	SWaT Councillor	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	9.2	Assisted with SWaT Councillor Letter of Support for ATWEST grant application to Hinkley Point	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	9.3	Personal interest	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
	15	Life member of Twinning Association	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted
Cllr B Mandley	9.3	Personal interest	2020	Stayed in the room, spoke and voted

DISPENSATIONS [Localism Act 2011](#)

No dispensations were requested.

610 TO ADJOURN THE MEETING FOR PUBLIC INCLUSION

No members of the public were in attendance.

611 TO AUTHORISE PAYMENTS

611.1 To approve Direct Debit payments between 1 June 2020 and 30 June 2020

Cllr C Palmer asked the Committee to approve the Direct Debit payments. There were no questions.

Approval of the Direct Debits, items 1 to 27 on the listing, was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.

611.2 To approve payments under £1,000

This included an urgent payment, item 2 under £1,000. There were no questions.

Approval of cheques under £1,000, items 3 to 21 on the listing, was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

611.3 To recommend to Full Council payments over £1,000

This included an urgent payment, item 1 over £1,000.

Cllr M Palmer and Cllr P Bolton questioned item 29, regarding payment for Social distancing signage in Alcombe, the harbour and seafront due to Covid-19.

Cllr Kingston-James explained that money for the signage came from the European Regional Development Fund ("EDRF") but did not cover Alcombe, the Esplanade or harbour. Cllr Bolton explained that District had put some money in which had come direct from Government. The signage for the Alcombe, harbour and seafront areas was paid for by Minehead Town Council ("MTC").

Cllr Kingston-James agreed to find out who had paid what to whom for what. Cllrs Venner and Lawton agreed to report back from their meeting with Minehead BID on Tuesday evening.

Cllr M Palmer requested that Minehead BID be contacted to ask if they are to pay any money they had received for the Town Centre to us for the Alcombe, harbour and seafront areas.

Recommendation to Full Council of cheques 22-28 over £1,000 was Proposed by Cllr Bolton– this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

611.4 To receive the Income Report for June 2020

There were no questions.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed receipt – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

611.5 To approve the wages for July 2020

There were no questions.

Approval of wages for July 2020 was Proposed by Cllr Venner – this was Seconded by Cllr Mandley and unanimously agreed.

612 TO DISCUSS THE PURCHASE OF THE SECOND-HAND CONFERENCING EQUIPMENT WITH A VIEW TO APPROVE THE PAYMENT DEFERRED FROM THE FULL COUNCIL MEETING OF 30 JUNE 2020

The Acting Clerk confirmed he had the equipment at home if Councillors wished to view it. He explained he thought it was the same system used by SWaT and that he felt it was good value. He explained it had 7 microphones and two further microphones may need to be purchased, but it could take up to 25 microphones. Cllr Bolton confirmed he had looked at the cost of the same system new and thought it was very good value.

Cllr Bolton Proposed approval to purchase the equipment – this was Seconded by Cllr Mandley and unanimously agreed.

(Liz Kane from Watery Lane Preschool joined the Meeting).

613 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT REGARDING BANK RECONCILIATIONS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED 30 JUNE 2020

Cllr M Palmer confirmed she had been emailed copies of the paperwork by the Finance Administrator and that everything looked fine. She confirmed she was going into the Office on Tuesday to sign the paperwork.

(The Chair, Cllr C Palmer, welcomed Liz Kane to the Meeting and asked to bring forward her grant application, item 9.1 on the Agenda – see below. There were no objections. Afterwards, Liz Kane left the Meeting.)

614 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE ON THE ACTIONS LOG

Cllr C Palmer said he had received a printout of the Actions Log to date from the Finance Administrator and asked that this be made available to all Councillors on the Members' Area of the MTC website. He explained that last year the Actions' Log was being trialled by the Finance and Staffing Committee, but this year it should be used by all the Committees.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed that the Actions Log to be used by all Committees go to Full Council – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.

(Cllr Malin joined the Meeting by telephone).

615 TO RECEIVE THE CHAIRMAN'S MONTHLY REPORT

Cllr C Palmer confirmed that he, Cllrs Bolton and Venner had helped Minehead BID to put up bunting in the Town.

Cllr C Palmer announced that he had produced an Excel workbook to help the Office staff easily analyse staffing costs of various activities. The Finance Administrator confirmed she was testing the software which was excellent and thanked Cllr C Palmer for the same. She explained that this tool would allow Finance to report the hidden wages cost of various activities to the Councillors in future.

616 TO CONSIDER GRANT APPLICATIONS

616.1 **Watery Lane Pre-school**

(Discussed earlier in the Agenda between items 6 and 7, having been brought forward in the Agenda by the Chair.)

Liz Kane explained that the Pre-school needs to buy equipment capable of running Windows 10 so they can continue running the payroll, accounts, record-keeping and general administration as their current computer equipment is too old to be upgraded.

She further explained that their budget had been hit by Covid-19. They had had no private income coming in and the furlough scheme did not cover Early Years Providers in the usual way, seriously disadvantaging them.

Cllr M Palmer asked if they were usually funded by Somerset County Council ("SCC") and Liz Kane confirmed this. Cllr M Palmer asked if they had approached SCC and Liz Kane explained that any funding they could get from SCC's Covid Hardship Fund could only be used to cover running costs and could not be used to buy equipment.

Liz Kane confirmed they were applying for £350 towards a reconditioned laptop and a new would probably cost around £800. Cllr Mandley asked if the Council could increase the grant to the maximum of £500. Cllr M Palmer confirmed that the grant could not be given for more than applied for by the applicant. Cllr Lawton asked if more funds could be donated from the MTC Covid Emergency Fund.

Cllr Bolton reminded the Chair of the Conditions on Grants that would prevent the Grant being approved as the Pre-school was funded by SCC. He recommended that the Council would have to suspend its Conditions on Grants to approve the application. The Acting Clerk advised that the Pre-school was a charity. However, Cllr M Palmer, reading the Grants Policy, confirmed that even a charity could not qualify if funded by an organisation like Somerset County Council, but the Council could waive the Grants Policy.

Cllr C Palmer queried why all three pages of the grant application were not available to view. The Finance Administrator confirmed this was our error, all three pages were now with the Acting Clerk and would be made available to the Councillors retrospectively.

Cllr Bolton Proposed to waive the Grants Policy temporarily – this was Seconded by Cllr Bloomfield and unanimously agreed.

Cllr Venner Proposed to approve the grant for £350, with a possible further donation later – this was Seconded by Cllr M Palmer and unanimously agreed.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed to re-instate the Grants Policy – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.

Cllr C Palmer confirmed to Liz Kane that the grant had been approved and thanked her for her presentation. Liz Kane then left the Meeting

Finance Administrator to arrange payment and Administrator to send out letter.

616.2 Accessible Transport West Somerset ("ATWEST")

It was confirmed by the Acting Clerk that this application had been rejected before as there were no accounts or constitution and it had been referred back to the next Grants Meeting by default. The applicant was still in Australia, not accounts or constitution had yet been received and we still needed more information about the fraud they had been subject to previously.

Refusal of the grant and a request to ATWEST to re-apply with all necessary paperwork and a full explanation of their finances before the next Grants Meeting was Proposed by Cllr C Palmer – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

616.3 **Café Bar 21**

Cllr Bloomfield stated that this was a good cause but did not meet the Grants Policy as Café Bar 21 was a business. She also confirmed that there were defibrillators nearby at the Old Hospital and the Regal. Cllr Venner explained that the applicant had approached him as last autumn someone had collapsed outside Café Bar 21 and there was confusion about where the nearest defibrillator was. The applicants are just two ladies, who run a business, so they do not have a constitution, just wanting to do their best for the Town. Cllr Venner also stated that the Council had given grants to businesses before.

Cllr Mandley pointed out that Café Bar 21 would provide electricity for the defibrillator for free. Cllr Lawton was concerned there was no 'body' behind the overseeing of the defibrillator and it felt like a bit of a 'black hole'.

Councillors generally felt it was a good thing for Minehead and were keen on the idea but had to be consistent in their approval of grants and not set a precedent. The Acting Clerk felt MTC should take the lead and take responsibility for any defibrillator.

After much debate, it was decided that any re-application would face the same problems and that the Acting Clerk would write to the applicants, sending them a copy of the Grants Policy, and ask to speak to them about a way forward and how he could help them, perhaps going to the Ambulance Service to get a defibrillator and MTC could fund them that way.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed to decline the application and ask them to re-apply in a different way that met the requirements of the Grants Policy – this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton. 7 Councillors voted in favour, 2 against.

616.4 **West Somerset Stroke Club**

Cllr Malin stated that Minehead Railway would not probably be operating before the end of the year. Cllr Bloomfield asked if the grant could be approved/paid subject to the railway operating. Cllrs Bolton and M Palmer confirmed the Council can agree in principle to the grant with funds only being released if the event can go ahead within this financial year. The Acting Clerk confirmed this was correct.

Approval of a grant of £300 was Proposed by Cllr Bolton with funds only being paid if the event can go ahead within this financial year – this was Seconded by Cllr Malin and unanimously agreed.

617 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT ON THE FEASIBILITY OF SUPPLYING COUNCILLORS WITH TABLETS/iPADS

The Acting Clerk explained this had been deferred from the Meeting in March. Since then Cllr Harvey had been provided with a computer and other Councillors needs may have changed. The idea was to become a paperless Council and most Councillors had their own technology and access to the new Members' Area of the MTC website made viewing documents much easier.

A number of the Councillors expressed a wish to have a dedicated machine rather than have to use their own.

Cllr C Palmer agreed to contact all Councillors again about using technology rather than paperwork to gauge the need.

The Finance Officer suggested any conclusion should work to the budget timetable with an answer in Autumn so it could be put into the budget for next year. He also suggested waiting until the Community Building was open to see what technology was needed.

The Acting Clerk confirmed that immediate support is available to any Councillor who needs help with any aspect of IT. Cllr Lawton also offered her help to Cllr Malin.

618 TO CONSIDER OUR INVESTMENT RETURNS WITH A VIEW TO MAXIMISE OUR INVESTMENT RETURNS

Cllr C Palmer has observed that our savings are not providing huge returns. The Finance Officer agreed it was good practice to look at the market and confirmed the bulk was in the CCLA fund. He suggested we look at the options and report back in a month or two.

Cllr Malin stated that liquidity as well as safety was important. Cllr Venner cautioned that the money should be invested ethically.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed to authorise the Finance Officer and Finance Administrator to look into ethical investments that were safe and provided better returns – this was Seconded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.

619 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL UPDATE ON THE RISK MANAGEMENT MONITORING

The Finance Officer explained that Risk Management has been moved forward but there is still work to do to move this forward. Recommendations are being implemented, but this should be kept at the top of the agenda as we need to show the Auditor and the Insurance provider that we are mitigating risks. He advised that the Council are doing the basics, but could do better and there needed to be a regular review and to get the Advisory Group to move things forward.

The Acting Clerk agreed to contact the Risk Management Advisory Group.

620 TO CONSIDER OPTIONS REGARDING A NEW MOWER AND OTHER EQUIPMENT AND REFER TO THE AMENITIES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The Cemetery mower, which is quite old, needs lots of repairs which is costly and some of the parts are not available. Cllr Lawton asked for more information about the old Stiga and how it compared to a new one and why one machine was to be replaced by three.

The Acting Clerk explained that the Stiga, a big sit-on lawnmower, had a large bucket on the front to carry earth. This was a specialist piece of equipment with no equivalent made now. The trailer was an add-on but this was very old now and possibly dangerous. The condition of the Stiga also made it too dangerous to use. The suggestion was to replace the Stiga and trailer with a new ride-on lawnmower with a towbar fitted, a new trailer and an electric wheelbarrow.

Cllr Bolton felt the comparison in price between repair and replacement meant it was better to replace. Cllr Mandley agreed, adding that the employees' and public's safety and the need to maintain the upkeep of the Cemetery for the public was important. It was also felt that there would be more flexibility with three pieces of equipment as they could all be used individually elsewhere.

Cllr Malin explained he had checked elsewhere regarding the price of the repair, confirming it was accurate, and felt replacement the best option, preferring Option 1, to buy locally.

Cllr Bolton agreed, adding that public and employee safety and our image meant we should not be using old, tatty-looking equipment.

Cllr M Palmer asked if there were electric options. The Acting Clerk confirmed the wheelbarrow/earth carrier was electric but there was no electric option for the lawnmower.

Cllr Malin Proposed to recommend Option 1 to the Amenities and Environment Committee – this was Secoded by Cllr Bolton and unanimously agreed.

621 TO RECEIVE A VERBAL REPORT REGARDING THE SANITISER FOR THE PUBLIC TOILETS AND REFER TO THE AMENITIES AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

The Acting Clerk and the Financial Administrator explained that the alcohol hand sanitiser was very runny and, due to the amount being used, quite expensive. There was also a health and safety risk as reports were available in the press of people becoming very ill or dying after drinking the alcohol in the dispenser. They confirmed that a further quote from Initial for a reduced 18 months for the rental of 10 dispensers using their UltraProtect non-alcoholic hand sainting foam had been received. The quoted cost per month is £58.84 per month, £706.00 per year.

Cllr Bolton questioned whether an anti-bacterial hand soap was safe and whether it met Government guidelines. Cllr M Palmer read out a statement about UltraProtect, confirming it was a hand sanitiser and reportedly could kill other organisms.

The Finance Administrator agreed to get more information about UltraProtect and to investigate other suppliers of bulk alcohol hand sanitising gel that could be used with the

dispenser already purchased before the Amenities and Environment Committee met the next evening so it could be further discussed at that Committee Meeting.

- 622 TO CONSIDER THAT MTC RING-FENCES THE EARMARKED BUDGET OF £200 TOWARDS THE TWINNING ASSOCIATION'S CELEBRATIONS FOR THE YEAR 2020 AND CARRIES FORWARD THE SAID £2000 TO 2021 – AND IN DOING THIS TO ENSURE CONFORMITY WITH THE FINANCIAL REGULATIONS SET BY MTC AND ITS GOVERNANCE

No questions raised.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed to accept that MTC ring-fences the earmarked budget of £2000 towards the twinning association's celebrations for the year 2020 and carries forward the said £2000 to 2021 – and in doing this to ensure conformity with the financial regulations set by MTC and its governance– this was Seconded by Cllr Lawton and unanimously agreed.

- 623 TO CONSIDER THE PENINSULAR SERVICE REPORT REGARDING PERSONNEL SUPPORT.

The Finance Officer confirmed that MTC had been approached by Peninsular as they already provide advice regarding Health & Safety. The report received by Peninsula had been made available to Councillors on the Members' Area of the MTC website.

The Finance Officer explained the Council had had a Service Level Agreement with Martin Griffin but this had been cancelled a year ago as not entirely successful.

Cllr Kingston-James asked about costs of the extra services not included and it was confirmed that some specialist expertise would need to be purchased separately, but that Peninsula's service would provide access to personnel experts in the future.

Cllr Bolton asked for other quotes for price comparison as he felt Peninsula's price seemed expensive and the agreement would have to be for 60 months. Cllr Malin felt it was good value and that Peninsula were a reputable company.

The Acting Clerk raised the need to have something in place going forward to mitigate the risk.

It was felt that this should be deferred for a month whilst the Officers looked at other options.

Cllr C Palmer Proposed to defer to next month – this was Seconded by Cllr Bloomfield and unanimously agreed.

- 624 TO CONSIDER A REPORT REGARDING THE BUDGETS FOR THE COMMUNITY CENTRE

The Acting Clerk confirmed the Advisory Group had met on the 8 July, adding that time was pressing if things were to be finished off to open in September 2020 after the Community Building had been handed over from the construction company to MTC, probably this month.

Cllrs M Palmer and Lawton from the Advisory Group were concerned that there needed to be more thought put into the outside to make sure everything had a cohesive look and feel. They felt it may need expert advice as had been used for the building design to make sure the outside looked as good as the building. The Acting Clerk advised that these decisions were for the Council to make, the details of which could be decided at a later date, and that at this time he was just asking the Council to approve the budget he had prepared, adding that things like tables and chairs for the inside were not part of the construction contract but were needed if the Community Building was to be used properly. Cllr Bloomfield suggested a Zoom Advisory Group meeting next week to discuss.

Cllr Bolton asked about the £25,000 already in the budget. The Finance Officer confirmed that some costs had already come from this budget, but it may not prove to be enough, in which case they would have to use the Reserves Fund. It would depend on the Council's overall spend for the current financial year. Funds may have to be taken from the Reserves and the Council should review the Reserves in August 2020.

Cllr Malin asked if there had been a snagging list drawn up by the construction company and the Acting Clerk confirmed that this would be drawn up together by the construction company and MTC.

Cllr Bolton suggested the Budgets for the Community Building could be recommended by the Finance & Staffing Committee to Full Council, to be agreed by Full Council.

Cllr Malin Proposed to recommend to Full Council to provisionally agree the £30,000 budget subject to the recommendations from the Advisory Group – this was Seconded by Cllr Mandley, 7 in favour and 2 abstentions.

625 TO RESOLVE TO EXCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC

No press or public were present.

Cllr Kingston-James Proposed to exclude members of the Press and Public – this was Seconded by Cllr Venner and unanimously agreed.

(The live feed to Facebook ended)

The Meeting ended at 10.33pm.