

LEIGHTON-LINSLADE TOWN COUNCIL
POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE
18 JANUARY 2021 AT 1930 HOURS

Present Councillors: S Jones (Chair)
C Palmer
R Berry
A Dodwell (Vice Chair)
J M Freeman
F Kharawala (substituting for D Bowater)
S Owen
T Morris
G Perham
R Goodchild
D Scott

Also in attendance: M Saccoccio (Town Clerk)
S Sandiford (Head of Democratic and Central Services)
Vivien Cannon (Head of Cultural & Economic Services) – part meeting
Clare Cummins (Finance Officer)
Stuart Wilbur ((Microshade Business Consultants Ltd) – part meeting
M Jahn (Committee Officer)
A Harrison (Market Manager) – part meeting
Cllr V Harvey
Cllr P Snelling

Members of the public: 0

172/PF APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Bowater (substituted by Councillor Kharawala).

173/PF DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests, including the nature of those interests, which they had in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.

(a) Councillor C Palmer declared a personal interest as a member of Friends of Leighton-Linslade in Bloom and Friends of Linslade Woods.

(b) Councillor J M Freeman declared a personal interest in agenda item 13 Remembrance Sunday as a member of the British Legion.

(c) Councillor V Harvey declared a personal interest as a member of South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth.

(d) Councillor S Jones declared an interest in the final agenda item regarding van usage as a trustee of the Leighton-Linslade Helpers and would not speak or vote on this item.

174/PF QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were no questions from the public.

175/PF MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

(a) The Committee received the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 16 November 2020.

RESOLVED that the minutes of the Policy and Finance Committee meeting held on 16 November 2020 be approved as a correct record, to be signed at a later date when safe to do so.

(b) There were no updates on matters arising from the previous meeting.

176/PF CITIZENS ADVICE LEIGHTON-LINSLADE (CALL)

The Committee received and considered a proposal from Citizens Advice Leighton-Linslade (CALL) for a one-off funding bid to enable their services to continue following increased demand from people who have suffered considerable hardship due to the pandemic.

Members agreed CALL was a worthy charity and after discussion it was proposed to continue with the current level of funding over the 5 year period with an additional one off payment of £8,500 offered up upon provision of receipts and amended contract for publicity costs, a temporary increase in hours of the Universal Credit Advisor and the installation of an Induction Loop system to improve accessibility for the deaf and hearing impaired. Councillor P Snelling advised he could offer CALL £1,000 funding as a Central Bedfordshire Councillor from a COVID grant scheme.

RESOLVED:

(a) To maintain the current level of annual grant funding to Citizens Advice Leighton-Linslade for the next five years (2021-22 until 2025-26), with an annual increase based on the Retail Price Index, subject to provision of an annual report and annual statement of accounts.

(b) to offer a one-off grant of £8,500 to CALL, subject to providing proof of expenditure, for extra publicity, the installation of an Induction Loop System and the cost of temporary increase in working hours of the Universal Credit Advisor.

177/PF MINUTES OF SUB COMMITTEES

(a)The Committee received the draft minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 4 January 2021.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Personnel Sub-Committee meeting held on 4 January 2021.

(b)The Committee received the draft minutes of the Community Safety Sub-Committee meeting held on 11 January 2021.

RESOLVED to receive the draft minutes of the Community Safety Sub-Committee meeting held on 11 January 2021.

Minute ref 62/CS Budget Monitoring -

RECOMMENDED to Council to approve that any underspend from the 2020-21 Community Safety Revenue Budget be carried into the Community Safety Earmarked reserve at year end.

178/PF COMMITTEE OBJECTIVES AND WORKPLAN

The Committee received and considered the Work Plan and Objectives for 2020-2021 It was confirmed that work concerning the Accessibility Regulations was ongoing and the Quality Council Status Award was still awaiting confirmation.

RESOLVED to note the information.

179/PF NINE MONTH BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The Committee received the nine-month budget monitoring report for the period April – December 2020. Members were informed that incomes had been reprofiled due to the effects of COVID-19. No queries were raised by Committee.

RESOLVED to note the report.

180/PF NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2020 PAYMENTS

The Committee received schedules of payments for November and December 2020, which had previously been approved for payment by the Town Clerk and countersigned by two signatories. There were no anomalies or matters of concern to draw to the attention of the Committee.

The schedule for November 2020 dated 10 December 2020 included BACS payments amounting to £171,850.56 (page numbers 2824 - 2837). The monthly salaries listing for 30 November 2020 amounting to £98,077.92 gross was received. A cash book report for November 2020, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

The schedule for December 2020 dated 17 December 2020 included BACS payments amounting to £103,352.41 (page numbers 2838 - 2847). The monthly salaries listing for December 2020 amounting to £100,078.31 gross was received. A cash book report for December 2020, including details of all direct debit payments, was also received.

RESOLVED to receive the schedules of payments for November and December 2020, which had been approved for payment by the Town Clerk and two councillor signatories.

RESOLVED to note the report.

181/PF 2021-2022 RISK REGISTER AND ACTION PLAN

The Committee received a report regarding the Town Council Risk Register and Action Plan for 2021-2022 and considered the recommendations contained therein. The report followed the annual review of risks across all Council service areas and it was confirmed a Pandemic Risk had been added to the risk register in a number of service areas. The Action Plan contained a number of elements relating to the continuing Covid-19 pandemic but also a range of other action points, some carried forward from 2020-21 and others new.

The Committee agreed the whole report was difficult to read and this was attributed to the software used to produce the report. Although designed specifically for this purpose and pre-loaded with council risk information, the software had its limitations and would be reviewed.

RESOLVED to note the report.

RECOMMENDED to Council to approve the Risk Register and Action Plan for 2021-2022, to be signed by the Town Mayor and Responsible Financial Officer.

182/PF MARKET RENTS

The Committee received a report regarding market pitch fees and considered the recommendations contained therein. After discussion Members agreed to continue to waive the payment of market pitch fees by permanent traders until 31 March 2021, with payments due to recommence on Saturday, 3 April 2021. It was agreed that this position could be reviewed by the Committee at its next meeting on 22 February, at the Market Sub-Committee on 25 February or by the Cultural and Economic Committee on 1 March. If necessary, consideration could be given to holding a brief extraordinary committee meeting for this purpose later in March.

RESOLVED to waive the payment of market pitch fees by permanent market traders until 31 March 2021, with collection recommencing on Saturday 3 April 2021, and for this to be kept under review by

appropriate committees during February/March 2021, with an extraordinary meeting of the Policy and Finance Committee called for late March if deemed necessary.

183/PF DATA STORAGE

The Committee received and considered a report to seek endorsement for use of earmarked reserve funds to purchase additional storage capacity for the Town Council's server.

RESOLVED to endorse expenditure of £1,268 from the IT/Modern.gov earmarked reserve 9060/920 (£3,360 available) for the purchase of 4 x disks for server, providing an additional 2.4TB storage capacity (double the current capacity).

184/PF REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY BUDGET AND MEMORIAL CLEANING BUDGET

The Committee received a report to seek endorsement for budget recommendations in respect of Remembrance Sunday and memorial cleaning. Members agreed the livestreaming and recording of services at Church Square and Linslade Garden of Remembrance were very well received by residents and the continuation of this would enable people who were unable to attend in person to be part of this emotive event.

RESOLVED -

- (a) to endorse that the Town Council continues to broadcast (either live or recorded) the acts of remembrance from both Leighton Buzzard and Linslade war memorials on Remembrance Sunday, following the success of this initiative in 2020.**
- (b) to endorse that the revenue budget allocation for this event be increased from £2,500 to £3,500 from 2021-2022 onwards for this purpose.**
- (c) to endorse the one-off cost of £7,000 to be met from the Future Projects earmarked reserve for cleaning of the war memorials and the steps of the Market Cross.**
- (d) To endorse that from the 2022-23 budget, an annual allocation of £3,500 be included for memorial cleaning (to be kept in an earmarked reserve until cleaning required, usually every second year).**

185/PF NEIGHBOURHOOD PLAN

The Committee received a report regarding neighbourhood planning and considered the recommendations contained therein. It was proposed that should Members be minded to appoint a consultant to advise them further on the possible creation of a Plan, that expressions of interest would be

sought from 9 planning consultants who through their work within the parish sector had Neighbourhood Planning experience.

Mixed views were expressed by Committee with several Members pointing out that a consultant had previously been appointed for this purpose and concerns expressed that the timing might not be right for this work, given not only the ongoing pandemic but the lack of certainty with local and national planning policy (Central Bedfordshire Local Plan not yet approved and Government proposals for planning reforms). Other Members were strongly in favour of revisiting this matter for further clarification on whether a Neighbourhood Plan would be beneficial for the parish.

The Committee agreed that a robust brief should be produced so the consultant appointed had a clear understanding of what was required by the Council. It was suggested that the brief should include reference to local and national planning policy and proposals, the potential scope of a Plan, likely timescales and costs for development of a Plan and resource implications. It was suggested that the brief be approved by Members including the Chair of the Planning and Transport Committee, the Leader of the Council and the Leader of the Liberal Democrat group.

Whilst it was still hoped that the consultant report could be presented to the April meeting, it was agreed that the briefing document needed careful consideration and that the consultant would need adequate time to undertake a thorough investigation. Therefore, if not possible by the April meeting, the information could be brought back to Committee for the June meeting.

On being put to the vote, proposals were agreed with 7 votes for and 4 against.

RESOLVED -

(a) to note the report.

(b) that a maximum of £3,000 (Budget code 920/9035 – Professional Fees) be drawn down for the purposes of appointing a consultant to offer up recommendations on the potential merits or otherwise in the Town Council leading the creation of a neighbourhood plan or other similarly appropriate document to better inform parish wide improvements.

186/PF DRAFT BUDGET 2021-2022

The Committee received a report for the budget setting process 2021-2022. The budget was predicated on draft committee budgets which had been reviewed and endorsed by Town Council Standing Committees during November/December 2020.

During these extraordinary times Members sought assurance as to whether the Council general reserves would be adequate and it was confirmed that four months of reserves were available if required.

Members agreed that the Council Tax should remain unchanged at this time as many residents had been financially affected by the pandemic.

The Committee was advised that the previous resolution regarding Remembrance Sunday budget was not currently included and was also asked to endorse the slight increase of £500 in the telecoms budget to accommodate additional mobile phones, necessitated by continuing home working. This would increase the overall shortfall of £72,931 as stated in the budget report, by a total of £1,500.

RESOLVED to note the report.

RECOMMENDED to Council:

(a) in accordance with the recommendation made by the Policy and Finance Committee at its meeting held 16 November 2020, that the anticipated budgetary shortfall of £74,431 for the financial period 2021-22 be met from the Covid-19 Earmarked Reserve which presently stands at £128,010.

(b) that the Council Tax remain unchanged at £155.50 (Band D equivalent) for the financial year 2021-22.

(c) the approval of the precepting amount of £2,271,388 which Central Bedfordshire Council would collect on behalf of the Town Council for the Financial Year 2021-22.

(d) To recognise and endorse that in accordance with paragraph 2.11 of the budget report, that certain budget lines be omitted from the 2021-22 revenue budget but be returned the following financial year 2022-23.

187/PF EXCLUSION TO THE PUBLIC

RESOLVED that, under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960, the public be excluded on the grounds of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted which involves the likely disclosure of exempt information. The public and press to withdraw from the meeting during consideration of detailed discussion regarding: Community Volunteer ward Nominations, Telecomms Contract and Van Hire.

188/PF COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARD NOMINATIONS 2021

The Committee considered three nominations for the Community Volunteer Award 2021. One nominee who had been recommended for approval had not wished their nomination to be taken forward.

Councillor S Jones declared an interest as a past work colleague to one of the nominees.

RECOMMENDED to Council to approve the nominations of Katrina Boyce, Rose Gunter and Stuart Clark for the 2021 Community Volunteer Award.

189/PF TELECOMMS CONTRACT

The Committee received a report seeking endorsement to change supplier for telecoms.

RESOLVED -

(a) to endorse a change in telecoms supplier for a hosted VoIP telephone solution to Virtual IT (costs to be met within existing annual Central and Tactic telecoms budgets)

(b) to endorse that the one-off installation and user training cost of £500 and the initial line activation costs of £330 be met from the Professional fees earmarked reserve (9035/920).

190/PF VAN HIRE

Councillor Dodwell took the Chair.

The Committee received a report regarding use of a Town Council vehicle and vehicle hire. A number of views were expressed. It was agreed that parameters needed to be clearly established in terms of any grant funding which fell outside of normal grant policies or for the use of Town Council assets.

Recommendations were resolved unanimously by the ten Members present and voting.

RESOLVED:

(a) that no further investigative work take place on this matter.

(b) to create a protocol that sets out expectations of third parties when using Town Council assets in support of any operation they are carrying out on behalf of the parish. This protocol would also cover expectations for any grant funding to organisations which fell outside of the Council's established grant schemes.

RECOMMENDED to the Grounds and Environmental Committee to investigate the possible installation of location tracking devices in all council vehicles.

The meeting closed at 2203 hours.

I HEREBY CONFIRM THAT THE FOREGOING IS A TRUE AND ACCURATE RECORD OF THE MEETING HELD ON 18 JANUARY 2021.

CHAIR

22 FEBRUARY 2021