

Sandy Town Council

Minutes of a meeting of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee of Sandy Town Council held in the Council Chamber at 10 Cambridge Road, Sandy, Bedfordshire on Monday 1 September 2014 commencing at 7.30 pm

Present: Cllrs N Aldis, C Butterfield, M Groom, W Jackson, C Osborne (Chairman), M Pettitt, M Scott, D Sharman, K Sharp and R Smith

In attendance: One member of the public and the Town Clerk

1 Apologies for absence (19-2014/15)

There were none.

Action

2 Declarations of interest (20-2014/15)

Declarable pecuniary interests - none

Non pecuniary interests – Cllr Jackson declared a personal interest in item 8 as the matter concerned relatives of his wife and indicated that he intended to take no part in that item of business for that reason.

3 Minutes of previous meeting (21-2014/15)

RESOLVED to receive the minutes of the Policy, Finance and Resources Committee held on 14 July 2014 and to approve them as a correct record of proceedings.

Admin

4 External Audit (22 -2014/15)

Correspondence received from the External Auditor and the initial responses provided by the Town Clerk had been circulated to the committee in advance of the meeting. Additional information had been requested from the council about the difference of £170 between the sum of £526,057 in Box 8 of the annual return and the reconciled bank balance of £525,887, a copy of the Santander bank statement was required, there were also three requests for a detailed breakdown of the figures making up the variances between 2013/14 and 2014/15 in the accounts on "Other receipts", "Staff costs" and "Trade creditors". An initial response had been sent by the clerk which had been copied to members and an extension had been negotiated to 5 September 2014 for provision of the remaining information.

RESOLVED to note the correspondence and to receive copies of the further correspondence at the next meeting.

Town Clerk

5 Financial Reports (23-2014/15)

- i) A member of the public addressed the committee expressing his concern that the Clerk's Report for this agenda item referred to "discrepancies" and wished to know why a detailed list of these discrepancies had not been reported to the committee, he went on to say that he was concerned about financial discrepancies and errors particularly an overpayment of £19,500 which had been noted at a previous meeting and wanted to know where an explanation for the over payment and its

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refund had been minuted. The member of the public felt it was unacceptable to the public that this had not been minuted. The member of the public complained that the internal door to the council chamber had been locked when he arrived to attend the meeting.

The Chairman explained that the word “discrepancies” in the Clerk’s report on agenda item 5 referred to the new and former account codes which had been developed as part of the ongoing recoding exercise and explained that the intention was for members to review the comprehensive list provided during the meeting so that all discrepancies could be noted and reported back. The word did not refer to financial discrepancies or errors in the accounts.

The Chairman confirmed that the amount of £19,500 which had been paid twice in error had been refunded and this had already been reported to members. The member of the public asked again why this was not minuted and the Clerk explained that the original error had been drawn to all members attention when it became clear that an error had been made, the Clerk had also brought it to the attention of the internal auditors, it showed clearly in the internal audit report and the year-end accounts. An explanation for what had happened had been provided to all members and the council’s accounts/bank statements showed that the refund of £19,500 had been made promptly. No members had queried the matter in a meeting and no specific minute on the matter had been made. The Chairman noted that this item was not on the agenda that evening and the meeting would now move on.

Members considered a detailed financial report showing income and expenditure against the revenue budget for the first quarter of the financial year which was displayed on the basis of the new codings. A list of the new codes had also been provided in advance of the meeting. A list of the previous codes and the same financial report based on the old codes was tabled. The Clerk briefly explained the differences between the cost centre codes and then members reviewed individual account codes. It was agreed to further review several account codes as follows:

| Income codes | Description | Action |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| 1205, 1212, 1244, 1260, 1309, 1351, | Miscellaneous income codes | Number of codes to be reduced |
| 1282 | Grass cutting income | Rename as CBC contribution not BCC contribution |
| 1401 | Grant Mid Beds | Obsolete |
| 1201, 1216, 1227, 1241, 1242, 1251, | Several rental codes | Number of codes to be reduced if |

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|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|-------------------|
| 1252, 1253, 1255, 1256, 1307 | | possible retaining about sources of income | whilst clarity of |
| 1258, 1286 | Insurance/street furniture income | Check needed? | whether |
| 1296, 1297 | SEG income | Obsolete | |

There was discussion about the use of different interest income codes for the different bank accounts but it was felt helpful to retain these. There was discussion of use of income and expenditure allotment codes and whether to retain these for the development of the new allotment site or whether to use capital/project codes, this was left unresolved until any new allotment site is confirmed.

The Clerk noted that an additional expenditure code was needed in cost centre 501 for Cricket Club equipment maintenance. The Chairman noted that income code 1307 should be moved from cost centre 602 Democratic and Civic Costs to cost centre 502 Nature Reserves.

RESOLVED to note the financial report and the work already done and to continue with the recoding exercise.

Town Clerk

ii) A schedule of payments made since the previous meeting had been circulated in advance of the meeting.

RESOLVED to approve the schedule of payments.

6 Bank Accounts (24-2014/15)

i) A report concerning the arrangements for the opening of a new current bank account with the council's existing bankers with an imprest of £1,000 had been circulated to the committee in advance of the meeting. This account would be used solely as an imprest account to enable the council to make purchases by a single debit card operated by the Town Clerk. The report was discussed and proposed imprest account regulations were considered. It was noted that the account would be topped up by cheque requiring the signature of three councillors and not by internal inter account transfers made by the Town Clerk.

RESOLVED to recommend to Town Council that a new imprest bank account known as the Clerk's imprest account should be opened and used for procurement of supplies in line with the regulations below when this would result in best value or savings for the council.

Town Clerk

Sandy Town Council Imprest Account Regulations

All payments made using the Clerk's imprest account must be dealt with in accordance with the detailed standards below:

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- 1 The imprest bank account will be opened by the RFO and approved by the council, the banking arrangements for the account including the mandate shall be approved by the full council and reviewed annually for safety and efficiency.
- 2 The purpose of the account shall be to make payments on behalf of the council by debit card in circumstances when payment by cash or cheque is impracticable and where the sum to be expended is £500 or less.
- 3 Payments shall be limited to minor items of expenditure and shall be supported by proof of payment eg printed receipt including details of VAT.
- 4 Payments shall be restricted to items which are within the RFO's spending authority as described in section 4 of Sandy Town Council's Financial Regulations.
- 5 The RFO will maintain a complete record of all transactions each of which will be supported by a signed voucher.
- 6 At least once in each month expenditure will be verified as correctly paid and the account will be reconciled.
- 7 In no circumstances may cash received, other than imprest account reimbursement be paid into this account.
- 8 In no circumstances shall the RFO overdraw the account. It shall be a standing instruction to the Council's bankers that the account shall not be overdrawn.
- 9 None of the following items of expenditure shall be paid out of imprest:
 - Sums which fall due for payment periodically
 - Travelling expenses of officers or members of the council except pre-purchased tickets from recognised transport operators
 - Payments of (or on account of) salaries, wages or payment to an individual of employed status
- 10 Payments must not normally be made from the imprest to creditors with whom the council has regular dealings
- 11 No payments other than debit card payments will be made from this account

- ii)** Members discussed current investment arrangements for council funds taking note of the existing Treasury Management policy. The Clerk had noted that in addition to the current account and deposit accounts at Barclays (used by the council for day to day operations) the council's reserves were currently invested with Barclays in a Base Rate Reward Account currently yielding 0.5% (£202,248.85) and with Santander in a Capital Account currently yielding 1% (£210,265.60) – this leaves a large proportion of overall funds with Barclays. Information had been provided to members about the Public Sector Deposit Fund a UK

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domiciled, FCA regulated qualified money market fund managed by CCLA which is currently being used by a range of local authorities including parish and town councils. The use of this investment vehicle was discussed.

RESOLVED to recommend to Town Council that its funds currently held in the Barclays Base Rate Reward account (£202,248.85) should be transferred to the PSDF.

Town Clerk

iii) The Clerk had prepared a report detailing progress with introduction of financial checks and controls required under the newly adopted financial regulations and this was worked through in detail and discussed.

Town Clerk

RESOLVED to note the report and the workload implications and to take the following actions:

| Reg No | Control | Action agreed |
|-------------|---|--|
| 2.2 | Once a quarter a member other than Mayor or a cheques signatory shall be appointed to verify bank reconciliations | Member of PFR (not chairman or a bank signatory) would verify and sign bank reconciliations and accounts before each PF&R committee meeting and this would be minuted during the meeting. The current reconciliations and statements would be verified and signed at the end of the meeting. |
| 2.6 | Internal audit | Appointment of internal auditor for 2014/15 still outstanding, one quote obtained and a further two required. Members would note this and carry forward to the next report. |
| 3.1-3.5 | Annual Estimates (Budget) and Forward Planning | This would be dealt with as a separate agenda item later in the meeting. |
| 4.1 and 4.5 | Authority to Spend | Authorisation slip system and recording of decisions was to be introduced by the Town Clerk and members would note this and carry forward to the next report. |
| 5.2 | Schedule of payments | Chairman of PF&R would rule off and initial schedule of payments in future commencing on 1 September 2014 and thereafter at each PF&R committee meeting. |
| 5.6 | List of regular due | List of regular due payments will be |

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| | payments | presented to the annual meeting. |
| 5.7 | Signature of regular payments | The schedule of payments presented at every PF&R meeting would not only be initialed by the Chairman but signed by two members beginning from 1 September 2014. |
| 5.8 | Grants | Scheme of delegations/arrangements to be amended when Sandy Community First grant funding was exhausted. The Clerk would take action and report on this in due course. |
| 5.11 and 6.17 | Approved Suppliers | Approved suppliers system to be documented as a Standard Operating Procedure, this was in hand and would be noted and carried forward. |
| 6.7 | Utility supplies and rate payment by variable DDM | Schedule of approved DDMs would be approved at the annual meeting. |
| 6.11 | PINs | Arrangements would be made and documents handed to Mayor. Members would note this and carry this item forward. |
| 6.13 | Back-ups | In future monthly backups would be stored offsite. Arrangements to be confirmed at the next meeting. |
| 7.4 | Salary Payments | Salary cashbook would be stored in safe and maintained separately. Members noted that four administrative staff had access to safe and to payroll information. |
| 8.3 | Duplicate statements | Copies of all online statements would be sent to the Mayor by the Clerk in future. |
| 8.5 | Treasury Management Policy | To be reviewed at annual meeting as at present. |
| 13.2 | Checking of delivery notes at time of delivery | To amend this regulation to read "Delivery Notes shall be obtained in respect of all goods received into store or otherwise delivered and goods must be checked as to order and quality." |
| 14 | Assets, Properties and Estates | It was noted that not all land owned by the council was registered with the Land Registry. Costs would be obtained of employing a suitably qualified person to undertake this |

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| | | task This would be considered during the budgeting process for 2015/16. |
| 14.6 | Inspection of assets | Members agreed that an improved inspection of assets system should be introduced as soon as possible and this item would be noted and carried forward. |

7 Budget Process for 2015/16 (25-2014/15)

- i) **RESOLVED** to note correspondence from Central Bedfordshire Council about its budgeting process for 2015/16 including the information that for the second year no local council tax support funding provided to CBC by central government for the benefit of town and parish councils would be passed on to Sandy Town Council.
- ii) Arrangements for the budgeting process for Sandy Town Council for 2015/16 were discussed. **RESOLVED** to hold an informal financial workshop for all members at 7.30 pm on 8 October 2014 prior to beginning the formal budgeting process.

Town Clerk

8 Cemetery Charges (26-2014/15)

(Cllr Jackson left the meeting room.)

Members considered the case of a long term Sandy resident now deceased who had spent the majority of her life in the parish but the final 5 years (approx) outside the parish for reasons related to her health. Application of the current burial charge rules meant that treble fees would normally be charged to the family for the former resident's interment in the family plot (purchased in 1986) as residency outside the parish for more than 24 months meant she would be treated as a non-parishioner.

RESOLVED to make an exception to the rules in this case and charge single (parishioner status) fees for this interment on the basis of the unique circumstances of the case.

Town Clerk

RESOLVED to retain the existing 24 month rule for the time being although this would be reconsidered on the occasion of the next review of the burial regulations. Meanwhile any future potentially exceptional cases would be treated on their individual merits as at present and members stressed that the decision in this case had been made without prejudice to any such future cases.

Town Clerk

(Cllr Jackson returned to the meeting room.)

9 Street Lighting (27-2014/15)

RESOLVED to replace street lighting column S1 Laburnum Road, Sandy at a cost of £1600 plus VAT funds to come from current budget.

Admin

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10 Open meeting and consultation about burial regulations (28-2014/15)

RESOLVED to approve arrangements for a public meeting to be held on 11 September 2014 at Jenkins Pavilion commencing at 7.30 pm to allow members of the community to express their views about potential changes to the current burial regulations. The cost of the meeting would be funded from savings in the current revenue budget for staff due to the current Deputy Clerk vacancy.

Admin

11 Market Proposals (29-2014/15)

Cllr Groom proposed that there were 3 options available to the council for the weekly market. Option 1 – to make no changes to current arrangements and by the end of December 2014 the weekly market would disappear as the current and only stallholder would then cease trading. The potential income to be received from this trader during this period would be £240. Option 2 – close the market now and lose £240 revenue. Option 3 - try again to rejuvenate the market by offering a 6-month rent free period commencing 3 October at a loss of £240 revenue.

Cllr Groom also proposed that the monthly Farmers market should be rebranded as a general market with a rent-free period of 6 months commencing 4 October at a potential loss of £200 revenue. He proposed that stall-holders be offered a parking permit to allow one nominated vehicle to park in a one-hour restricted parking space for the duration of the market plus one hour either side from 8am – 2pm Saturday market days only. (Not disabled spaces). A mail-shot would be produced and circulated to known craft and general stall holders in the hope of encouraging them to our market. This can be done electronically by email and/or telephone. Community groups could be offered the opportunity to raise funds at the market. A new banner should be purchased at a cost of approx £50 plus VAT. A review would be held in March 2015.

Members debated these proposals in some detail and it was pointed out that all the proposals had been tried previously. In summary members explored the reasons for the demise of the market and the demise and/or success of other markets in Bedfordshire. Concern was expressed that the council had other competing priorities and resources were limited. It was noted that the adult population of Sandy was in the region of 8,000 and therefore obtaining sufficient local footfall to sustain a market was challenging. The impact on the staff team of work on the market was also noted.

(Cllr Scott and Cllr Smith left the meeting during this debate.)

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RESOLVED to authorise Cllr Groom to devise and send out a mailshot to potential traders to test interest if a further rent free period was offered. The mailshot would be approved by the Town Clerk and responses would be invited to the Town Council email address.

Cllr
Groom,
Cllr
Cole,
Town
Clerk

The proposals would be considered further at Town Council on 22 September 2014. Meanwhile the Town Clerk would take advice from CBC on whether it would grant permission for a change from Farmers Market to General Market.

12 Transparency Issues (30-2014/15)

i) **RESOLVED** to note the enactment of The Openness of Local Government Regulations 2014 and the revision of the publication "Open and accountable local government – A guide for the press and public on attending and reporting meetings of local government" and the need to ensure that these are taken into account in the development of all future policies.

ii) **RESOLVED to recommend** to Town Council the adoption of a draft FOI policy including internal review/appeal process and to note progress with adoption of revised FOI publication scheme.

13 Verification of Bank Statements (31-2014/15)

Cllr Sharman verified all current bank statements and bank reconciliations on behalf of the committee and it was **RESOLVED** to note this.