

Minutes of Finance Committee held on the 19th of May 2021.

In attendance: Councillors M. Harriman, M.J. Edwards, J. Holmes, K. Hobbley, J. Hobbley, J. Jones

Chair: Councillor M.J. Edwards

Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer: S Baxter

Apologies: Councillor M. Wilde, A. Merry

i) This meeting took place remotely, using 'Go To' Meetings software, under the Local Government and Elections (Wales) Act 2021 (following The Local Authorities (Coronavirus)(Meetings)(Wales) Regulations 2020. which make provision for meetings to take place remotely.

1. **Apologies:** Apologies were given and accepted. There were no members of the press and public present for the meeting.
2. **Declarations of Interest:** Councillors were reminded of the need to declare an interest in the matters under discussion. Councillor Holmes declared an interest concerning the lease of Allington Park. It was AGREED to move item number 7 on the agenda to the end of the meeting.
3. **Minutes of Finance Committee meeting held 18th of January 2021 and matters arising:** The minutes were AGREED as an accurate record, and no matters were arising. It was noted that the date agreed for the next meeting had been rescheduled to allow for end of year reporting, and the meeting to discuss the lease of Allington Park had been held on the 19th of January and not the 12th of January as stated.
4. **Report on Income and expenditure for the end of 2020-21:** The Chair referred to the Financial report and stated that he was happy with the totals as stated. All items of expenditure and income were considered and AGREED as accurate. A request was made for the costs of Allington Park and Marford Play area to be itemised for the next meeting. The Clerk clarified a point raised that the rise in income was not due to COVID but to the exercise carried out by the Cemetery Assistant to enable grave lessees to purchase in full, and as a result the balances had all been paid. Councillor Edwards advised that it was important that each Committee looks to its planned expenditure for the next financial year in advance of the budget setting meeting in November. Councillor Holmes enquired whether the Cemetery expenditure included the work on trees. This will be clarified. Councillor Harriman referred to the items raised at Full Council which were to be discussed at Finance Committee and it was confirmed that they would be discussed under item 12.
5. **Report of Internal Auditor:** The report received from the Internal Auditor, concerning 2020-21, was examined. The Clerk advised that the minor issues relating to the banking transaction of a £500 transfer recorded in the cash book and the consequent Annual return had been corrected. The Asset register had also been amended. The Clerk advised on the reference made to the Clerk's contract. The risk assessment requires a short form of words in regard to supplier/ procurement fraud. This is likely to be a common issue. The Clerk confirmed that the items raised in previous years Audit had all been implemented to the satisfaction of the Auditor, including the HMRC matter, and the minutes should reflect that the balance owed to HMRC in consequence of the Employer's Allowance was paid back in full. It was AGREED to accept the findings of the Internal Audit and advise Council at the next meeting.
6. **External; Audit Arrangements and Annual Return:** The Clerk advised of the figures in the Annual Return, and these were AGREED. The Clerk advised that the Full Audit by Wales Audit office has been postponed until 2022. The Clerk advised of the process, following Council's Approval at the next meeting.

7. **Progress on Allotments application to Charity Commission:** The Clerk advised that the Solicitor appointed has been in contact to advise on taking the matter forward, but nothing further has been heard. **Action: Clerk to chase.**
8. **Arrangements regarding Payments:** The Clerk wished to raise three items and explained the background to each. Concerning electronic payments of staff wages, the Chair proposed delegated power to the Clerk to pay staffing payments and other costs, according to staff contracts without having to wait until the Council meeting for payment approval. Payments made will be reported to Council in the usual way, but it will be deemed that the Clerk has the authority to make those payments. This arrangement can be renewed at the Annual meeting each year. This was AGREED and shall be recommended to Full Council. Regarding where a payment needs to be made urgently, it was AGREED that this is already provided for within existing Financial regulations, and that any urgent payments can be made by the Clerk in discussion with the Chair. Regarding Scottish Power- a Direct debit could be set up for what is a regular monthly payment of a very similar amount each month, and this would avoid any possibility of payments becoming overdue. This was AGREED and shall be recommended to Full Council for approval.
9. **Request for Grant Aid- 1st Marford Guide Unit:** This had been requested under an urgent request procedure. A discussion took place, and support for the Guides was expressed. It was proposed to make a payment of the amount requested being £470, with the acknowledgement that this has been an exceptional year. If any future requests are made by the Guides, it would be useful to have some additional information. The proposal for a payment of £470 was seconded and AGREED to be recommended to Full Council for payment.
10. **Website specification:** The Clerk had circulated a draft specification concerning a new website. The Chair proposed a smaller group to look at the specification and it was AGREED that Councillors Jones, Holmes and Merry shall look at this. Councillor Harriman advised this needs to be convened quickly. This group will look at the document and the tender process and will report back to Finance Committee with recommendations- if necessary, a specific Committee meeting shall be convened.
11. **Members urgent matters for consideration.** The Clerk advised on the findings of the financial return to WCBC in respect of the Community Agent funding contract. The contract arrangements are currently under review at WCBC although there is no threat to the service itself or personnel. The concern is that the future funding provides no room for implementing an increment and paying other costs. This had been also reported to General Amenities Committee and a letter of concern has been drafted to WCBC. It was AGREED to press WCBC on the matter of additional funding. Councillor Harriman proposed a review be conducted and recorded and presented to Full Council. The matter concerning payment for bench provision at Allington Park and Marford Play area was brought to the meeting referred from Full Council. The proposal that the balance be met from Reserves was discussed. Councillor Edwards stated that costs need to be shown on the Full Council agenda. It should be exceptional to pay outside of the budget set. Councillor Harriman advised that he has written to the Auditor General on the point concerning the agenda but stated that as priorities change through the year there needs to be forward planning by Committees. The level of Reserves was noted, having risen from the previous Financial year. It was also noted that a bequest has been received. A discussion took place similarly concerning payment for the Vehicular speed signs that had been researched and the proposal to purchase two signs having been referred for consideration from Full Council. The amount for two signs would be £4000. It was AGREED that the amount of £7900 shall be recommended to be brought forward from Reserves for the purchase of Benches and Vehicular speed signs.
12. **Renewal of lease of Allington Park:** Councillor J. Holmes declared an interest in this matter and left the meeting. The Clerk confirmed that the Trust had written concerning the renewal of the lease and a meeting had taken place on the 19th of January for which notes had been taken and shared. The Clerk had also included notes from the file and information from Councillor Dutton. The Chair gave details on the background concerning when the lease was taken out and for what purpose; that £128,000 was provided by the Community Council via a loan on which interest was payable. At the time this was looked on as a contribution to the Trust to allow for the rebuilding of the Memorial hall and was not seen as rent as such. The original lease provided for a peppercorn rent. Maintenance has been carried out by the Community Council during the intervening time on Allington

Park. Discussion took place as to the choices open to the Community Council and the need for negotiation on the points put forward at the initial meeting held on the 19th of January. It was proposed and AGREED that the meeting should now be conducted under Part II arrangements, since the matters under discussion were of a commercial or sensitive nature. The meeting was subsequently reconvened and it was RESOLVED to recommend to Council and Committee, whichever meets soonest, that those present and engaged in discussion on this matter specifically, should continue as a sub group of the Finance Committee, with a further meeting needing to be convened. The sub-group would then recommend to Finance Committee on the course of action proposed and this would be for the Finance Committee and subsequently Full Council to decide.

13. **Date of next meeting.** The next scheduled meeting of the Finance Committee will be 28th of September at 6. pm: the venue will be confirmed but may be held remotely.