

LYDNEY TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2021/12/06 – 04

Minutes of the Meeting held in the Council Chambers, Claremont House, High Street Lydney
on Monday 6th December 2021 at 7.03 pm

PRESENT: Councillors R Holmes (Chair), A Harley, C Harris, S Holmes and C Vaughan

Mr S Holley – Town Clerk

1. **APOLOGIES**

Received from Councillor S Thomas Brown, who was unwell.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations at this point in the meeting. However, during the discussion of Agenda item 10 (Review of Grants Process) Councillor S Holmes declared an 'other' interest in the possible Service Level Agreement with Lydney Community Centre, in that she was a member of its managing committee.

3. **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING**

Following a Proposal from the Chair, the Committee RESOLVED that the minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 21st June 2021 be confirmed as a true record. Record of Voting: For – 4, Against – 0, Abstentions 1, Absent/Apologies – 1.

4. **OPEN FORUM**

No members of the public were present.

5. **ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR OF THE COMMITTEE**

Councillor C Harris was unanimously elected as Vice-Chair of the Committee.

6. **COUNCIL BUDGET FOR 2022/23**

The Committee considered estimates for its Budget in 2022/23 and they were unanimously approved for RECOMMENDATION to the Council, subject to adding a further £2,000 to the Flood Defences line (currently £700 for a rain gauge) in order to allow for the purchase of more Flood Sax and Hydro Snakes– new total £2,700.

Later in the meeting (Review of Grants Process – Minute 10 refers) the Committee agreed to reduce the £15,000 suggested for Service Level Agreements to £10,000 and to keep the sum allowed for 'free' Grants at £10,000 (against £3,000 recommended).

Action by the Town Clerk

7. **REVIEW OF KEY POLICIES**

- (i) Asset Register - NOTED with no suggestions for amendment.
- (ii) List of Bank Signatories - The Committee NOTED that arrangements were in hand for the addition of new signatories. It was suggested that the Town Clerk/RFO ask the Internal Auditor if she had any suggestions for allowing Councillors to electronically co-sign bank payments. Currently, action was required by the Town Clerk / RFO only.
- (iii) List of Standing Orders and Direct Debits - NOTED
- (iv) List of Subscriptions for the Council and its staff - NOTED

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- (v) List of the Council's insurance policies – NOTED
- (v) Scheme of Delegation – The Committee was reminded that the Personnel Committee had considered a revised Scheme in detail in November 2019. In September 2020 the Council amended its Financial Regulations with regard to the level of the Town Clerk's spending authority. The Clerk had put the resulting version to the Council in May 2021 with proposals to allow him to authorise day-to-day routine expenditure to (a) allow the continued operation of the Council Office Team and Grounds Team including the provision of protective personal clothing and (b) authorise appropriate training for Councillors and Staff (one- or two-day courses only). The Council had approved the Scheme with no further amendments. In view of this recent history of review there were no proposals for further amendment by the Committee.

Action by the Town Clerk

8. REVIEW OF COUNCIL CONTRACTS

- (i) Tate Computer Technology (IT support and supplies) – Some members of the Committee stated their occasional difficulties operating the email system and finding documents on the website. The Clerk explained that the email system was Microsoft Outlook and operated the same way in many other businesses; so it was possible that difficulties could be addressed with some training. Tate had no involvement with the website, so difficulty finding documents could either be because some documents may not have been uploaded with the Office Team at 50% since two resignations in May/June or because the website required updating. The Council had a four-year contract with Tate, expiring 31st March 2023, so it had the opportunity to undertake a procurement exercise in the preceding six months or so.
- (ii) Alpha Designs (website hosting) – It was agreed by Members and Officers that the Council's website could be improved. The Town Clerk explained that Alpha Designs had not designed the original website; it had a rolling contract for hosting only. The firm had also done an accessibility update in 2020 and since then it had been used only for ad hoc uploading work to cover the departure of two members of the Officer Team. It was AGREED that, when resources allowed, the Council should commission a brand-new website from developers experienced in Council work, which could include Alpha Designs.

Action by the Town Clerk

9. CONTROL MEASURES FOR ELECTRONIC PAYMENT

Covered earlier in the meeting during the Review of Key Policies – List of Bank Signatories (Minute 7(ii) refers).

Action by the Town Clerk

10. REVIEW OF GRANTS PROCESS

- (i) The Committee was requested to review the Council's Grants Process and related paperwork with a view to providing the Council with any recommendations for changes. After some discussion the Committee resolved to RECOMMEND the following:
 - That the £500 limit for grants be increased to £1,000 and the total remain at £10,000 per year against the £3,000 recommended by Officers
 - That grant applications be considered three times each year (dates to be agreed) rather than just February and June

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- That the Gloucestershire Association of Parish and Town Councils be requested to advise on the suggestion that the Lead Councillor for Youth be given a budget to allow for Youth Grants of up to £100 as a quick source of funds to show the Council's direct support for minor youth activities already in hand
- That the Council agree to the principle of awarding Strategic Grants to key partners in the town, delivering essential community services
- That the principle of the Mayor awarding grants from the Civic Fund be recognised by the creation of Civic Grants not exceeding £250 each and not exceeding £1,000 in total, as expenses within the existing Civic Fund

(ii) The Committee continued its previous discussion of the suggestion that long-term grants could be awarded to a limited number of organisations in the town delivering key 'strategic' services, subject to a Service Level Agreement (SLA). It was AGREED to recommend to the Council that the Budget for 2022/23 allow for a maximum of £10,000 for SLAs rather than the £15,000 suggested in the Committee's draft Budget estimates. It was further AGREED to create the following Working Groups to meet with representatives of the community groups likely to benefit from an SLA:

- Lydney Town Hall – Councillors R Holmes, Saunders and Vaughan
- Lydney Community Centre – Councillors C Harris, R Holmes and C Vaughan
- Lydney Youth Hub – Councillors Cave, Harley, Macklin and Taylor

Action by the Town Clerk

10. **COUNCILLORS' REPORTS**

Councillor Holmes referred to the Council's grant of £26,000 to the Youth Hub and expressed his concern as to how the funds had actually been spent. The Committee was reminded that the Council had received a number of reports at the end of 2020 prior to issuing the last stages of the grant.

11. **FUTURE BUSINESS**

The availability of Council Grants should be advertised quickly in order to receive applications for consideration at the February meeting.

The meeting closed at 8.55pm.

Chair

Date