

**WESTON-SUPER-MARE TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF THE POLICY & FINANCE
WORKING PARTY MEETING
HELD VIA ZOOM ON
MONDAY 23rd AUGUST 2021**

Meeting Commenced: 7:00 pm

Meeting Concluded: 8.12 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Alan Peak (Chairman), Mark Canniford, Sarah Codling, Dave Dash, Peter Fox, Robert Payne, Lisa Pilgrim, Ian Porter Tim Taylor and Helen Thornton.

IN ATTENDANCE: Councillor John Crockford-Hawley, Malcolm Nicholson (Town Clerk), Sarah Pearse (Deputy Town Clerk/RFO), Fay Powell (Assistant Town Clerk - Public Services), Samantha Bishop (Committee Officer/Officer Manager) and Rebecca Saunders (Civic Officer/Committee Officer).

102 In the absence of the Chairman, the Vice Chairman took the chair at the start of the meeting.

To receive Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

There were no apologies for absence received.

103 To receive Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

104 To approve the minutes of the Policy & Finance Committee meeting held on 21ST June 2021

The minutes had been previously circulated with the agenda.

It was noted that the previous meeting met as a Committee and not a Working Party and that Councillor Ciaran Cronnelly was not a member of the Committee.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Ian Porter

SECONDED BY: Councillor Dave Dash

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: That with the above amendments the minutes be approved and signed by the Chairman.

105 The minutes of the Working Party to Review Expenditure & Governance held on 6th May 2021 (approved) and 15th July (unapproved)

The minutes had been previously circulated with the agenda.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the Working Party to Review Expenditure & Governance held on 6th May 2021 (approved) and 15th July (unapproved) be noted.

106 Monthly Financial Reports: May, June & July 2021

a) For Approval

Schedule of Unapproved Expenditure

The Deputy Town Clerk clarified that the Tuks Tuks were purchased from the previous year's revenue budget which was unspent and were included on the council's asset register.

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

.1 RESOLVED: That the Schedule of Unapproved Expenditure for May, June & July 2021 be approved.

b) For Noting

- i. Bank Reconciliations
- ii. Budgetary Control Report
- iii. Bank Interest Report
- iv. Schedule of Receipted Income
- v. Bad debt report

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

.2 RESOLVED: That reports 5b i – v be noted.

107 To approve the updated Procurement Guide

Members referred to minute no8 of the Expenditure & Governance Working Party minutes held on 15th July which had been previously circulated.

Councillor Alan Peak (Chairman) joined the meeting at 7.10 pm.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that no further changes had been made since the previous Policy & Finance meeting.

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: That the approval of the updated Procurement Guide be deferred until any changes were outlined.

Councillor Alan Peak took his place as Chairman of the meeting and thanked the Vice Chairman.

108 Grove House renovations

The report of the Deputy Town Clerk and tender submissions for works at Grove House from SJ Surveyors had been previously circulated earlier than day.

The Deputy Town Clerk advised that the tender report provided more in depth detail with regard to the procurements and should be read alongside her report.

Grove House – Internal Alterations

The procurement of the internal works had now been undertaken and was summarised in the report from SJ Surveyors. The most competitive tender, subject to an outstanding query raised by SJ Surveyors was £51,549.

A. Garage conversion to meeting room.

The procurement of the internal works had now been undertaken and was summarised in the report from SJ Surveyors and the most competitive tender was £38,759.70.

The Deputy Town Clerk reported that having attended the measuring and site meetings in relation to the conversion, the space was going to be limited due to the size of workable space in the garage area as it retained the wall to the park hillside on one side. It was envisaged that a small meeting room was all that would be achieved to hold between 5-7 people maximum only.

The tenders had come in 53.7% over the budget provisions made in the revenue budget for 2021 / 2022 outlined within the report.

The appointment of both A & B works would mean only a minor balance available for any renovations to the barn area at the quarry within the current financial year. However, the budget sums did fully include the upgrade to UPVC windows on the ground floor extension areas at Grove House of which now had conservation consent.

Members were asked to note that this was a considerable increase in costs and to acknowledge and decide if they felt it was good value for money on a building that they did not own or if they wished to explore other options before committing to the scheme. In addition, GH was not planned to be a public building and ventilation limitations in the current Mayors Parlour itself may short term limit the Mayoral use working within recommended covid practices, should the garage area not be converted. Officers were working with the H & S advisors and would be undertaking a risk assessment that week to establish the parameters of any limitation.

Other factors to bear in mind were that space at Grove Lodge was very restricted, currently a base for the Grounds and Finance teams. A recent review of working arrangements for the Finance team highlighted that they needed to be working in an office on a 75% arrangement in order to work effectively. The Grounds team were a front facing service and therefore needed to be 100% operational. This would differ for other teams.

The Town Clerk advised that members seriously needed to question the suggested budget for what would be achieved on what was not the council's own building and advised that in his view to proceed would not be not a good business decision.

Debate ensued and members agreed that the scheme should be abandoned and other options explored such as finding space at the Town Quarry.

Grove House and Grove Lodge were both inadequate and inappropriate for the council to operate from as a headquarters and had been for some time as the council had expanded. The council had 5 of its own premises that should be considered for diversification as opposed to spending money on a building that it did not own.

Staff were also able to operate working from home which would take the pressure off finding office space immediately.

The Committee Officer/Officer Manager (Admin/Civic) reported that the option of working from home worked well for some tasks but there was still a requirement to be in the office and would really welcome a hybrid system which could be determined by department managers moving forward. This may help alleviate the lack of office space problem short term.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Mark Canniford

SECONDED BY: Councillor Pete Fox

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Expenditure & Governance Working Party review and explore council office space and ways of working and that the current proposals for Grove House be put on hold.

109 *It was **resolved** under the Public Bodies (Admissions of Meeting) Act 1960 that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for reasons of confidential nature of the following business.*

110 Town Quarry Lease

The report of the Town Clerk had been previously circulated.

Discussion ensued and officers clarified queries from members.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Robert Payne

SECONDED BY: Councillor Ian Porter

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: That:

1. The Structural Engineer's Report be received and the issues and concerns regarding the condition of building 1 be noted.
2. Completion of the head lease be deferred to enable resolution of this issue to be explored.
3. Quotations be obtained for the costs of partial demolition of Building 1
4. The Town Clerk be authorised to make a planning application for partial demolition of Building 1
5. Progress be reported back to councillors in due course.

It was requested that the Civic Society be informed of the decision.

111 Towerpiece Legal Claim

The Town Clerk verbally updated members with the latest advice.

Discussion ensued and officers clarified queries from members.

PROPOSED BY: Councillor Ian Porter

SECONDED BY: Councillor Pete Fox

A vote was taken and **carried**. Accordingly, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk makes an application for summary dismissal of the claim against the council and consults with the Chairman and Vice Chairman as required on the ongoing claim.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8.12 pm

Signed.....Dated.....

Chairman of the Policy & Finance Committee