

LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 1 JUNE 2023

PRESENT: Councillors Bradford, Harvey, Howells, l'Anson, and Sinclair

ALSO PRESENT: Angela Price – Town Clerk
Charlotte Bartrop – Minute Taker
Julia Lawrence – Deputy Town Clerk
1 member of the public

F1. TO ELECT AN ACTING CHAIR IN THE ABSENCE OF COUNCILLOR HUGHES

Councillor Bradford nominated Councillor Sinclair, which was seconded by Councillor l'Anson.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Sinclair be elected as acting Chair in the absence of the Chair Councillor Hughes.

F2. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Hughes.

F3. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None received.

F4. NOLAN PRINCIPLES

RESOLVED

That the Nolan Principles be received and noted.

F5. ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR

Councillor Bradford nominated Councillor Sinclair, Councillor l'Anson seconded this nomination. A vote was taken, the outcome of which was 3 for, 1 against, and 1 abstention.

RESOLVED

That Councillor Sinclair be duly elected as Vice-Chair of the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee for the 2023-24 Municipal Year.

F6. TERMS OF REFERENCE

RESOLVED

That the Terms of Reference be approved for recommendation to Full Council.

F7. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Nick Morris was in attendance as a member of the public and requested that the chair consider bringing forward agenda item 17, "Plaque Purchased via Great Places to Visit".

RESOLVED

That Agenda Item 17 be brought forward within the meeting to allow members of the public to leave the meeting should they so choose.

F8. PLAQUE PURCHASED VIA GREAT PLACES TO VISIT

Members were requested to give consideration to a request from Herefordshire Council officers asking the Town Council to have a second plaque made and the invoice sent to Herefordshire Council to pay, to bring the year-long saga to a close.

The Clerk informed the members that whilst the plaque had not been misplaced by Herefordshire Council, it was believed that it was taken to the home of a staff member who is on a long-term sabbatical for personal reasons.

Councillor Harvey advised that as a Ward Councillor she had not been copied into any correspondence regarding the loss of the Plaque and that this should not be the case.

Councillors discussed the plaque and whether a second one should be commissioned to replace the original and the invoice sent to Herefordshire Council. It was felt that as Herefordshire Council are aware of the location of the plaque and as it should never have been removed to a private dwelling, Herefordshire Council be asked to retrieve the plaque and return it to Ledbury Town Council forthwith. Councillor Harvey, as Ward Councillor, is to be copied into any further correspondence regarding this matter in order that she can keep abreast of the matter.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the Clerk contact Herefordshire Council and advise them of Ledbury Town Council's response to their request for a second plaque to be commissioned with the invoice being sent to Herefordshire Council, which expressed a wish for them to retrieve the plaque from where they believe it to be.**

2. That Councillor Harvey be copied into any future correspondence in relation to this or other such matters in order to enable her to have input into finding resolutions and assisting the Town Council.

F9. TO APPROVE AND SIGN AS A CORRECT RECORD THE MINUTES OF AN EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE FINANCE, POLICY & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON 27 APRIL 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of an extraordinary meeting of the Finance, Policy and General-Purpose Committee held on 27 April 2023 be approved and signed as a correct record.

F10. TO REVIEW THE ACTION SHEET

The Clerk drew attention to item F586 advising that Citation had reviewed the policies and stated that they are happy with them but reminded that before taking any action in relation to Grievance or Disciplinary matters the Clerk consulted with them.

RESOLVED:

1. That the Action Sheet be received and noted.
2. That the Policies considered at the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee held on 23 March 2023 be submitted to a meeting of Council for final signing off.

F11. TO APPROVE INVOICES FOR PAYMENT MAY 2023 (FINAL)

RESOLVED

That the invoices for payment in the sum of £6,552.56 (plus VAT) be approved.

F12. TO RECEIVE THE RECORD OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS FOR MARCH AND APRIL 2023

RESOLVED

That the receipts and payments for March and April 2023 be received and noted.

F13. TO RECEIVE THE BALANCE SHEET AND TRIAL BALANCE FOR MONTHS 12 & 1

RESOLVED

That the Balance Sheet and Trial Balance for months 12 & 1 be received and noted.

F14. TO CONFIRM VERIFICATION OF BANK STATEMENTS AND RECONCILIATIONS FOR MARCH AND APRIL 2023

RESOLVED

That in the absence of the Chair the verification of bank statements and reconciliations for March and April be deferred to the next meeting of Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee to be held on 27 July 2023.

F15. TO RECEIVE YEAR END REPORTS TO 31 MARCH 2023

The Members offered their thanks to the Accounts Clerk for all the hard work involved in preparing these reports.

Councillor l'Anson raised a question in relation to the funds allocated within the yearly budget for youth provision. The Clerk advised that this was money that had been allocated to LYAS, but due to them not currently having a location and therefore not being able to meet the money had been carried over for years 2 and 3 and placed in the earmarked reserves, to be drawn down once a suitable premises had been identified and they were able to continue.

RESOLVED

- 1. That the 2022/23 year-end reports be received and noted.**
- 2. That the Clerk arrange a budget meeting to consider the year-end turnout figure and allocated funds to earmarked reserves accordingly.**

F16. 2022/23 ANNUAL RETURN AND INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT

Members discussed the items outlined within the auditor's report.

Members felt that there had been massive improvements since the previous year's audit. It was noted that there had been an issue with the website on the day that the audit was carried out and that this had been noted within the report. Members discussed the many issues which occur with the website, often the 404 Error message can occur without reason but will correct itself without action being taken to rectify it. It was suggested that the Clerk email the website company enclosing a copy of the auditor's comments to ensure that they are aware of the gravity of the issue.

Members were provided with a draft Statement of Internal Control outlining the Council's responsibilities in respect of internal controls, along with what the Council has done to ensure these controls have been managed throughout the year. It was suggested that the date should be added to the Statement of Internal Control ensure that it was clear as to the period which the report referred to.

Councillor Harvey suggested that it would be useful to commission the auditor

to undertake a review of Ledbury Town Council internal control systems in order to identify areas that could be improved, which would be over and above his normal duties as internal auditor. This would provide the Council with a report on the areas in which they could improve going forward and also provide Council with a template to undertake this in-house in future years.

Members reviewed Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 and entered the following answers as a recommendation to Full Council:

1. We have put in place arrangements for effective financial management during the year, and for the preparation of the accounting statements

YES

2. We maintained an adequate system of internal control including measures designed to prevent and detect fraud and corruption and reviewed its effectiveness

NO

3. WE took all reasonable steps to assure ourselves that there are no matters of actual or potential non-compliance with laws, regulations and Proper Practices that could have a significant effect on the ability of this authority to conduct its business or manage its finances

NO

4. We provided proper opportunity during the year for the exercise of electors' rights in accordance with the requirements of the Accounts and Audits Regulations

YES

5. WE carried out an assessment of the risks facing this authority and took appropriate steps to manage those risks, including the introduction of internal controls and/or external insurance cover where required

YES

6. We maintained throughout the year an adequate and effective record system of internal audit of the accounting records and control systems

YES

7. We took appropriate action on all matters raised in reports from internal and external audit

YES

8. We considered whether any litigation, liabilities or commitments, events or transactions, occurring either during or after the year-end, have a financial impact on the authority and, where appropriate, have included them in the

accounting segments

YES

- 9. (For Local Councils Only) Trust funds including charitable. In our capacity as the sole managing trustee we discharged our accountability responsibilities for the fund(s)/assets, including financial reporting and, if required, independent examination.**

N/A

The Clerk informed Members that in order to avoid issues with the auditor reviewing whether the audit information has been correctly advertised on the Council's website going forward, it would be her intention to take a screen shot of the relevant pages when they are posted to the website.

RESOLVED

- 1. That Members received and noted the information in the Internal Auditors report and observations.**
- 2. That Members noted the Negative Response from the Internal Auditor and the reasons for this given within the letter draft letter to the External Auditor.**
- 3. That Members approved the content of the draft letter provided by the Clerk, for submission to Council for final approval prior to being sent to the External Auditor when submitting the 2022/23 documents.**
- 4. That Members considered the Internal Auditor's Observations and approved the Statement of Internal Control prepared by the Clerk in respect of point 1.**
- 5. That Members noted the brief explanation of significant variations from last year to this year in Section 2 "The statement of Accounts", as provided by the Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer.**
- 6. That the Chair of the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee be authorised to sign Section 2 – The Accounting Statement for 2022/23, confirming it presents a fair representation of the Council's financial position.**
- 7. That the Clerk contact Advansys, the website hosting company, and provide a copy of the auditor's comments and to make them aware of the issues of the Ledbury Town Council website not working properly can have serious implications for the Council**
- 8. That the Clerk ensure that the date be added to the Statement of Internal Control to ensure that it is clearly identified for future years.**

9. That the Auditor be commissioned to carry out a review of the Ledbury Town Council processes in order that these can be brought in line with the required standards.
10. That the Clerk provide an explanation for the “NO” responses within Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 for consideration at Full Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That Full Council be asked to authorise the Town Mayor to sign the Statement of Internal Control, as provided by the Clerk/Responsible Finance Officer.
2. That Full Council be asked to complete Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement for 2022/23 as recommended by the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee, noting the comment from the internal auditor that they should return a negative response in respect of Assertion 3.

F17. EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL AUDIT (STANDING ITEM)

RESOLVED

Nothing to report.

F18. GRANT APPLICATION – LEDBURY VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Councillor Sinclair advised Members that he had asked the Clerk why this application has only just been presented to committee and the Clerk had offered her apologies for the delay in bringing this item forward stating that the application had become lost within a pile of paperwork.

Members discussed whether it was relevant to award a grant for an outing when no other grants of this type were awarded within Ledbury for the Coronation. It was suggested that the Clerk should contact the group and apologise for the delay in responding to their request for funding and to ask if there is any equipment that the council could provide a grant to purchase.

It was felt that as the event has passed this was an item which should be deferred to Full Council.

RESOLVED

That the Clerk be instructed to write to the Ledbury Visually Impaired Group to apologise for the delay in responding to their application, asking if there is any other way in which the Council could assist with grant funding and that this be submitted to Full Council, along with the Grant Application, at the next meeting of Full Council which is to be held on 29 June 2023.

F19. SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members were requested to give consideration to two subscription renewals; National Association of British Markets Authorities (NABMA) and Strömstad Twinning Association. It was noted that there was no charge for the Strömstad Twinning Association Membership and therefore Members were only required to consider the NABMA renewal.

RESOLVED

That the renewal of the subscription to NABMA be approved.

F20. PUBLIC SECTOR DEPOSIT FUND FACT SHEET 31 MARCH 2023

RESOLVED

That the Public Sector Deposit Fund Fact Sheet 31 March 2023 be received and noted.

F21. RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

EVENTS WORKING PARTY – CORONATION MUGS FOR JOHN MASEFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

Members discussed whether this item should have been revisited by the Events Working Party, due to a resolution being made at an Extraordinary meeting of Full Council held on 9 February that only Ledbury Primary School should receive the Coronation Commemorative mugs. Therefore, as this was within the 6-month period of the aforementioned decision the item should not have been reconsidered.

RESOLVED

That the Council do not provide a contribution to John Masefield High School as recommended by the Events Committee.

F22. TRAILER SECURITY

Members discussed whether the adding of a tracking device would be the most effective way to secure the trailer. It was suggested that Smart Water should be used along with signage as this would act as a deterrent rather than just having the tracker which would not be effective unless the trailer were stolen.

Councillors agreed that, in light of the recent break in at the Cemetery, it would be frugal to use all methods available to secure the trailer and to mark other tools and that Smart Water would be a good addition to the security plan.

RESOLVED

That Members of the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee agreed to approve the purchase of a tracking device and Smart Water along with signage for the trailer, in line with requests made by the insurance company.

F23. PROPOSED CHANGES TO COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

Councillor Harvey stated that although more information had been provided to the Members, she felt that there should be a Task & Finish group set up in order to explore this subject fully.

Councillor Howells stated that it may be a good idea to arrange with a member of the Ross-on-Wye Town Council to attend the Task & Finish group in order that they may impart their knowledge on the matter as this is the structure which Ross adopted 3 years ago and therefore have experience of.

Councillor Harvey agreed that she would be happy to chair the Task & Finish group and all members felt that this is not a decision which should be rushed. It was felt that this work could be carried out by September 2023.

Members suggested that all committees should be asked to look at putting together a work programme in line with the Corporate Plan in order that this can be utilised in the Task & Finish group.

RESOLVED

- 1. That a Task & Finish group be set up to explore the new Committee Structure in depth, Councillor Harvey to Chair, and that a Councillor from Ross Town Council be invited to advise members on how this process works in Ross Town Council.**
- 2. That all Committees be asked to put together a work programme in line with the Corporate Plan.**
- 3. That the Task & Finish Group submit a full report to a meeting of Full Council in September 2023.**

F24. POLICIES

Members were requested to review two policies; Concerns and Complaints Policy and the Vexatious Complaints Policy. Following considerable discussion, it was agreed that both policies were "fit-for-purpose", noting that the Vexatious Complaints Policy was in line with the policy adopted by Herefordshire Council.

RESOLVED

That no changes be made to the Concerns and Complaints and Vexations Complaints Policy.

F25. GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATIONS (GDPR) (Standing Item)

RESOLVED

That this item be noted.

F26. TO REVIEW THE RISK REGISTER

RESOLVED

That this item be deferred to the meeting of Finance, Policy & General purposes Committee to be held on 27 July 2023.

F27. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED

The next meeting of the Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee is scheduled to take place on Thursday, 27 July 2023, at 7.00 pm, in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Church Lane, Ledbury.

F28. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

RESOLVED:

That in accordance with Section 12(2) of the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the press and public are excluded from the remainder of the meeting.

F29. CONSIDERATION OF POTENTIAL VEXATIOUS COMPLAINANT

Members discussed the reasons for the possible use of the vexations complaint policy being brought into effect.

Members questioned as to whether the emails were received from a Ledbury Resident. Councillor Howells informed the Members that when he had asked this question, he was informed that the person lived in Ledbury, but they had not provided an address.

Councillor Harvey stated that she had corresponded with the person in question in the past. She pointed out that if Members had not viewed the correspondence, then it would be difficult for them to make a judgement on whether the Vexatious Complaints Policy should be invoked.

Councillor Bradford stated that he knew nothing of the matter and therefore could not comment. Members informed Councillor Bradford that the relevant emails were available to view in the Clerk's office and that this was stated in the report which had been circulated within the agenda.

Members felt that this item could not be decided until all Members had read the emails which Councillors and the Clerk had received and that therefore it should be deferred until the next meeting of Finance, Policy & General Purposes to be held on 27 July 2023.

Councillor Howells advised that there was an outstanding email that needed to be dealt with before the next meeting of Council. He advised that the individual had previously been advised that the matter would be considered at a meeting in July and asked how Members wished the Clerk to respond.

RESOLVED

- 1. That this item be deferred to the meeting of Finance, Policy & General Purposes Committee to be held on 27 July 2023.**
- 2. That no response be provided to the most recent email from the individual.**

The meeting ended at 9.01 pm.

Signed **Date.....**
(Chairman)