

FORDINGBRIDGE TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance & Policy Committee held on Wednesday 26th January 2022 at 7.30pm in the Town Hall (Minutes subject to approval at the next meeting of the Committee)

Present: Cllr Adams – Chair;

Cllrs Anstey, Earth, Goldsmith, Hale, Jackson, Lewendon, Mouland, Paton, White, & Wilson.

In attendance: Mr P Goddard, Town Clerk
Mrs M Coatham, RFO
One member of the public

1. To receive any apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Cllr Perkins

2. To receive any Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest.

3. To confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 24th November 2021 and report any matters arising

Cllr Wilson proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Goldsmith and therefore **RESOLVED**: that the minutes of the meeting held on the 24th November 2021 be signed as a true record. All in favour.
No matters arising.

4. To receive any matters raised by Members of the Public

None.

5. To receive details of Monies Collected & Payment of Accounts

Cllr Adams referred to the RFO's report to members. Cllr Lewendon proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Mouland and therefore **RESOLVED**: to approve the schedule of payments of account and that the amounts collected are correct. All in favour. The RFO reported that now the Christmas lights were down and the adult gym equipment was now installed she will be paying the balancing payment due to Sparkx and Fresh Air Fitness, both of which have already been agreed. She also noted that the direct debit for the PWLB loan goes out mid February and is around £3,000.

6. To consider grant applications under Section 137/CIL

- No new grants to consider

7. To receive any Finance & Policy matters referred from sub-committees - None

8. To receive an update on building matters

The Clerk advised that Sheerin Bettle had visited the Town Hall to look at the roof void and the Buildings Manager was costing the architects scheme and the scheme incorporating the Conservation Officer's suggestions. The architect would then go back to the NFDC's planning officer.

9. To discuss the current position and future of Avonway Community Centre

Cllr Jackson had been liaising with the treasurer (and trustee) of the Community Association ("CA"), who is stepping down at the end of May. The CA needs a new treasurer and secretary. He suggested that if the Town Councils staff relocated to Avonway, then Kings Yard could be given up and there would be no need to incur the costs of the scheme at the Town Hall. He felt that in these circumstances the CA would not lose its charitable status. Cllr Wilson did not agree and felt that clarification should be sought from the charities commission (by the CA). She felt that if the CA gave up two rooms to the Town council it would lose its charitable status. Cllr Adams felt the options should be explored. Cllr Jackson felt that if the charities commission point could be addressed it was worth financially exploring the option, which would result in rent being paid to the CA, a local concern. Cllr Hale queried the position regarding the rates as the Town Council would still effectively be operating from two sites. Cllr Adams felt that the proposed scheme at the Town Hall would be

too expensive and would saddle the Town Council with significant debt in the future. The RFO advised that money would still need to be spent on the Town Hall on the roof, updating the toilets and providing accessibility to the first floor. The work on the Town Hall was not just about staff location. The RFO said she would check the position regarding rates. Cllrs discussed the position regarding rates. Cllr Wilson felt that the money that would be saved on Kings Yard would allow the Council to service a significant loan that would fund the work on the Town Hall. The RFO asked whether Cllrs wanted her to look into the options to support Avonway, the Town Council could become a trustee to keep the building open to the public. This would not necessarily involve the Town Council offices relocating to Avonway. The Town Council could employ a bookkeeper for Avonway. Cllrs should decide if the Town Council in principle wants to support Avonway remaining open and the officers could then look into the various options. Cllr Hale suggested that the costings of the Town Hall may be available to consider once the options had been explored. Cllr Wilson felt that costs had been incurred in relation to the Town Hall scheme and a decision had been taken to progress it. She noted that the roof of the Town Hall would need to be repaired in any event. Cllr Goldsmith felt that the options should be explored. Cllr Hale said that the matter could be considered once more facts regarding costs were available and the Town Council has until May, when the current treasurer of the CA steps down. Cllr Adams felt that no decisions need to be made but the Council should consider the options. Cllr Adams proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Anstey and therefore RESOLVED: that the officers should explore the options and report back to the Council. Ten in favour, one against.

10. To discuss a strategic plan for the town

The Clerk said this agenda point would be deferred to the next General Council meeting as the decision taken by the planning committee needed to be referred to and considered by General Council. The RFO said otherwise the auditor would pick this up.

11. To receive mid-year internal audit observations

The RFO had circulated the auditors report but noted the observations therein. The Clerk was not CiLCA qualified (although the RFO is), invoices were not stamped (the RFO has incorporated an additional line in her report to address this), risk (which the Council looks at mid-year after the audit took place), the forms had to go back to the auditor with comments (this was the first time this had been requested), there is no CIL nominal code (but the RFO details CIL on her reports), there is no Council investment policy (see the next agenda point) and the Council should not hold all its money with one institution, the occupation of the kiosk does not confirm with the existing lease so the lease should be reviewed, VAT journals were not posted from the VAT control account (this did not impact on the finances of the Council, the Council does not use petty cash so should not hold £200 and the auditor said that bank reconciliations were only carried out on the current account (which is not the case) and they are signed but not dated (the Clerk is now dating these). Cllr Jackson asked about the rent position for the kiosk and the RFO advised that during Covid the Council had agreed on quarter's relief and the leaseholder has since been paying the agreed amount. The RFO advised she is looking to speak to the leaseholder regarding the lease. Cllr Lewendon asked who paid for the Covid screen at the kiosk and the RFO advised it was paid for by the leaseholder.

12. To review the following policies and registers

- Standing Orders
- Financial Regulations
- Investment Policy

The RFO advised that there had been no updated guidance or changes to the model standing orders and regulations. Cllr Paton proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Wilson and there RESOLVED: to continue with the existing policies. All in favour. Cllrs discussed the new investment policy. The RFO had based it upon of a council standard and reiterated that funds could not be held by one institution. Cllrs discussed the level of the bank guarantee for funds and whether it applied to Town Councils. The RFO advised that it was difficult to find institutions that would open a new Town Council account but suggested as options Cambridge Building Society, CCLA, Unity Bank and possibly NS&I (used by Hyde parish council). Cllr Adams suggested the Co-Operative but Cllr Hale thought this might not be an option for councils. The RFO talked about monitoring the percentage of

funds held by one institution given the cashflow of the Council. Cllr Jackson suggested that the clause could be taken out. The RFO said that policy allowed for the Council to approve an exception of the policy by full council. She suggested that she investigates the banking options and in the meantime the Council should note that it cannot comply at the present time. Cllr Paton proposed and it was seconded by Cllr Wilson and therefore RESOLVED: to adopt the investment policy.

13. To note any items of correspondence

No correspondence.

14. To receive a report from the Clerk or any other relevant business

The Clerk reported that he and Cllr White were meeting with representatives from the Events Group on Monday at 5pm. Cllr Wilson said she would also be happy to attend that meeting.

15. To note the date of the next meeting as 23rd February 2022

The meeting ended at 8:04 pm.