



FARNHAM TOWN COUNCIL

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Notes

Strategy & Finance Working Group

Time and date

9.30 am on Friday 14th October, 2022

Place

Council Chamber - Farnham Town Hall

Attendees:

Members: Councillors David Beaman, Carole Cockburn, Alan Earwaker (ex-Officio), George Hesse, Kika Mirylees and Mark Merryweather

Officers: Iain Lynch, Iain McCreedy, Rachel Aves and Jenny de Quervain (via Zoom)

1. Apologies

Apologies were received from Cllrs Evans (Lead Member), Attfield, Blishen, Dickson, and Mirylees (for the first half)

2. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Minutes of the last meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6th September were agreed.

4. Finance report

i) External Audit. Notice of Completion of Audit at Appendix B.

The result of the External Audit (attached as Annex 1 to these minutes) which was again unqualified was welcomed by councillors and its acceptance by Full Council was recommended.

Recommendation to Council: To welcome the unqualified Audit for 2021-22

ii) Trial Balance to 30th September 2022 at Appendix C

The financial position at the 6 month point was noted. The Town Clerk pointed out that there were some areas where significant additional expenditure had taken place, due to contracted works undertaken. Some areas also needed following up, in particular some sponsorship income which had not yet been invoiced. Income generated from events was higher than expected at 6 month point, due to some Christmas Market income being received early. The trial balance was noted and no questions were raised.

The Town Clerk brought councillors attention to page 7 and the detailed level of reserves which would be discussed in detail when agreeing the budget for 23/24. It was noted that there were some transfers to take place from CIL to the public conveniences project and that the remaining funds in reserves under 336 was for the Gostrey Meadow toilet project which was not funded by the revenue fund for public conveniences.

iii) Budget Comparison by Committee and account to 30th September 2022 at Appendices D and E

Councillors noted the budget comparison and were advised that income, despite invoicing for additional sponsorship, was at 54% and that expenditure was running at 58.5%, which was as expected for the time of year. The cancellation of the Gin Festival meant the surplus expected was not going to be made but the overall expenditure was low as most suppliers had refunded cancellation costs.

There was no budget for CIL income, but the next amount was due, although the amount had not yet been confirmed. The balance of previous year's CIL was earmarked in reserves the public conveniences.

The town Clerk also advised of the following points:

- Allotment income showing partial amount as invoices were being raised in October for remainder of the year.
- 1205 showed the loss of income for Gin Festival.
- The remaining part of the precept would be received in October.
- Savings on vacancies would be offset by agency or contracted staff and contracted services.
- Under professional maintenance and refurbishment, the Council Office boiler replacement and West Street gates would be paid soon.

Cllr Merryweather asked about energy costs and the expected budget variance. The Town Clerk advised that electricity and gas was purchased under a framework agreement from Kent County Council via WBC and he had asked for information on anticipated costs which he was waiting for. It was noted that the expectation was for this to be 3-4 times the previous amount but that this could be absorbed in the current year. The new boiler was significantly more efficient and so expected savings would mitigate to a limited extent the increase.

Councillors discussed the budget for the provision of Christmas lights as the commitment exceeded the budget. The Town Clerk advised that the expenditure would exceed budget due to the replacements needed as LED lights fade over time. It was noted that there were also requests for additional lighting in 2022 and the cost of installation had gone up due to supplier costs increasing.

Cllr Beaman asked about the contract length for Christmas Lights. It was noted that the Council was not now tied in to a contract and that this could be reviewed in 2023.

Action: Town Council to review the Christmas Lighting contract next year.

The grant for CAB had not yet been paid as the signing of documents was delayed by the transfer of management at CAB. Cllr Beaman flagged that the Town Council still owed the Blackwater Valley Countryside Partnership £1k as the grant was increased from the prior year. The Town Clerk agreed to follow up on this.

Action: Town Clerk follow up on the outstanding Blackwater Valley payment.

iv) Statement of Investments at 30th September 2022 at Appendix F

The statement of investments was reviewed. It was noted that the interest rates had all changed since this was written and a further rise was expected in November. It was noted that the Council

does not invest for more than 12 months due to accounting practices.

It was noted that HSBC were no longer offering a relationship manager and the service was no online or via a centralised call centre. It was noted that a banking review would be picked up soon.

v) Outstanding and aged debtors at Appendix G

The list of aged debtors, including longstanding debtors which may require writing off, due to the business closing down was considered. The Town Clerk explained that processes were in place to mitigate against aged debtors and there were just three debtors of concern totalling about £350.

Cllr Mirylees joined the meeting at 10.25am

vi) Latest BACS and cheque payments (documents available for inspection)

The availability of the BACs and cheque payments for review was noted.

vii) Other financial matters to report

The Town Clerk gave an important update regarding the ownership of the accounting software, RBS (Rialtas Business Systems). The company had been bought by Harris Computer Incorporation and the existing owners of RBS were being kept on as advisors. Councillors were advised that there would be no immediate financial impact as the Town Council had just signed a new deal with RBS.

viii) Request from 40 Degreez for Young People outreach work at Appendix H.

A request for grant funding had been received from 40 Degreez to fund a Young People Outreach service, in the town centre. It was agreed to support this initiative with a review of its effectiveness after six months requested.

Recommendation to Council: A grant of £2,500 be made to 40 Degreez for the youth worker and assistant outreach.

5. Farnham Infrastructure Programme

It was noted that the FTC response to the latest Consultation had been submitted (attached at Appendix I to the agenda) and Cllr Beaman had requested to make a formal presentation on the Town Council position at the next Board.

The Working Group was disappointed to note that the latest Farnham Infrastructure Board meeting been deferred again to December 16th, and that the Officers Board had not met since June.

6. Co-option of Councillor

The Working Group reviewed and agreed the proposed process, at Annex 2 to these minutes, for the co-option of a councillor to represent Wrecclesham & Rowledge following the resignation of Councillor Edmonds and with no poll being claimed. The appointment would be made at the December Council meeting.

Recommendation to Council: The process for the co-option of a councillor to represent Wrecclesham & Rowledge be endorsed.

7. Reports from Task Groups

a) Infrastructure Planning Group

Rachel Aves gave an update on the progress of discussing the process for developing a Design Code for Farnham. It was noted that Locality had not yet responded and that there had been a positive meeting

with Waverley Borough Council officers who were supportive of the Town Council developing a Design code in principle. It was noted that more research was needed on the best process for updating the Neighbourhood Plan or developing a Design Code as there were advantages and disadvantages. It was noted that the Brixworth Neighbourhood Plan update process seemed to fit what Farnham was after and would be investigated.

The Town Clerk also advised that at the meeting with Waverley officers, he had raised the frustration of councillors regarding applications being recommended for approval by planning officers, against policies in the Neighbourhood Plan.

It was noted Waverley were now also responding with final comments on the Farnham Design Statement and a timetable for the completion of this was being agreed.

b) Younger People Task Group

It was noted the meeting was being held later on the 14th October.

c) Riverside Sculpture Task Group

Jenny de Quervain gave an update on the Sculpture project taking place during Craft month with community involvement. She said that working with UCA had been very positive and that the two ambassadors from UCA (year 3 students) had been fantastic.

d) Museum Task Group

The Task Group had met with Waverley representatives and the MEND application had been submitted. The outcome was not expected until March. The funding had been pledged by FTC included an earmarked reserve of £15,000 to support work required for fitting out inside the museum after the MEND project was completed.

The museum had to be resurveyed as part of the application so an additional sum had been identified for window repairs but this was not added to the application. The total bid submitted was around £734k and included contingency funding. Waverley was approaching a number of other trusts and foundations for support and there was hope that a specialist local contractor would be able to undertake the work if the application was successful. It was noted that there were conversations on going with the Maltings regarding the future running of the museum.

e. Assets Task Group

It was noted that the Assets Task Group would be meeting shortly. The Town Clerk advised that the West Street Cemetery gates would be completed in 2-3 weeks with the stonework preparation now completed.

f) HR Panel

The HR panel had not met since the last meeting but the Town Clerk advised he had commissioned the grading review. Cllr Hesse asked if staff would be recognised for their exceptional work during a difficult year. It was noted that this would be discussed at the next with the aim of making any recommendation to the December Council.

g) Community Infrastructure Projects Task Group

The Town Clerk has been asked by the Farnham Infrastructure Programme Team to write a letter of support for an application to Waverley for CIL fund regarding Water Lane improvements. He had asked for details of costs and an outline of the scheme and was awaiting a response.

h) Coronation Task Group

The Working group noted that the date of the Coronation of King Charles III had been confirmed as 6th May 2023. The Town Clerk confirmed that despite the elections on 4th May, all serving councillors would still be in office until 4 days after the election.

It was agreed to recommend to Council the creation of a Coronation Task Group as a Task Group of Strategy & Finance to review the Council's arrangements. Cllrs Mirylees, Hesse and Cockburn agreed to be part of the group.

Recommendation to Council:

A coronation Task Group comprising five members be created reporting to Strategy & Finance with membership to include Cllrs Mirylees, Hesse, Cockburn the Lead Member of Strategy & Finance and one other councillor.

The Farnham Society had offered to purchase a brazier to be used as a Beacon for future events. Councillors agreed that if a brazier were to be purchased it should be commissioned from a local creator as part of Farnham World Craft Town and details of ownership and location for its use needed to be agreed. It was noted that the Town Clerk was meeting with the Farnham Society and Farnham Park Ranger with Cllr Mirylees to discuss this on 24 October.

8. Contracts and assets update

a) Hale Chapels Community Garden

Town Clerk advised that tenders for the Hale Chapels Community Garden had been opened and the bids were tabled. It was noted that officers were analysing the tenders for accuracy and in accordance with the Tender documentation and that they varied significantly in terms of cost and experience. An Exempt report would be submitted to Council.

b) IT

The Working Group noted that the significant IT issues of the past fortnight following the failure of an Uninterrupted Power Supply device meant that the main drives were being restored. A replacement NAS drive had been purchased and alternate back-up options were being investigated to provide greater resilience going forward.

c) Boiler installation

The installation works had taken longer than anticipated with the old flue being replaced in the chimney and some covid impacts, but the new boiler was expected to be working within a week.

Iain McCready left the meeting at 11.55

9. Review of Council Policies

Civility and Respect Pledge

Following the adoption of the new Code of Conduct, Councils have been invited to adopt the new Civility and Respect Pledge (at Annex 3 to these minutes) which has been developed by the National Association of Local Councils, the Society of Local Council Clerks and One Voice Wales. The Town Clerk advised it reinforced the principles already in the FTC Councillor/staff policies but was a positive statement of the commitment of the Council. The Working Group recommends its adoption to Council.

Recommendation to Council:

The Civility and Respect pledge be adopted.

10. Consultations

Interim Polling District and Polling Place Review 2022

The Town Clerk advised that an email had been sent to all councillors inviting comments on the polling districts and polling places review which Waverley Borough Council were undertaking until 11 November (Representations and comments are invited by email to polling.review@waverley.gov.uk). As the number of councillors was reducing, this would impact on polling stations and councillors

were encouraged to review their own proposed (new) ward although official confirmation from the Boundary Commission that these had been adopted was still awaited.

11. Town Clerk update

There were no further matters to report.

12. Date of next meeting

The date of the next meeting was agreed as Tuesday 6th December at 9.30am.

The meeting ended at 12.15 pm

Notes written by rachel.aves@farnham.gov.uk