

# FINANCE & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

## Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 10th February 2021

**Due to the Covid19 pandemic and related restrictions the meeting was held remotely using the Zoom Cloud meetings application**

**Present:** Councillors Grisenthwaite (Chair); Branyan; Bromilow (Town Mayor); Gardner; Jones (Part). Parker and Watson

**In attendance:** Bob Bailey, Clerk and Proper Officer

**21013 Apologies:** There were no apologies.

**21014 Declaration of interests and dispensations:** There were no declarations of interest or dispensations for items on the agenda.

**21015 Urgent Business:** The following items of urgent business were considered:

- 1) Payroll Outsourcing:** As requested the Clerk had sought quotations for outsourcing the payroll function. Two quotations had recently been received offering payroll processing, reporting and administration costing £221 and £156 per annum respectively. It was acknowledged that there had not been sufficient time to fully analyse and compare the services on offer, but Councillors were agreed that either would represent value for money and provide a good level of expertise and assurance on payroll and HMRC requirements. **ACTION: Clerk to produce a paper analysing the services offered by each provider to enable a decision to be made on the 'most advantageous' quotation.**
- 2) Training Programme:** The Chair presented a paper setting out initial thoughts on developing a training programme for Councillors and staff which to date has not followed a clear structure. The proposals suggest a combination of in-house, bought in and shared training that can be offered to other parish councils in the district in the longer term. A range of generic and specific training was suggested. Councillors agreed that this would meet the criterion for achieving the Quality Standard set by the Local Government Association Award Scheme and, importantly, provide value for money training and development for both Councillors and staff to fulfil their potential and responsibilities. **ACTION: Clerk to circulate the paper to Councillors for more detailed discussion at the next meeting of the Finance and Governance Committee and subsequent recommendation(s) and/or plan being presented to the Town Council.**
- 3) Council Decisions:** Following a question by the Chair it was acknowledged that other than in the Council Minutes there is no permanent record of the decisions of Council that can be easily accessed. There followed a discussion on ways in which this could be achieved and arrangements for archiving Council Minutes.

**ACTION:** Clerk / Administrative Officer to develop a spreadsheet, for further consideration by the Finance and Governance Committee, setting out a permanent record of decisions made by Carnforth Town Council.

- 4) **Covid-19 Support Group:** Councillor Jones reported that having been awarded money by a local organisation, the volunteer group are looking to develop a constitution / business plan with a view to becoming a registered Charity. At the same time, they are looking into opening a bank account. One option under consideration is an account with Unity Trust (on the recommendation of the Town Council) that will require an opening deposit of £500 as a minimum. Should this be the only or preferred option – rather than a High Street bank - the group will need £200 to make up the £500 needed. After some comments, Councillor Jones proposed, Councillor Bromilow seconded and it was **RESOLVED** unanimously, with one abstention, **that subject to there being a need, the Town Council be recommended to award £200 to the Carnforth Covid-19 support group to be funded from the Community Resilience Fund created to support Covid-19 related activities and matters.** **ACTION:** Councillor Jones to provide a short report on the activities of the group and their plans going forward.

**21016 Minutes:** It was noted that the demand for the annual precept for 2021/22 had been signed and submitted to Lancaster City Council and that just two Skills and Development forms are now outstanding – Councillors were again asked to complete and return these. Some actions are still being progressed. **It was then RESOLVED that Minutes of the last meeting held on Wednesday 13th January 2021 be approved.**

**21017 Civic Hall NHS expenses:** The Clerk presented a spreadsheet setting out details of a suggested 'out of pocket expenses' claim resulting from the late decision of the NHS, not to use Carnforth Civic Hall as a vaccination centre. The total, included lost income, cost of essential works, officer time and legal services, amounting to £9,987. There was much discussion about whether the cost of some maintenance and repair works could be considered as 'planned work' or arose as a direct result of the NHS proposals for use of the building. Comments were also made on the impact the closure may have on the future use and hire of the hall.

The Clerk then advised the Committee that having contacted Lancaster City Council in response to their appeal for venues for use as Covid-19 testing centres, an initial proposal offering the Civic Hall is being developed for consideration by the Town Council. The proposal will set out the expected period that the Civic Hall will be needed and how much the City Council are willing to pay for its use. The Clerk has also submitted an enquiry with Lancaster City Council's Business Support team on the availability of any additional government funding arising from the coronavirus pandemic.

It was noted that it would now be possible for Lancaster City Council to use the Civic Hall for the local elections in May. **ACTION: Clerk to advise Lancaster City Council that the Civic Hall may now be available for the upcoming local elections.**

After some further comments and observations, it was **RESOLVED** that that **Town Council be RECOMMENDED to approve a submission to the NHS for expenses incurred amounting to £9,987; that the Town Council be recommended to approve, in principle, the approach made by Lancaster City Council for use of Carnforth Civic Hall as a testing centre, subject to a formal request and satisfactory proposals being received, and that the Clerk update the Town Council on any additional Covid-19 funding being made available.**

**21018 Crag Bank Village Hall:** The Chair reported that following a request to the Council's solicitor, arrangements will be made for the transfer of deeds and legal entitlements relating to Crag Bank Village Hall, subject to an agreement signed by the existing trustee that the management and running of the Hall be transferred to Carnforth Town Council under new trusteeship arrangements. It was reported that the venue is financially viable and should be considered as a valuable asset for both the residents of Crag Bank and the wider Carnforth community. **It was then RESOLVED that the update be noted.**

**21019 Administrative Officer:** The Clerk reported that the Council had received fifteen applications for the new post of Administrative Officer. Following a shortlisting exercise five candidates were interviewed, after which the panel unanimously agreed to recommend the appointment of Sarah Lowell with effect from Monday 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021. Councillors welcomed the appointment and briefly discussed the equipment that she will need to effectively carry out her role. **ACTION: Clerk to discuss IT and other requirements and report to full Council. It was RESOLVED that Carnforth Town Council be asked to endorse the appointment of Sarah Lowell as Administrative Officer commencing 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021 and that a contract of employment, signed by the Town Mayor, be sent as soon as practicable.**

**21020 Councillor Vacancy:** The Clerk reported that the following the deadline for expressions of interest six people had come forward for consideration for the casual vacancy on the Town Council. One candidate has since withdrawn their application due to other commitments. Arrangements will be made for these candidates to be interviewed remotely on 18<sup>th</sup> and/or 19<sup>th</sup> February 2021 by Councillors Bromilow, Grisenthwaite and Smith, with Councillor Jones as substitute. **It was then RESOLVED that the update be noted.**

**21021 Office 365 Business:** Further to a previous proposal the Clerk had done further research and had concluded that increased productivity and efficiency can be achieved through the purchase of just two Microsoft Business Standard licences (one each for the Clerk and Administrative Officer) at a cost of £9.40 per user per month - £225.60 per annum.

Councillors asked several questions on the benefits of the proposed package and the potential for additional security, 'cloud' storage and 'future-proofing' of applications.

It was noted that the package includes video-conferencing using Microsoft Teams which could potentially mean that the current arrangements with the Zoom conferencing could be cancelled, saving £38.40 per month. **It was then RESOLVED that the Town Council be RECOMMENDED to approve the acquisition of two Microsoft 365 Business Standard user licences at an annual cost of £225.60.**

**21022 Budget Monitoring & Bank Reconciliation:** The Clerk presented the up to date 'Net Position' of the Town Council's budgets as at 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021. The report sets out against each budget heading the net position of receipts and payments and the Committee noted an overall favourable variance of £46,893. Councillors were asked to note that this had increased from the previous month due to income being received from Quarter 3 VAT refund and the second installment of the grant for the Carnforth Steps into the Light project. The Clerk also confirmed that the application for a further £1,500 funding for Carnforth Neighbourhood Plan had been successful and payment was due within the next 10 days.

The Clerk then presented a *Bank Reconciliation Report*, generated from the Scribe Accounting System, setting out the bank and petty cash balances as at 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021 that had been reconciled to the accounting records, amounting to £63,623.

After some comments it was **RESOLVED that the net position and bank balances be noted and that the Clerk and Proper Officer as Responsible Finance Officer and the Chair sign the bank reconciliation.**

**21023 Payments List:** The Town Clerk presented the Payments List and advised of an additional payment received since the list was distributed, With this addition the total payments due amount to £7,843.76. The Clerk reported that the annual cost for the Scribe Accounting system has increased for 2021 but will include additional functionality including the ability to upload invoices and a new booking system that will allow for automated booking of the Civic Hall and, in due course, Crag Bank Village Hall.

**It was then RESOLVED that the payments listed be RECOMMENDED for approval by the Town Council.**

**21024 Effectiveness of Internal Controls:** The Chair took the Committee through a paper provided by the Clerk covering a review of Assertion 3 of the Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) on the subject of Compliance with laws, regulations and proper practices. This assertion aims to demonstrate that the Council '*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 financial effect on the liability of the Council to conduct its business or on its finances*'.

The Clerk reported that whilst arrangements are in place to meet this assertion, small improvements could be made to the required standards to enhance control further, including raising awareness of the Council's powers and duties. There is also an opportunity for the relevant Minute and legal power to be recorded against each payment in the *Scribe* Accounting system as a permanent record demonstrating that the appropriate power had been applied, including Section 137 payments and, when applicable, the General Power of Competence.

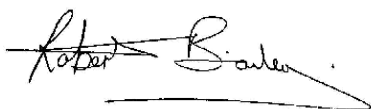
It was noted that the existing Action Log, together with a permanent record of Town Council decisions (Agenda item 21005 (3) refers) will provide good assurance that any decisions or authorised actions taken by the Council during the year have not exceeded its powers or contravened any laws, regulations or proper practices.

**It was then RESOLVED that the Clerk takes the necessary action to enhance assurance relating to this assertion and reports back to Finance and Governance by 30<sup>th</sup> September 2021.**

**21025** **Items for next Agenda:** The Chair reported that at his request items have been suggested for the next meeting being, in this instance, policies for review and the Council's Standing Orders and Financial Regulations. Councillors were informed that they are welcome to make their own suggestions for consideration at future meetings.

**It was then RESOLVED that the agenda items for next meeting be noted.**

**21026** **Date of next meeting:** The next meeting of Finance & Governance Committee will be on **Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021** at 5:15pm. **The meeting closed at 6:35pm**



Clerk to the Council Date: