

Workington Town Council

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Minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 22 June 2020 at 6.30pm on the Zoom platform under the restrictions imposed by the Coronavirus Emergency.

Cllr C Armstrong	Present
Cllr H Briggs	Present
Cllr R Briggs	Present
Cllr G Glaister	Apologies
Cllr H Harrington	Present
Cllr S Melton	Present
Cllr B Sansom	Present
Cllr P Scott (chair)	Present
Cllr S Stoddart (vice chair)	Present
Cllr W Wilkinson	Present
Cllr J King (Mayor)	Present
Cllr D King (Deputy Mayor)	Present

In attendance: Town Clerk.

FG19.70. Apologies

Apologies were received and accepted as being for approved reasons under the terms of the Local Government Act 1972, s85, from Cllr G Glaister.

FG19.71. Declarations of Interest

No further declarations were made

FG19.72. Exclusion of Press and Public (Public Bodies Admission to Meetings Act 1960)

No issues were noted.

FG19.73. Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The Committee received the minutes of the meeting held on 28 January 2020.

Resolved: To affirm the minutes as a true record.

F19.75. Risk Assessment

The Committee noted that the report on the Risk Assessment had been circulated prior to the March meeting, which was subsequently cancelled due to the Coronavirus pandemic. No additional comments were made at that time, however the Clerk has subsequently added a section on the Council's response to future pandemic-related emergencies.

Resolved: To note the amendment and accept the report.

F19.76. Presentation of the Accounts 2019-20

a) The Schedule of Payments 1 Jan-31 March 2020

The Committee reviewed the Schedule of Payments for the period between 1 January and 31 March 2020.

A query was raised about the bulk purchase of blue bells, which councillors wondered whether they had been planted. The Clerk will confirm this with the Estate Team.

Resolved: To accept the schedule.

b) The Bank Reconciliation Statement as at 31 March 2020

The Committee reviewed the Bank Reconciliation Statement for the year end 31 March 2020.

Resolved: To accept the statement.

c) The S137 Payments as at 31 March 2020

The Committee reviewed the S137 payments over the financial year ending 31 March 2020.

Resolved: To accept the report.

d) The Asset Register as at 31 March 2020

The Committee reviewed the Asset Register as at 31 March 2020.

Resolved: To accept the Register.

e) The Budget Statement as at 31 March 2020

The Committee reviewed the Budget Monitoring Statement for 31 March 2020.

Resolved: To accept the statement.

f) The Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) Section 2 Accounting Statements 19-20

The Committee reviewed the return for Section 2 of the AGAR.

Resolved: To accept the return.

F19.77. Schedule of Payments

The Committee reviewed the Schedule of Payments 1 April to 31 May 2020.

A query was raised about grant payments for VE Day. It was noted that there was an assumption that these could be held over until such time as the Emergency restrictions were lifted, or organisations could make innovative use of the funding, as Moorclose Community Centre had demonstrated very recently. The Clerk confirmed that officers would contact the grant recipients to confirm their actions and remind them that they should plan to hold an event when possible. A follow up query noted that there was an apparent overspend in the year's budget, but it was noted that this was due to the way the budget was presented. An appropriate amount had been carried over from the previous year to more than cover the overspend.

Resolved: To note the schedule.

F19.78. Bank Reconciliation Statement

The Committee received the Bank Reconciliation Statement as at 31 May 2020. The Clerk reported that this was the first reconciliation statement using the format created by the new finance software.

Resolved: To note the report.

F19.79. Budget Monitoring Statement

The Committee received a report on the Budget Monitoring Statement for 2020–2021 to 31 May 2020. There was considerable discussion about how the Council could free up funds it had earmarked for particular reasons, to help alleviate some of the financial problems caused by the Coronavirus Emergency and lockdown. The debate focussed on a pair of items in the Culture Budget, which had been discussed when the budget was being set both by the Culture Committee and subsequently by the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Chair asked whether the Culture Committee had got as far as allocating money from the Museums and Exhibitions budget, and the Theatres budget. If it had been unable to do so, because of the lockdown, he asked if it was possible that the F&GP Committee might steer those funds appropriately, acting in its Policy and Resources role. The Clerk reported that the advice that he had received from SLCC seemed to support this, so long as the Council evidenced that the decision to spend money had been done as transparently as possible, and was within existing norms of expenditure. The F&GP would resolve to make a recommendation on the expenditure, which the Clerk would take to the members of the Culture Committee. If there was unanimity on the proposal from members of the Committee, then the Clerk would report that the funds could be so targeted, and would make a delegated decision. Since in its Policy and Resources role F&GP is also responsible for considering schemes of delegation, it seemed unlikely that such a situation would be legitimately challenged. However, as with the Environment Committee and the bowling green mower, if there was no consensus then a meeting would be required. The Committee then debated what such a recommendation might amount to. After some discussion, it was resolved that the recommendation would split the Theatre budget between the Town's three theatres, with £2,000 allocated to the Carnegie, and £1,500 each allocated to the Theatre Royal and the Moorclose Community Centre Theatre. It was agreed that the Museum and Exhibition budget of £5,000 would be allocated to support the Helena Thompson Museum. The aim of this intervention was to move on resources to where they are needed most as these institutions emerge from lockdown.

Resolved: To recommend that the Culture budget be spent as outlined, with the specific and limited delegation in the context of the Coronavirus Emergency passed to the Clerk in consultation with the members of the Culture Committee.

Resolved: To note the budget.

F19.80. Internal auditor's report

The Committee received the Internal Auditor's report for the year ending 31 March 2020. The Clerk added the observation for members that the Finance and Admin Officer should be particularly commended for delivering this clean audit, and achieving what the trainer described as an 'exemplary' year end on the new Rialtas finance software.

Resolved: To pass on the Council's thanks to the Finance and Administration Officer for her outstanding work on the new system.

Resolved: To note the report.

F19.81. Nightingale Garden

The Committee considered a proposal that a local firm (Hudson Swan) donates a specially designed monument, commemorating the sacrifice of key workers, carers and the NHS in the Coronavirus Emergency, for erection in Vulcan Park. Cllr Wilkinson gave a brief outline of the genesis of the idea from Mr Raf Gibki at Hudson Swan. The committee agreed that the concept was outstanding and generous and should be accepted. The Clerk reported that the Estate Team Leader had costed some designs for an area of Vulcan Park to accommodate the monument, which had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting. The second concept circulated came with a variety of price points but could be achieved with a budget not exceeding £7,000. It was suggested that much of the groundwork might be done by local firms in the same spirit as Hudson Swan's contribution.

There was some discussion about whether the monument could be lit and watered by itself, or whether this might require mains services, which had the potential to add considerable cost. It was agreed that the design for the monument should seek to be self-powered, with water and solar energy if possible. It was felt that this would emphasise the sustainability and resilience of the community.

Resolved: To accept the generous offer from Hudson Swan, and to liaise with their designers over its delivery and installation.

Resolved: To allocate a nominal budget of £7,000.

Resolved: To prepare a press and public launch for various stages, including the final dedication of the monument, subject to appropriate social distancing.

Resolved: That, subject to social distancing regulations, members of the Committee accept an invitation from the Chair of the Environment Committee to inspect various parts of Vulcan Park, to aid them in their policy and resource considerations.

The meeting closed at 19.26.