

BARNSTAPLE TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES of FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE MEETING held on 28TH SEPTEMBER 2015 at 7.00pm in the GUILDHALL, BUTCHERS ROW BARNSTAPLE.

Present: Cllr Mrs S Haywood (Chairman)

Councillors: Mrs V Elkins (Mayor Ex Officio), F Vernon, A Windsor, I Roome, Mrs J Hunt, J Phillips, J Carter, Ms N Haywood, M Kennaugh, I Williams, and G Langford.

Also in attendance: Cllr F Jefferies and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

FG27 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs S Upcott and Mrs V Monk.

FG28 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND DISPENSATIONS RECEIVED

Cllrs Mrs S Haywood, I Roome and Mrs J Hunt, as members of North Devon District Council, have dispensation under S.O. 66 to discuss and vote on all items on the agenda except where the item is a matter of financial or legal agreement or dispute between the two authorities.

Cllrs Mrs S Haywood, Mrs J Hunt and Ms N Haywood declared personal interests in agenda item 4(d) as relatives of an honorary member of the Showmen's Guild.

FG29 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20TH JULY 2015

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 20th July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(10, 2abs)

FG30 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND BUDGET MONITORING REPORT

The financial statements and budget monitoring reports were circulated prior to the meeting.

a) Budget Variance Report

RESOLVED: That the Budget Variance Report be received and approved.

(NC)

b) Bank Transactions

RESOLVED: That the Bank Transactions report be received and approved (NC)

- c) Direct Reserve Account and petty cash accounts for Barum House, Heritage Centre and Improvements & Design

RESOLVED: That the Direct Reserve Account and petty cash accounts for Barum House, Heritage Centre and Improvements & Design be received and approved. (NC)

- d) Aged Debtors and Aged Creditors Analyses, and Nominal Balances

RESOLVED: That the Aged Debtors Analysis report be deferred for consideration at the next meeting. (NC)

RESOLVED: That the Aged Debtors Analysis, Aged Creditors Analysis and Nominal Balances reports be received and approved. (NC)

- e) Direct Debit and Credit Card Reports

Cllr Ms Haywood asked for clarification of a transaction relating to Let's Go Bowling. The Clerk explained that this was an organised staff team building exercise, which he said was much needed. Further team building costs may be incurred in future.

RESOLVED: That the Direct Debit and Credit Card Reports be received and approved. (NC)

FG31 CORPORATE GOVERNANCE WORKING PARTY

The notes of the Corporate Governance Working Party meeting of 28th September 2015, as shown at Appendix 1 to these minutes, were reported verbally by the Town Clerk. A Media and Communications Policy had been recommended to the Committee and this would be brought forward to the next meeting.

RESOLVED: That the notes of the Corporate Governance Working Party meeting of 28th September 2015 and the recommendations therein be received, adopted and approved, except the recommendation in respect of a Media and Communications Policy which should be tabled for consideration at the next committee meeting. (NC)

FG32 ANNUAL RETURN FOR 2014-15

The Town Clerk circulated a copy of the external auditor's report and advised that the external auditor had signed the annual return for 2014-15 with no significant matters drawn to the attention of the Council. Two minor issues had been noted in respect of accounting for fixed assets and adoption of the NALC model Financial Regulations. The accounting matter had been addressed.

RESOLVED: That the Clerk should bring forward the model NALC Financial Regulations for consideration by the Committee. (NC)

RESOLVED: That the report of the external auditor in respect of the Council's Annual Return for 2014-15 be noted. (NC)

FG33 NALC LARGER COUNCILS COMMITTEE ELECTIONS 2015

RESOLVED: That Cllr J Phillips be nominated for election to the NALC Larger Councils Committee. (NC)

FG34 CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS FOR 2016

The Clerk reported that he had been approached by the Town Centre Management Team for assistance in funding the Christmas lighting scheme for 2016. Funding was under threat following the end of the Business Improvement District which had previously provided a significant contribution. The Town Centre Manager was seeking contributions from retailers but had not received significant offers to date.

Councillors considered options and

RESOLVED: That authority be delegated to the Chairman and Town Clerk to agree a contribution pending the outcome of the Town Centre Manager's efforts to obtain funding. (NC)

FG35 2016-17 PRECEPT

The Clerk introduced this item and explained that the Council faced significant pressures in setting a budget for 2016-17. These included a need to ensure appropriate general and earmarked reserves, and new initiatives such as verge maintenance and possible funding for North Devon Records Office. He asked councillors to consider a recommendation to committees to assist them in setting budgets.

Councillors considered the issues surround a possible rise in the precept, such as a potential referendum, and the impact of reductions in service provision by the principal authorities.

RESOLVED: That committees be recommended to base their draft budget and precept requirements on the Council's Corporate Plan requirements, and that these should be submitted to Finance & General Purposes Committee for consideration.

(11, 0, 1 against)

Meeting closed at 7.42pm.

Chairman.

Signed

Dated

Notes of Corporate Governance Working Party held on 28 September 2015 at 6.30pm in the Guildhall, Butchers Row, Barnstaple.

Present: Cllr A Windsor (Chairman), Cllr Mrs V Elkins, Cllr I Roome, Cllr J Phillips, and Cllr M Kennaugh

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr I Roome, as a member of North Devon District Council, has dispensation under S.O. 66 to discuss and vote on all items on the agenda except where the item is a matter of financial or legal agreement or dispute between the two authorities.

NOTES OF MEETING HELD ON 20TH JULY 2015

RESOLVED: That the notes of the meeting held on 20th July 2015 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

(4, 1abs)

REVIEW OF INTERNAL CONTROL – MEDIA & COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Members considered a draft policy document that had been circulated prior to the meeting, and a further revised draft that was circulated at the meeting. The Clerk explained the changes incorporated into the revised draft, which had been made following his appraisal.

Members considered the document, and an amendment was proposed to ensure that any media releases specific to one ward should be flagged to councillors as such.

RECOMMENDED: That the draft policy should be amended to include a clause requiring that media releases specific to one ward be flagged to councillors as such.

(NC)

RECOMMENDED: That the draft policy as amended be agreed.

(NC)

The policy as amended is appended to these notes.

Meeting closed at 6.54pm.

Chairman.

Signed.....

Dated.....

Barnstaple Town Council – Media Policy and Protocol

1. Introduction

Barnstaple Town Council welcomes enquiries from the media and recognises that our relationship with them helps us communicate with the community and stakeholders. The aim of this policy is to ensure that the Town Council is seen to communicate in a professional and objective manner. This policy should be read in conjunction with the Members Code of Conduct and other relevant Council policies. The Council's approach to the media should be:

- Open and honest
- Proactive
- Responsive and timely

2. Types of Media Activity

Media Releases

Media releases are important in highlighting significant aspects of our work, generating demand for our services, representing the community on local issues, and in responding to criticism. There are two types of media release that are relevant to Council activity:

- **Official Council Releases.** An official Council release is made on behalf of the Council as a whole, and will be written by an Officer and issued by the Town Clerk or by an officer designated by the Town Clerk. It should be in line with Council policy and is non-party political. It may include a quote from the Mayor as Council Chairman (or in his/her absence the Deputy Mayor), or a committee Chairman/Vice-Chairman. Quotes from officers can also be included but these should be ancillary to the member quote, unless urgency dictates that only an officer quote is achievable.
- **Councillor Releases.** Councillor releases are personal and are written and issued by the Councillor responsible. This release may or may not be political and must not include the name of a Council Officer, or a Council telephone number as a point of contact. The release should make clear that it is not issued by or on behalf of the Council. It would be beneficial for copies of intended releases, especially those of a factual nature, to be provided to the Town Clerk. Councillors seeking advice can either contact the Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk.

The protocol below provides guidance on the drafting and issuing of media releases.

Social Media

It is important that social media sites are used effectively as part of a wider communications mix and that their use does not expose the Council to security risks or reputational damage. Social media offers great potential for building relationships and improving the services that the town council provides. The Council's Social Media Policy sets out how social media can be managed effectively and how any

risks or pitfalls can be avoided or mitigated. This document does not seek to override that policy, but does set out below a protocol governing its use.

Interviews

The broadcast media is a further opportunity to get the Council's message across to a wider public audience. Every effort should be made to accept offers of interviews, subject to the requirements of the protocol below.

3. Media Communications Protocol

Media Relations/Releases:

- The Town Clerk and other staff as approved by the Town Clerk should maintain positive and proactive relationships with the media, but on significant matters will not issue media releases or make formal comment without the approval of the Mayor (or Deputy in his/her absence)
- All media releases other than those relating to the Council's day-to-day activities (e.g. regular events, promotion of existing services) should be approved by the Mayor (or Deputy in his/her absence) before publication, and circulated to councillors before being sent to the media, except where the urgency is such that this cannot be achieved. In these cases the release must be approved by the Town Clerk or Assistant Town Clerk.
- Where a media release concerns a matter that is specific to one ward, this fact should be flagged to councillors when the release is circulated to them.
- All member quotes in media releases should be attributed to the Mayor (or Deputy in his/her absence), or the Chairman/Vice Chairman of the appropriate committee, and agreed by the member concerned before release. Officers may also be quoted, but any quote should be ancillary to a member quote and care should be taken to ensure that the quote is non-party political and in accordance with Council policy.

Social Media:

- Routine information from the Council can be published on social media and the website by officers designated by the Town Clerk.
- Any information that is 'significant', for example new Council initiatives, statements about Council policy, news about completed projects, or anything that will result in a media release, should be approved by the Mayor (or Deputy in his/her absence) before publication, and all councillors should be made aware of the information prior to publication.

Media Interviews

- Requests from the media for comment/interviews should be directed to the Mayor (or the Deputy in his/her absence), or a Chairman/Vice Chairman of the appropriate committee. Officers may also be interviewed but should obtain prior approval from the Mayor (or the Deputy in his/her absence).

General:

- No issues of significance to the Council (new Council initiatives, statements about Council policy, news about completed projects) should be communicated to the media or published online until this information has been sent to councillors.
- Councillors other than the Mayor (or the Deputy in his/her absence), or Chairmen/Vice Chairmen of committees should not communicate with the media on behalf of the Council, and should make clear that they are acting in an individual capacity in any such communications.
- Councillors and staff should have regard for other relevant policies (Code of Conduct, Acceptable Behaviour Protocol, Social Media Policy, Staff Handbook, etc.) and the law in dealing with the media and in using social media. Advice can be obtained from the Town Clerk.

Delegation for Urgent Matters

Where urgency or other unforeseen circumstances dictate that the Mayor (or the Deputy in his/her absence) cannot provide the necessary approval, the Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk have delegated authority on matters of media protocol.

Last reviewed: Sept 2015