

LOUGHTON TOWN COUNCIL
RESOURCES AND GENERAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting held by ZOOM
on Wednesday, 2 December 2020 at 7.15pm

Present:

Councillors:

J Jennings (in the Chair)			
J Angold-Stephens	M Dalton		J Jogia
J Mahoney	S Murray		A Omer (from Min no 276)

Also present:

Councillors:

D Wixley

Officers:

M Squire (Town Clerk)
B Smith (Assistant Town Clerk)

RG272 Apologies for absence
No apologies for absence were received.

Cllr Mahoney left the meeting during the next item.

RG273 Declarations of Interest
None were declared.

RG274 Confirmation of Minutes
The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 2020 were CONFIRMED as a correct record and will be signed by the Chairman.

RG275 Public Representations
None were received.

Cllr Omer joined the meeting during the next item.
Cllr Mahoney re-joined the meeting during the next item

RG276 Town Clerk's Report
The Town Clerk reported on the following items:

The New Finance & Administration Assistant, Lyndsey Mitchell, was due to start work on the 2nd November but in view of the current COVID lockdown she asked to defer her start date to 2nd December 2020.

RG277 Christmas Card Competition 2020
The Town Clerk reported that despite the current COVID-19 restrictions, the Christmas Card Competition has been completed. There were 147 entries from local schools, a care home and individual entries. Cllrs Murphy and Cllr Cochrane have been able to judge the cards and we have designated winners in each category. The overall winner was agreed, and hard copies of this year's Christmas Cards have been ordered to be signed by the Mayor and the Town Clerk and sent out as soon as possible.

RG278 Training and Conferences
The Committee NOTED the courses recently attended.

The Committee discussed whether Webinar Training was of similar quality as attending personally. The Town Clerk reported that the feedback was good, and they tended to be more economical, generally costing less and incurring no travelling expenses. There were some merits in attending personally, especially in terms of networking. Future training courses would be booked on a case-by-case basis, assessing the merits of each method of training.

RG279 Apprenticeship Scheme

The Town Clerk reported the difficulties in delivering the Apprenticeship Scheme from the original Communities Initiative Funding (CIF) of £10,000 from the Essex Association of Local Councils (EALC) that was to be used for a ground's maintenance apprenticeship.

Whilst the grant would cover a proportion of the apprentice cost, the Town Council would need to budget a further £25,900 over the next two years to cover further costs required for an apprentice, including salaries, uniforms, training equipment etc

This would be difficult to justify given the large fall in income on hall hire, football pitches and other sources this year, almost entirely due to the covid pandemic. Proceeding with this scheme would potentially add a significant amount to the precept request for 2021/22. Bearing in mind also that the Council is committed to other major projects that would benefit local residents, this may not be the best use of such funding.

After some initial delay, the Town Council had liaised with Writtle Agricultural College and was ready to go in the Spring of 2020. However from the onset of the Covid pandemic in March 2020, the various Government restrictions, lockdowns, and social distancing measures have made the project untenable and unmanageable (due to health and safety considerations) whilst the virus continues to persist. Although further extensions have been requested, the EALC have now requested the return of the grant funding.

The Committee AGREED that although it would be a good thing to take on an apprentice, in consideration of the factors already highlighted, it would be in the best interests of the Town Council and better value for local residents to return the funds.

RG280 Current Financial Position

The Assistant Town Clerk reported that grant payments to date were low which might be due to organisations locking down during Covid. A reminder will be sent out in December 2020 stating that community organisations need to claim soonest. If for any reason organisations have to delay their claim, the Committee will consider this on a case-by-case basis.

The financial position as of 30th September 2020 was NOTED.

RG281 Accounts Paid

The Committee NOTED that payments totalling £26,321.56 as detailed on payment schedules no. 320 until 30 October 2020 have been made since the report to the meeting on 14 October 2020.

RG282 Internal Financial Check

The Committee NOTED that Cllr Jogia visited the office on the 15 October 2020. The Committee thanked Cllr Jogia for carrying out the financial check.

Areas covered during this visit included petty cash, payroll for Feb, March, April, May, June, July, August, September and October 2020 along with the Public Works Loans transactions for Buckingham Court and Murray Hall.

RG283 Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) – Section 3 External Auditors Report and Certificate for 2020/21

The Committee NOTED the external auditors report from PKF Littlejohn LLP dated 16/11/20 and thanked The Town Clerk for a good report. The Town Clerk reported that this will assist the Local Council Awards, Gold Standard re accreditation process.

RG284 Subscriptions Review – Min no RGS 206

The Committee reviewed the current list of organisations of which it is a member and AGREED to continue to support those listed in the agenda without amendment.

RG285 Parish Basic Allowance – Min no RGS 207

The Committee RECOMMENDED to full Council to retain the level of Parish Basic Allowance that members may claim in 2020/21 at £120 per member per annum.

RG286 Committee Priorities – Min no RGS 208

As part of its overall plan and to complement the budget-making process, the Committee reviewed and AGREED the priority list and to move IT and office Equipment from High to Medium on the priority list for 2021/22.

RG287 Estimates for 2021/22

The Town Clerk reported that there are no spectacular changes in projected working expenses, which typically rise slightly year on year. There may be some drop in rental income. The Town Clerk explained the basis of these preliminary figures, which will be fine-tuned by the time of the full budget meeting in January 2021. There may be a further amendment to the final recharge figure.

The Committee reviewed and NOTED the report.

RG288 Future Work of the Committee

No items were raised for future discussion.

RG289 Exclusion of the Press and Public

The Committee RESOLVED to exclude the press and public from the following two items in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960, as they contained confidential information relating to contractual matters.

RG290 Buckingham Court

The Committee NOTED the report from the Town Clerk.

RG291 Councils Water Supplier

The Committee NOTED the report from the Assistant Town Clerk.

Signed:
Date: 6 January 2020