

DISS TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held **online** on **Wednesday 9th December 2020 at 8pm.**

Present: Councillors: S. Browne (ex-officio)
M. Gingell
S. Kiddie
J. Mason (Vice-Chair)
S. Olander (ex-officio)
D. Poulter (Chair)
J. Robertson
E. Taylor

In attendance: Cllrs K. Murphy and J. Welch
S. Richards (Town Clerk)
S. French (Deputy Town Clerk)
A. Jamieson (Responsible Finance Officer)
R. Ludkin (Maintenance Manager)
S. Hurst (Finance / Administrative Assistant)

EX1220/01 **APOLOGIES**
There were none.

EX1220/02 **NOMINATION OF SUBSTITUTE REPRESENTATIVES**
There were no nominations for substitutes.

EX1220/03 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**
There were no declarations of interest.

EX1220/04 **MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING**
It was

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee held on 2nd September 2020 as a true record of the meeting and will be signed post meeting.

EX1220/05 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
There were no members of the public in attendance.

EX1220/06 **ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS**
There were no items of urgent business.

EX1220/07 **QUARTERLY REPORT**
Members received the the second quarterly report of the Financial Year 2020-21 (report reference 29/2021 referred). It was noted that point 18 should have read £5k, that the considerable gas expenditure reflects the 12-month bill receipt in quarter one and the RFO is monitoring this. Thanks were extended to the RFO for providing useful information over data in this report.

Cllr Olander joined the meeting.

EX1220/08 **STRATEGY PLAN**
Councillors considered draft proposals from the Chair and Vice Chair of this committee regarding the agreed priorities for the Strategy Plan relevant to this committee, namely cost efficiencies and revenue generation. There was discussion around the long-term viability of the Park toilets given the current refurbishment of the Mere's Mouth toilets in close proximity. It was noted that the Park toilets have considerable footfall, which has increased since the play areas were improved. Large events such as the Carnival rely on this provision albeit additional portaloos are brought in.

When the options for the Mere's Mouth toilets were discussed, a petition was signed by upwards of 2,000 residents in support of retaining them at their location and there has been an aspiration to swap the bus station and Park Road car park, which would support the retention of toilets at the Park Road location. It was noted that usage is lower during winter months, there has been relatively little vandalism historically, expenditure on the facility has been minimal post installation and given

the current refurbishment of the Mere's Mouth toilets, the Park toilets will require improvements medium term. The Rural Market Town Grouping may act as a useful forum and it was agreed that usage should be monitored against the Mere's Mouth toilets as a comparison to inform future consideration.

The second proposal considered potential capacity within the maintenance team to reduce overall costs by undertaking tasks such as grass cutting, sign cleaning, street cleaning, bin emptying on behalf of neighbouring parishes and / or higher tier authorities. It was noted that this idea was costed 5+ years ago and deemed to be too expensive due to the increased requirement for staff and equipment. It was agreed that another review should be undertaken to assess requirements at each site with the associated resource requirements to identify any efficiency savings and potential spare capacity. It was noted that some work has already been undertaken to identify requirements in relation to assets, that hours spent at each site are no longer recorded and that a model of site allocation to staff was previously used but was difficult when covering leave.

The review of the Council's photocopier lease has been identified as a potential cost saving activity. It was noted that the Council is currently in year 2 of a 5-year lease arrangement, there is a significant penalty clause, and a comprehensive review was undertaken prior to entering the current arrangement. It was agreed that all commercial contracts and Council leases with third parties would be reviewed to identify potential cost savings. It was noted that the RFO would like a more active role in procurement alongside her monitoring and reporting function and that the end of year process would be a useful timeframe.

Other potential cost savings were discussed to include reviewing the energy efficiency of the Council Offices building particularly but across all sites, which should also contribute to reducing the Council's carbon footprint. It was noted that ground source energy could be an ideal solution given the office's location and consideration of the Council's environmental impact should be a key theme in its Strategy Plan. Members also discussed solar panelling, recycling, electric vans and charging points and working with traders to reduce the number of refuse collections in the town centre. It was noted that all Council sites are supplied with green electricity.

Revenue generation was subsequently discussed. The Sports Ground was identified as a potential site for increased income. Not all pitches are currently used although pitches to need to be left in a good condition for Sunday matches. This site has been considered as part of the potential leisure provision for the town and the budget allows for remedial works to the site as well as a future fund for more significant works. It was agreed that the available space at both at the Sports Ground and Diss Youth & Community Centre could be better promoted and that this may also assist with revenue generation.

There was discussion around a Son et Lumiere event for Diss, which could portray the historic story of the town set against music and lights. Increasing footfall in the town centre particularly at weekends should be supported by local businesses and members considered relevant trader forums to pursue the proposal further. It was noted that the Council has a representative on the Diss Business Forum, there is the Heritage Traders Group, a trader WhatsApp group and advice could be sought from the Rural Market Towns Group, which the Council has just joined. Efforts have been made previously to join the forces of the various trader groups in the town but was difficult to sustain.

The proposal to install a zipline from the Council Offices car park over the heritage gardens and the Mere into the Park was discussed. The consensus was that the equipment, insurance, staffing and safety aspects would render it not feasible financially but costs from a similar project in Norwich would be reviewed and it was agreed that the Mere would be explored further as a visitor attraction through the Facilities committee objective of improving the water quality.

(Action: Facilities committee / DP; by 02.12.21)

The final discussion was around increasing the number of market stalls and potential other sites. It was noted that the Friday market operates a waiting list, that the regular farmers market was not well supported by traders or the public and have decreased in popularity and that there are legal and logistical restrictions for use of the Mere's Mouth and Market Hill sites. There may be some potential in re-introducing the specialised European markets as one-off events to increase footfall in the town. It was

RESOLVED:

- a) To investigate devices to monitor the usage of the Park toilets compared to the Mere's Mouth toilets to inform future decision making.
(Action: DepTC / MM; by 25.02.21)
- b) To appoint an action group of the Deputy Town Clerk, Maintenance Manager and councillors Gingell, Mason and Robertson to review maintenance requirements against the site / asset register to determine capacity for exploring options for acting as a contractor for neighbouring parishes and/or higher tier authorities.
(Action: DepTC / MM / MG / JM / JR; by 27.05.21)
- c) To appoint an action group of the Deputy Town Clerk, Responsible Finance Officer and councillors Browne, Murphy and Poulter to review the Council's non-salary revenue commitments as part of the year-end process.
(Action: DepTC / RFO / SB / KM / DP; by 26.08.21)
- d) To appoint an action group of the Clerk, Maintenance Manager and councillors Gingell and Murphy to review all Council activities and establish a forum of local businesses to consider how the Council and / or town's carbon footprint can be reduced.
(Action: Clerk / MG / KM; by 26.08.21)
- e) To consider capacity at the Sports Ground and Diss Youth & Community Centre sites for further publicity.
(Action: DepTC; by 25.02.21)
- f) To appoint an action group of the Deputy Town Clerk and councillors Browne, Collins, Kiddie and Poulter to consider the potential of a Son et Lumiere event for Diss in liaison with traders.
(Action: DepTC / SB / DC / SK / DP; by 02.12.21)
- g) To investigate options for increasing the footfall in the town centre through increased market activity.
(Action: DepTC; by 02.12.21)

EX1220/09

BUDGET 2021/22

Members considered the draft budget for the 2021/22 financial year for recommendation to Full Council at its January precept setting meeting (report references 30/2021 & 31/2021 referred). The RFO was thanked for a great report and it was noted that questions raised prior to the meeting had been answered by the RFO.

It was noted that since issuing report 30/2021, the net effect of income over expenditure has resulted in a £5,287 decrease in precept requirement for the Executive committee compared to the 2020/21 budget (relevant to point 14). General Reserves would account for required contingencies should any be required for example for bailiffs / solicitors' fees in relation to encampments and therefore does not require a budget allocation.

Relevant to points 30 & 31 in the report, a reduction in the net effect precept request compared to the 2020/21 budget was also reported for the Infrastructure committee from £19.5k to £17,890 due to a revised estimated additional income receipt of £8,890 for the Parish Partnership Scheme. It was

RESOLVED: That members recommend to Full Council:

- a) The proposed income and expenditure budgets for the Executive committee
- b) The Earmarked Reserves allocations as appropriate reserves
- c) An allocation of £20k to the Community Grant Scheme
- d) The proposed income and expenditure budgets for the Facilities committee
- e) The Earmarked Reserves allocations as appropriate reserves for the Facilities committee
- f) The reallocation of EMR funding for approval at the December meeting of Council
- g) The proposed income and expenditure budgets for the Infrastructure committee
- h) The Earmarked Reserves allocations as appropriate reserves for the Infrastructure committee.
(Action: RFO; by 16.12.20)

Members also considered the hire charges review (report reference 31/2021 referred). It was noted that the recommendation was based on increasing only some of the fees but that an increase by

inflation of all hire fees would equate to an additional £1,600 in income. A comprehensive review of Cemetery fees was undertaken three years ago, and any changes would require a considerable administration. There was discussion regarding the Funeral Directors fees versus the Council's charges, and it was agreed that a further review of Cemetery fees should be undertaken. It was

RESOLVED:

- 1) To increase hire fees by 1.5% across all sites.
- 2) To review the pricing structure for the Council Offices in time for 2022-23 budgeting.
- 3) To undertake a review of the fees charged by other authorities regarding fishing rights.

(Action: RFO / DepTC; by 15.03.21 / by 30.09.21)

EX1220/10

POLICIES

Councillors considered one revised and four new policies. It was

RESOLVED:

- a) To approve a revised Disciplinary policy
- b) To approve a new Equal Opportunities and Dignity at Work policy subject to the addition of 'gender' to the list 'race, colour, ethnic origin, nationality, national origin, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment, age, pregnancy or maternity, marital or civil partnership status, disability, children and/or domestic obligations' throughout the document
- c) To approve a new Illegal Encampment policy subject to the removal of clauses 2.3 and 2.4
- d) To approve a new Financial Reserves policy with a 6-month target for General Reserves
- e) That councillor Browne would review the new draft councillor Exit Interview policy to include the names of the members conducting the interview on the form for presentation to the next meeting of this committee.

(Action: DepTC / SB; by 25.02.21)

EX1220/11

COUNCIL'S RESILIENCE PLAN

Councillors considered progress towards the Council's Resilience Plan. It was noted that the Council's original plan focused on flooding, that a meeting with South Norfolk Council's Emergency Planning Officer was undertaken and that the Council's plan should feed into the District's comprehensive plan already in place. It was

RESOLVED: to appoint an action group of councillors Olander, Poulter and Robertson to review the Council's Resilience Plan.

(Action: SO / DP / JR; by 27.05.21)

EX1220/12

ITEMS FOR NOTING

- a) Bank Signatories – members noted that the Council's Responsible Finance Officer will carry out a review of bank signatories for the next meeting of this committee.
- b) Progress report - members noted progress on decisions made at the last meeting of this committee. There was a request for regular updates in maintenance staffing changes.

(Action: RL; immediately)

EX1220/13

MEMBER FORUM

Members did not have any additional information or issues relevant to this committee for brief discussion, action or inclusion on a future agenda.

EX1220/14

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Councillors noted that the next meeting of the Executive Committee is scheduled for Wednesday 3rd March 2021.

Meeting closed at 22:38 hours.

Chairman: Councillor Poulter