



Battle Town Council



**MINUTES of a meeting of the FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
held on Tuesday, 20 December 2016 at The Almonry, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm**

Present: Cllrs D Furness (Chairman); G Favell, J Gyngell, R Jessop, M Kiloh and A Ratcliffe

In Attendance: Carol Harris (Town Clerk)

1. Apologies for absence – None.

2. Disclosure of interest – Cllr Ratcliffe declared a personal interest in any discussion relating to the Almonry building as a tenant and associate of prospective new tenant.

3. Minutes of the meetings held on 8 November 2016 – These were approved by Members and duly signed by Cllr Furness.

4. Matters arising from previous meetings

A letter of thanks had been received from Peter and Tina Greene for the use of the Almonry for the stitching of the Battle Community Tapestry.

5. Asset review report

As this had not been received until yesterday, it was agreed to circulate to all Members for discussion at the next meeting.

6. Almonry

In light of comments made by Rother's Conservation Officer it had been suggested that an archaeological/historic architectural impact/mitigation strategy for the proposed works should be prepared. A quotation had been received in the sum of £390. **Cllr Jessop proposed that David Martin be instructed to carry out this report. This was agreed.** The Clerk was asked to arrange a meeting with the architects early in the new year.

A report from Beautiful Battle on the plans for the Almonry garden had included a request to **replace some of the pots with 3-4 planters similar to the smaller ones on the Green. This was agreed.** Members suggested that more colourful planting should be incorporated into the Diamond and Acorn beds. The Clerk was asked to clarify the end date for the agreement with Beautiful Battle to ensure that this is not missed.

7. Vacant office space

Cllr Ratcliffe declared his personal interest in this item.

The Clerk confirmed that the proposed tenant, Taylor Riley Commercial Ltd, had been introduced by an existing tenant. They are a Chartered Surveyors that currently work from Ashford. The suggested rent would be set at the same previously, based on there being a number of offices available in Battle and rents have not changed over the period. Taylor Riley had requested that the office be: repainted; improved lighting installed; and a new carpet fitted. This would cost in the region of £350. **This was agreed with the proviso that a non-secured tenancy agreement be drawn by a solicitor with the costs borne by the tenant.**

8. Grant request

A grant request had been received from the **Battle Medieval Fayre requesting a donation of £500** towards the purchase of two stall covers. **This was agreed.**

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9. Financial matters

The budget report to date was noted.

In light of the recommendation for Council to accept ownership of the memorial statue the annual fee for full insurance cover had been obtained in the amount of £60.76. In relation to the cleaning and maintenance it was felt that this would be of little cost. **Members agreed that, in light of the position and value of the memorial statue, it should be immediately insured.** Cllr Furness confirmed that 3 quotes for the provision of lighting to the statue had been obtained and that upon receipt of relevant approvals this would be installed from donation funds. He also advised that an information plaque would be erected in due course and that a leather bound book was currently being produced. Cllr Jessop agreed to fund this memorial book at an approximate cost of £200. Cllr Furness reported that an invoice for £4,000 was awaited from the sculptor and that all costs have been covered. The Committee supported the suggestion that appropriate 'explanation boards' should be erected by the library and oak bed. Cllr Furness recommended that the cost could be included within the Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

The Clerk confirmed that the increase in salary costs is due to an under budget allowance made for tax and national insurance this current year. Cllr Kiloh reminded Members that it had been agreed to include £10,000 for Almonry general maintenance and a further £10,000 into Earmarked Reserves(EMR) for the Almonry.

The Clerk reported that all budgets had been examined for necessary adjustments required based on actual figures for both this and the previous year. All other items had been increased by an inflationary 3%.

Discussions then took place in relation to planned projects by individual Committees:

Environment:

Cllr Favell highlighted the consultations that have been undertaken over the last 12 months that had identified schemes that Battle residents felt were missing. These included a toilet and café within the recreation ground and better equipment that would encourage interactive play. The accessible toilet has now been provided and enquiries to confirm the way forward for the café have been made. Although sponsorship for the new play facility had been sought, this had not been successful. The Committee plan to apply for match funding of £5,000 to enable the Pavilion kitchen to be adapted in time for an Easter 2018 opening and allocate £2,500 for staff costs for the remaining period of that year. The Council have an EMR of £10,000 towards the provision of a new play facility and propose to add a further £15,000 and apply for funding for the remaining balance. In light of the cemetery extension and the age of the existing ride-on mower, a sum of £6,500 is required for a replacement. Finally, the Council staff have undertaken training to enable tree work to be completed in-house to help reduce costs. This has proved successful and there is now an awareness of the timber residue. The Committee recommend the purchase of a wood shredder at a cost of £10,000 that will enable the environmentally friendly disposal of timber which will then be reused as a natural material.

External Relations and Town Development:

Cllr Ratcliffe reminded Members that the Chamber of Commerce had given notice that they could no longer take responsibility for the Christmas lights in the town after this current season. The Council feels that this is an essential part of the town and have obtained quotations for erecting and taking down the lights for £10,000. Cllr Ratcliffe reported many messages of concern that Battle no longer has a Tourist Information Point(TIP) to assist residents and visitors and ultimately local businesses. The Committee proposed a budget of £6,000 to support the provision of a TIP. The installation of a defibrillator at the Memorial Halls had been well received and it was felt that Netherfield residents should also have access to a defibrillator at a cost of £1,000. The Committee were pleased to report the

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reduction in cost of social media/marketing which is now carried out in-house. However, it had identified the need for £1,000 to promote links with other groups such as the twinned town of St Valery sur Somme.

Finance & General Purposes:

Cllr Furness highlighted the wonderful asset of the Almonry building but that how, through lack of available funds for maintenance, it is now in need of much attention. As highlighted above, the Committee had previously agreed that £10,000 should be allocated for essential repairs with a further £10,000 being placed into the EMR for future works. Members were reminded of the great commemoration events of this Concorde 1066 year and the acknowledgement that the Mayor's regalia is becoming shabby and is not in line with such a significant town as Battle. It was felt that £5,000 should be provided to replace the Mayoral Chain of Office.

Planning & Transport:

Cllr Jessop reported on the chaos that can be experienced on parking at the Council managed Mount Street overflow car park. He reminded Members that this is an area of free parking allocated for people that live and work in the town. Cllr Jessop had obtained costs for installing a hard, drained, line-marked surface and suggested that, at a cost of £3,000 a year for repayment to a PWLB loan, this facility could be far more attractive to use.

The Committee then discussed the poor state of the general reserves at 25% against a recommended position of 40-45%. It was acknowledged that this could not be rectified overnight but that £15,000pa for 3years would raise the general reserve level to an acceptable position.

To encompass the plans for the Council, **the Committee agreed to recommend to Full Council a precept of £340,762.** It was acknowledged that an increase of 33% for Band D equivalent properties would appear to be high, but this equates to an extra 60p per week on Council Tax (Band D) residents. Members were confident that, in return, residents will be assured that the Council is doing all it can for the well-being of the Town and will enjoy the services provided. The Committee felt that the Council must continue to attempt to provide amenities that either Rother or East Sussex Council have cancelled; such as the Tourist Information Point or that have suffered from substantial cutbacks. The Clerk confirmed that the Council Tax reduction Grant from Rother will also be reduced by 50% to £3,664.74 for 2017/18.

10. Staff incentive

The Clerk was asked to leave the room for a confidential discussion

Members agreed that, in recognition of the hard work by members of staff, an ex-gratia payment should be awarded in the December salary.

11. Matters for information and future agenda items

To consider Asset review report

12. Date of next meeting: 7 February 2017

The meeting closed at 8.40pm

**CLLR D FURNESS
CHAIRMAN**