

## FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the BEST VALUE AND SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE of Bridport Town Council held at Mountfield, Bridport on Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 10.00am.

PRESENT Cllr Sarah Carney

Cllrs: Jonathan Bourbon	Paddy Mooney
Andrew Holdridge	Anne Rickard
Ann Langridge	Steve Williams

Also in attendance: Cllr Ian Bark (ex officio), Paul Fuszard (Finance & Office Manager) and Will Austin (Town Clerk).

### PUBLIC FORUM

There were no members of the public present.

#### 18. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Anna Killick and Dave Rickard.

#### 19. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

#### 20. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Best Value and Scrutiny Sub-Committee held on 3 September 2024 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman, including the following amendments:

- Minute 14 (i) (b) should end “and the group should seek alternative funding”.
- Minute 15 (iii) means that future funding should not go beyond £30,000.

The Town Clerk advised that a report on investments, as noted at minute 13, had been deferred until the March 2025 meeting.

Responding to a query in respect of minute 15(iv), Cllr Ian Bark confirmed that a meeting with Bridport Area Development Trust had been scheduled for 5 December 2024.

#### 21. WEST BAY CAR BOOT SALE GRANTS SCHEME

The Town Clerk reported that a panel to determine grant applications had in previous years comprised five town councillors, with the Leader as a reserve, and two Dorset members; one from the Bridport ward and one from any of the other wards in the Bridport Local Area Partnership area. He invited members to consider the membership for 2025.

Following discussion, it was

RESOLVED: that the West Bay Car Boot Sale Grants Scheme Panel should comprise:

- (i) Town councillors Sarah Carney, Ann Langridge, Paddy Mooney, Anne Rickard and Steve Williams, with Cllr Ian Bark as a reserve; and
- (ii) One Dorset Council member from the Bridport ward, and one from any of the other wards in the Bridport Local Area Partnership area, to be agreed in consultation with the Town Clerk.

## **22. INTERNAL AUDIT**

The interim report of the independent internal auditor, ENCL: 3950, was received and considered at length at the meeting.

Members discussed the report, focusing on:

- The availability of the Town Council's asset register, which the Town Clerk advised was published on the council's website;
- A proposed review of the council's banking arrangements, which the Town Clerk advised would be brought forward in due course;
- Pursuit of a debt referred to in the report, which the Town Clerk advised was in hand;
- Ensuring the appropriate wording of minutes in respect of appointment of the internal auditor;
- Consideration of the council's reserves, including a reserves policy later in the meeting;
- Financial software in use by the Town Council;
- Arrangements for a review of Financial Regulations; and
- The impact of increased employer National Insurance contributions on the council's finances.

RECOMMENDED: that the report of the internal auditor be approved.

## **23. COUNCILLORS/OFFICER PROTOCOL**

A draft protocol, ENCL: 3951, governing relations between councillors and officers was considered at the meeting. Members welcomed the report and discussed:

- Sanctions available to the council in the case of transgressions, which the Town Clerk advised were limited;
- Training, monitoring, and conflict resolution arrangements;
- The relationship between the draft policy and the Members' Code of Conduct; and
- Whether councillors could research possible conflict resolution processes for further discussion.

RESOLVED: that councillors will research conflict resolution and discuss this at a future meeting of the sub-committee.

RECOMMENDED: that the draft Councillor/Officer Protocol be approved as tabled.

## **24. RESERVES POLICY**

A draft reserves policy, ENCL: 3952, was considered at the meeting. The Town Clerk reported that this was in response to a recommendation of the internal auditor.

Members discussed:

- The current position regarding the council's reserves. The Finance & Office Manager reported that total reserves were reported as approximately £570,000 as at March 2024, and were likely to reduce when next reported in March 2025.
- The appropriate level of reserves. The Town Clerk advised there was no statutory minimum, but that sector guidance advised a figure of no less than three months' net expenditure; and
- Arrangements for delegated decision-making that involved the use of reserves.

RESOLVED: that the next review of Standing Orders, the Scheme of Delegation, and Financial Regulations should review the arrangements for delegated decision-making.

RECOMMENDED: that the draft reserve policy be approved as tabled.

## **25. COMMUNICATIONS**

There were no items to report.

## **26. PUBLIC BODIES (ADMISSION TO MEETINGS) ACT 1960**

RESOLVED: that in view of the confidential nature of the business about to be transacted, it is advisable in the public interest that the public be temporarily excluded, and they are instructed to withdraw.

## **27. DRAFT ESTIMATES 2025/26**

The draft budget proposals for 2025/26 were received at the meeting and the Town Clerk outlined the main areas of change, and the potential effect of the impending Tax Base for 2025/26. Members also considered a briefing note tabled by members of the Budget Working Group, which was summarised by Cllr Ann Langridge.

RESOLVED: that the draft budget be further updated, for consideration at the next meeting of the Budget Working Group.

The meeting closed at **12:28pm**

**The next meeting of this Sub-Committee was scheduled to be held on 4 March 2025, but will now take place on a date to be agreed.**