

PENWORTHAM TOWN COUNCIL
STRATEGY & FINANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting held at Penwortham Community Centre on Monday 31st July 2023 at 6:40pm.

Committee Members Present: Councillors D Bennett, T Flannery, H Hancock, D Howarth, J Patten, and A Turner.

Substitute Committee Members Present: Councillors K Martin and A Rae

In attendance: Marie Curran, Town Manager & RFO
Daniel Guise, Democratic Services Officer

17. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Councillors William Adams and Ian Watkinson.

Councillor Adams was substituted by Councillor Rae.
Councillor Watkinson was substituted by Councillor Martin.

18. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Patten declared a non-pecuniary and non-prejudicial interest concerning the Staffing Report item. This arose because Councillor Patten was a trustee for the Double R Arts youth theatre group. This was run by the Events Co-ordinator, and the Events Co-ordinator was therefore known to Councillor Patten in another context.

Councillor Martin noted that he also worked with the Events Co-ordinator when volunteering at The Venue.

19. Minutes of the Last Meeting

Councillor Howarth proposed that the minutes of the last meeting be approved. Councillor Martin seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the last meeting, held on 26th June 2023, be approved as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

20. 1st Quarter Accounts to end June 2023

The Town Manager presented the quarterly accounts, and noted that income had increased by £13k.

Councillor Howarth noted that the Arts Centre was in profit. The Town Manager noted that profit from some centres allowed the Town Council to subsidise room hires for community initiatives at other centres. She cited the food bank, clothes bank and lunch club at Penwortham Community Centre (PCC) as examples.

Councillor Howarth asked if The Venue was available to community groups, for private hire. The Town Manager confirmed that it was not, partly because it was a licensed venue and alcohol was stored there. Councillor Turner remarked that she hoped a way could be found to work around this, as the building could be a great money earner.

Councillor Patten noted that income from PCC had not changed significantly, and asked if it was a struggle to hire it out. The Town Manager advised that Priory Lane Community Centre was more popular. She also noted that PCC was busier than its income suggested, because groups serving a welfare need (e.g. the food bank) or dealing with medical issues (e.g. Alzheimer's) were not obliged to pay.

RESOLVED: that the report be noted.

21. **Staffing Report**

The Town Manager presented the report and recommended that the Council extend the employment of the existing Events Co-ordinator until the end of the Financial Year on 31st March 2024. She advised that this would allow time to complete a thorough recruitment process and a handover to the new employee.

Councillor Howarth remarked that the Town Manager could not be left to do all the work. He noted that if there were only two office staff, and one became incapacitated, the remaining team member would be on their own, and delivering on Town Council business would become very challenging. Councillor Howarth remarked that there was no choice but to extend the Events Co-ordinator's contract and very quickly look to recruit new staff.

Councillor Howarth proposed that the Events Co-ordinator's contract be extended until 31st March 2024, and that the Personnel Board meet as soon as possible, to implement a permanent solution. Councillor Rae seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: i) that the Events Co-ordinator's contract be extended until 31st March 2024; and

ii) that the Town Manager report to the Committee and/or Personnel Board at the earliest opportunity, to work towards more permanent staffing arrangements.

22. **Local Government Pension Fund Admissions**

The Town Manager advised that the Democratic Services Officer had passed his probation period and was a permanent employee. As such, he was entitled to admission to the Pension Scheme.

The Town Manager explained that a person permanently employed by the Town Council was eligible to be an active member of the Local Government Pension Scheme (LGPS), if they were designated by the Town Council as being eligible for membership, or they belonged to a class of employees who were so designated.

Penwortham Town Council passed a resolution in January 2004 to allow employees to join the LGPS; however, it did not designate any specific employees or class of employees as eligible for membership. The LGPS now required a retrospective resolution that designated membership to all previous employees that had been admitted to the scheme, and a resolution to designate membership for the new joiner.

Councillor Martin proposed that the Council make the necessary resolutions. Councillor Howarth seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: i) that Penwortham Town Council allow all permanent employees of the Town Council to join the LGPS; and

ii) that in retrospect, the Town Council designates membership to all previous employees that have been admitted to the scheme; and

iii) that the Town Council designate membership for the new joiner, Mr Daniel Guise.

23. **Personnel Board**

Councillor Howarth nominated Councillors Howarth and Emery to be members of the Personnel Board. Councillor Turner seconded the nominations.

RESOLVED: that Councillors Howarth and Emery be appointed to 2 of the 5 places on the Personnel Board.

24. **Reserves Policy**

The Town Manager advised that the Council had never had a reserves policy confirmed in writing. The Town Manager presented her report, and recommended that the Council adopt a policy to hold, as General Reserves, no less than 50% of annual expenditure at all times.

Councillor Howarth noted that the Council had always held sensible reserves, regardless of not having an explicit policy.

Councillor Patten noted that in recent years the reserves had been well over 50%, such that if reserves continued increasing the Council should consider reducing the precept, reducing the fees and charges it applies, or increasing expenditure.

Councillor Martin proposed that the written policy be adopted. Councillor Bennett seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: that the Council adopt the proposed Reserves Policy, whereby it shall hold as General Reserves no less than fifty percent of annual expenditure.

25. **Signage Policy**

Councillor Howarth advised that his group was not in support of the proposed policy, and that he hoped the Council was not going to micromanage reasonable decisions by the Town Manager, or curtail swift action when it would resolve an issue.

Councillor Martin advised that there were cases in which a road was not adopted by Lancashire County Council (LCC), but they still operated the lighting columns on it, which would have implications for erecting signs on them. He also noted that members, particularly those who were County Councillors, could still go to LCC directly to request new signage, without directing enquiries through the Town Council.

Councillor Bennet proposed that the policy be adopted. Councillor Flannery seconded the proposal.

RESOLVED: that the Council adopt the proposed Signage Policy.

.....Chairman

(The meeting finished at 7:15pm.)

The minutes of this meeting will be published on the website
www.penworthamtowncouncil.gov.uk