



Battle Town Council



MINUTES of the FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
held on TUESDAY, 26 MARCH 2024 at The Almonry, High Street, Battle at 7.30pm

Present: Cllrs V Cook (Chairman), B Brown, S Burton, D Russell, D Wheeler.

In Attendance: Cllr M-L Neill, two member of the public, C Harris (Town Clerk)

Public Question Time

P Mills spoke on behalf of the Battle Memorial Halls Committee providing an update on the provision of solar panels. He confirmed that funding had been secured from: Rother District Council's Village Halls Energy Project £15k, donations £5k, BMH funds £5k, and three quotes had been received with a preferred contractor identified at £39k. PM reported that confirmation of a successful application for Battle's local Community Infrastructure Levy is required by 8 April 2024.

A member of the public commented on three items on the Agenda:

9b – highlighted that this had been agreed subsequent to public consultation, was reaffirmed in the published Budget Statement and should not be postponed;

11 – as a member of the Neighbourhood Plan Implementation, Monitoring & Review Sub Committee would support the Cloud storage as a high priority to allow access to archive documents requiring amendment;

16 – reminded Council of a project workflow that he had produced which would assist with this matter.

1. **Apologies for absence** – Cllr A Barton.
2. **Disclosure of interest** – Cllr B Brown declared an interest in item 9a as the Council's representative and Trustee of the Battle Memorial Halls Committee.
3. **The minutes of the meeting of 23 January 2024**, subject to the addition of Cllr D Russell to those in attendance, were agreed and duly signed by Cllr Cook.
4. **The Clerk's report**
 - The replacement photocopier is now installed.
 - The Leases for Suites 6 and 8 had been presented, subject to satisfactory references being received.
5. **Financial matters**
 - a) The **budget report to 31 January 2024** was noted, as attached. The Clerk highlighted that each radiator setting has been adjusted for room use to assist with reduction in cost and carbon footprint.
 - b) Members considered **virements to Ear Marked Reserves** and **agreed:** with the compulsory move to VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol), any **underspend at 4045 Telephone, broadband & IT to an EMR for potential extra expenditure**; the **grant budget 4280** had not been called on for the January 2024 although there had been several expressions of interest for 2024/25 from eligible organisations, and should be transferred to an EMR for this purpose, particularly in light of the reduction to the budget allocation for 2024/25.
 - c) Members noted the agreed **F&GP budget for 2024-25:**
Income £29,930; Expenditure £351,531, plus projects at £14,000 as detailed:

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Item	Proposed	Agreed from Precept	Agreed from other means	Comments
Solar panel research	3000	1000		Work with Museum to research feasibility
Arbour and step repair	7000	0	7000 EMR 320	Previously agreed for health and safety reasons
Flag service	1100	0	1100 Gen Reserves	Considered inappropriate not to repair
Almonry double gates	4058	0		Grounds staff to carry out temporary repair
Station Master's House		12000		
Devolvement		0		Not sufficient information to consider

d) Cllr Brown detailed his concerns that the current **accounting and budget system** allows for errors. Following a discussion, **Members agreed that an additional Full Council meeting to discuss a review of the accounting and budget system should be held as a confidential matter.** The Clerk was asked to circulate a doodle poll to arrange this. *Post meeting note: due the Clerk's concern at the agreement to a confidential matter, not in accordance with the Local Government Act 1972, reasons for exclusion of members of the public and press, further advice has been sought. A one-off Working Party meeting with Terms of Reference: to examine the current financial arrangements; and to consider improvements, for recommendation to Full Council should replace the above. This Working Party must include the Responsible Finance Officer. This matter will be added to the next Full Council agenda for decision on how to take forward.*

d) Cllr Wheeler was thanked for his notes on a new telephone & broadband provider. As additional information on Voice over Internet Protocol (VOIP) is still being received, **Members agreed to postpone this discussion to the next meeting.** Cllr Wheeler agreed to help with this.

6. Minutes and recommendations from Sub Committees

a) Cllr Cook reported on the **Marketing Sub Committee held on 12 March 2024.** These were noted, as attached.

b) There had been no meeting of the **Personnel Sub Committee.**

c) Cllr Burton provided a verbal report on the **Climate & Ecology Sub Committee** meeting held on 25 March 2024. She highlighted that the Council's carbon emission calculation had been completed.

7. Projects

The list of agreed projects had been circulated and it was acknowledged that no further projects, schemes or Task & Finish Groups should be considered until the Annual Meeting.

8. Use of Community Infrastructure Policy

The notes of the meeting held on 13 March 2024, including the Terms of Reference, as attached, and the draft Policy produced had been circulated prior to the meeting. Following discussion, **Members agreed the document in principle and agreed a further meeting of the T&FG should be held to finalise the document and an application form to apply for CIL funding.**

9. Community Infrastructure Levy funds



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Members agreed to reorder the following two Agenda items:

- b) **Members agreed by a majority not to defer the Marly Lane footway and to take forward this project as soon as feasible.**

Cllr B Brown repeated his interest in the application from Battle Memorial Hall:

- a) Members noted the comment made at PQT and, following discussion, agreed, by a majority, up to £15,000 towards the provision of solar panels at the **Battle Memorial Hall**.

The **Battle Area Community Transport service was discussed and, by a majority, agreed to £15,000 towards a replacement second hand bus**. The Clerk was asked to suggest to BACT that additional promotion of the service be provided and, if alternative fundraising is not successful, a further application for CIL would be considered.

Members agreed not to consider further CIL funds for the Pavilion rebuild at this time.

10. Town Model

Cllr Cook reported on the history of the Council's purchase of the Town Model in 1985 at a cost of £10,000 and an additional £3,000 for the lighting and sound element. It was highlighted that the siting of the Model was discussed by the Town Development & External Relations Committee, as it was suggested that the Model is also of potential interest to tourists. TD&ER had suggested that it remain in the Buttery until an alternative location could be found, and, to the Clerk's knowledge, Full Council had asked that F&GP discuss the Model's permanent location. Following further discussion Members agreed that: alternative locations in the High Street should be sought by all Councillors; feasibility of making the Model smaller should be researched; cost of a Perspex cover be identified; honest comments be requested from visitors to the Almonry; the Clerk contact the artist again for a further opinion. It was agreed that a long-term decision is required on the Town Model based on the results of these investigations.

11. Cloud storage for Task & Finish Groups

Cllr Wheeler had identified and set up a draft system that is at no cost for 15GB and requires minimal time resource to set up. He confirmed that documents would be for permitted users and not for public use. **Members thanked Cllr Wheeler for his work on this and agreed unanimously to trial this scheme.**

12. Policies

- a) The following policies had been circulated to Members prior to the meeting and **agreed, as attached**:
- I. Pension Discretion Policy;
 - II. Media Policy;
 - III. Hire Cancellation Policy.
- b) The **list of policies** for had been circulated again and Councillors were asked to inform the Clerk of those that they wished to review.

13. Action Plan

This was noted, as attached.

14. Almonry building

- a) Members agreed that whilst the **physical contractual works had now been completed**, it was not appropriate to formally agree the terms of the contract are complete at this time.



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- b) Members noted that the main **Chimney works** are complete and a date for the removal of the scaffolding and finishing works is awaited. It was noted that an Olive tree requires removal.
- c) Members agreed to an additional **picture hanging rail** for the entrance to the Hall to be utilised for exhibitions at a nominal cost of £27.10.
- d) Members agreed storage of archive material owned by the **Battle & District Historical Society** in the eaves cupboard, currently containing Council documents that could be stored in the loft (with appropriate boarding), at an initial annual cost of £300, subject to confirmation that BDHS has suitable insurance is in place.
- e) The Clerk reported that drawings and information for the provision of **solar panels at the Almonry and Museum** have been received but has not been progressed due to other tasks taking priority.

15. Almonry garden

- a) **Beautiful Battle reported** that perennial plants, additional shrubs and a top up of pea beach for the thyme line gravel borders had been supplemented with plants from personal gardens. It was noted that a hibernating hedgehog had been found in the front garden and had been carefully covered over. BB hoped to restart on the rear garden, now that the chimney is 'complete', subject to the cordoning off of the steps and arbour areas.
- b) Following the surveyor's schedule being presented to several contractors, two quotes had been received for the essential **repairs to the arbour and steps**. These were similar in cost and **the Clerk was granted delegated authority to contract the work based on best practice**. **Members agreed that this would be funded by, the previously agreed, £7500 from EMR 120 Asset replacement, the remaining balance of this EMR of £8125 and up to £1500 from EMR 445 Garden.**

16. Streamlining Council procedures

Due to time constraints within Council Standing Orders, this item was deferred.

17. Correspondence and communications received post agenda publication

Grant applications had been received and those that are time sensitive will be considered by Full Council.

18. Matters for information and future agenda items

19. Date of next meetings: provisionally, 28 May 2024

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 22.03.

CLLR V COOK
CHAIRMAN