

## PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

### ADDITIONAL TOWN COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 4<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER 2014 AT EASTON METHODIST CHURCH HALL

**PRESENT:** Councillors R. Wild (Chair), Ms S Lees, I. Munro-Price, T. Munro, Mrs S. Reynolds, R. Nowak, A. Matthews, G. Chadwick, J. Thorner, Mrs S. Bradley and R. Hughes (late arrival from 7.45pm).

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Mrs Paula Harding (Locum Clerk) together with seven members of the public.

#### **2730 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Mr Ian Looker (Clerk) who is on sick leave, Cllrs Mrs E. Munro-Price, Mrs A. Munro and R. Denton-White.

#### **2731 – DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr. Munro declared a personal and prejudicial interest in the agenda item 7 – Staffing Review Report as he was a resident of Portland and therefore local Council Tax payer. The Chair suggested that this would apply to all of those members present. All agreed.

#### **2732 – PUBLIC HALF HOUR**

Questions were raised by some of those present about whether a decision by the Council regarding the recommendations made in the Staffing Review Report should not wait until after the election. They added that with an ‘all out’ election, a number of councillors (if not all) may be new to the role and that they may wish to handle the issues raised in a different manner to those currently in office. The Chair replied that it was important to try and leave the administration of the Council in a positive position where it could begin to move forward from the election. It was noted that there were some recommendations which would have a financial implication and it was important that these are addressed as part of the current budget setting process for the 2015/16 financial year. Any future Council could be restricted regarding the speed of any agreed improvement implementation if the financial resources are not in place.

A request was made from a member of the public for a referendum to be held to decide whether to dissolve Portland Town Council. Whilst it was noted that there had been a referendum since the inception of the Council, there was some question in the public opinion as to its coverage across the island. It was noted by Cllr T. Munro that any referendum undertaken would not be binding but would be a statement of public opinion which the Town Council would then consider. Cllr R. Wild stated that it would be unlikely that a referendum would be possible before the elections in May 2015. Clarification was sought by the public present as to how a referendum could be called. Cllr T. Munro stated that a list of names, representing 10% of the registered electorate of Portland calling for a referendum would be required to be presented to Weymouth and Portland Borough Council, who would then consider the validity of the request. He also stated that the public should be aware that any costs for such a vote to be held would be borne by Portland Town Council.

[Portland Clerk’s Note – I believe that the 10% electorate idea is a proposal under a current consultation about parish polls. However at present the situation is quite different. Any six electors of a parish can call a parish meeting. “A poll may be demanded before the conclusion of a parish meeting on any question arising at the meeting; but no poll shall be taken unless either the person presiding at the meeting consents or the poll is demanded by

not less than ten, or one-third, of the local government electors present at the meeting, whichever is the fewer.” (Local Councils Explained, p 111) The details of the procedures that follow continue for two further pages.]

### **2733 – MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20<sup>TH</sup> NOVEMBER 2014 (ADDITIONAL)**

Cllr T. Munro expressed concern that paper copies of the redacted Staffing Review Report which was to be discussed were not available for the public at this meeting. All members of the public present confirmed they already had a paper copy from the previous meeting which then subsequently been postponed.

Cllr. Munro noted that Minute 2727 agreed that some of the salary details in the Staffing Review Report be redacted and whilst this had been done on the paper copy, the presentation given by Mr Nick Randle had, he claimed, revealed this information. Based on this observation Cllr. Munro questioned whether these details were now in a public domain. The majority of the members disagreed with this observation and felt that the presentation slide containing salary information had been ‘skipped’ at the meeting. Cllr. Chadwick offered to check the audio recording of the meeting to clarify this but Cllr. Munro declined. The Chair confirmed that therefore that this information should remain confidential during this meeting and not discussed without the exclusion of the public and press.

It was proposed by Cllr. Munro-Price that Minute 2728 para (2) be amended as follows: *With reference to SO39 concerning expenditure it was proposed by Cllr. Munro and* **RESOLVED** *that all the recommendations in the report be considered by the Council in detail and stand adjourned for debate at a subsequent additional meeting.* All present agreed with this proposed amendment.

The minutes of the meeting were formally agreed and signed as an accurate record (For: 6 votes, Against: 0 votes, Abstentions: 4 votes)

### **2734 – STAFFING REVIEW REPORT**

The Chair invited members of the Council to consider the recommendations set out in the commissioned Staffing Review Report as agreed in Minute 2728 and the subsequent amendment agreed in Minute 2733.

Cllr. Munro opened the debate by stating that he felt that any the decisions made on the recommendations in the Report should ensure the Council is competent into the future and not just the short term. He felt that the Council would need to consider commissioning the second part of the review if they wished to develop a strategic document for the future of Portland Town Council and its administration.

Cllr. Munro felt that a number of the recommendations suggested that the Council should increase staff costs in return for a reduction in work undertaken and that without budget approval the Council would not be able to consider adopting any of the recommendations which would have a financial implication.

Cllr. Mrs S Bradley stated that since January 2014 more committees had been created and that the Clerk and administrators were under pressure to service them all in addition to their daily tasks, so the workload had increased.

Cllr. Munro stated that the report suggested an increase to the precept is required. The Chair informed members that the level of precept cannot be dictated by an independent report and that the final decision on the amount of the precept request must be made by Councillors.

Cllr. Chadwick proposed that an additional interim member of staff be sought to assist the Clerk and administrators with their current backlog of work and a further review be carried out once workloads were manageable. It was agreed to discuss this at the relevant point in the meeting (Recommendation 8).

The Chair reminded members of the three options facing the Portland Town Council as outlined in the report summary:

- 1) Close Portland Town Council
- 2) Commit to the growth of Portland Town Council
- 3) Keep doing what Portland Town Council is doing now.

He also added that the Council had commissioned the independent Staffing Review Report at a cost which showed there was an interest in improving the Town Council now and for the future, with an acknowledgement that things were currently unsustainable. Therefore the recommendations presented should be carefully considered before any decisions are made on whether to implement them.

It was agreed by all to take the recommendations one by one for consideration unless otherwise stated.

**2734a – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS 1, 2 & 3**

It was noted that these Recommendations should be considered together as they relate similar points regarding Committee Meetings. All agreed.

Recommendation 1	Committee system - Review system of committees and sub-committees; keep under annual review.
Recommendation 2	Committee system - Hold monthly Town Council meeting
Recommendation 3	Committee system - Abolish Grants and Budgets & Investments Sub-Committees

There was a general consensus that the current Committees were not set up as agreed and that changes did need to be made, although the suggested configurations varied. Cllr. Munro added that Sub - Committees rather than working groups were initially established to aid openness and transparency as they would be public meetings. Cllr. Nowak felt that as the Sub-Committees reported to the Finance & Resources Committee (F&R) they did not make decisions, it was therefore unnecessary to hold them in public and they should be downgraded to Working Groups.

It was suggested that the Town Council meetings remain at bi-monthly. The Chair felt that this was not enough and put forward his case for making Town Council meetings monthly.

(Cllr. Hughes joined the meeting – 7.45pm, Cllr. Wild remained in the Chair)

It was proposed by Cllr. Nowak, seconded by Cllr. Chadwick and **RESOLVED** (Votes For: 7, Against: 4,) that:

- a) Portland Town Council meetings be bi-monthly
- b) The Finance and Resources Committee meet monthly
- c) The Events and Tourism Committee, HR & IT Committee, Grants Committee and Budgets and Investments Committee, be downgraded to Working Groups with instructions to convene being issued by the F&R Committee as and when required.
- d) That the Working Groups only meet when instructed and a report presented at the next available F&R committee.
- e) That if required an additional meeting of the Town Council be called to attend to urgent business if required before the next scheduled meeting.

#### 2734b – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 4

Recommendation 4	Committee System - Implement Scheme of Delegation to Committees and Town Clerk
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Cllr. Matthews stated that there is a Scheme of delegation in place but that a number of personnel have changed since its issue. He suggested that this is re-issued to ensure that all staff and Councillors are aware of their approved delegated powers.

It was **RESOLVED** by that the Scheme of Delegation be re-issued to members and staff before the next meeting.

#### 2734c – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 5

Recommendation 5	Apologies for absence - Introduce a policy for notifying apologies for absence
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It was **RESOLVED** that all Councillors should make their apologies if they are unable to attend a forthcoming meeting as soon as possible so it can be logged.

It was agreed that this should be done direct to the Town Council within office opening hours to ensure they are processed in time for the meeting. If there is little notice before the start of the meeting, direct contact should be made by telephone to the Chairman for that Committee or Working Group.

#### 2734d – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 6

Recommendation 6	Matters arising - Town Clerk to establish and maintain an ongoing list for each Council meeting
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It was **RESOLVED** that a Clerks Liaison group be set up which would include the Mayor, Deputy Mayor, Chairman of the F&R Committee and Clerk. This group should meet weekly and discuss the items which require immediate attention and the progress of longer term projects.

The first task of this group would be to analyse the current backlog and set out what requires priority attention. Secondly they would put together a rolling log of ongoing items which should be reported monthly to the F&R Committee.

#### 2734e – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 7

Recommendation 7	Typing of minutes and agendas – Change the current practice
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It was proposed by the Chair and seconded by Cllr. Thorner and **RESOLVED** (Votes For: 10, Against: 1) that the officer who takes the minutes of a meeting should be personally responsible for typing them ready for publication. It was acknowledged that this may create an additional training requirement for the Clerk and this would be discussed with him.

#### 2734f – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS 8, 9 &10

It was noted that these Recommendations should be considered together as they relate to the administration and office processes.

Recommendation 8	Filing, Administration & Annual tasks – Allow a one off additional time to enable staff to get routine tasks up to date, supplement with volunteer support (including Councillors)
Recommendation 9	Filing, Administration & Annual tasks – Create a list of short term tasks which require catch up
Recommendation 10	Filing, Administration & Annual tasks – Create a list of policies and governance procedures which require updating with an action plan for updating

Cllr. Chadwick asked whether anyone knew the full extent of the backlog and the estimate of how long it would take to clear. Cllr. Matthews pointed out items that he was aware of including the bank reconciliation and budgeting paperwork which were not up to date, but generally it was agreed that a full list was not available. It was felt that without this information it was impossible to know what a 'one-off time' would consist of and that until then Recommendation 8 could not be considered.

It was **RESOLVED** that the Clerks Liaison group set up in Minute 2734d be convened and that they investigate and review the contents of the reported backlog. They should also bring together a list of policies and governance procedures with the date of their last adoption. Cllr. Matthews requested that if possible the report regarding the backlog be brought to the next meeting so that urgent budget setting items could be identified for priority action.

**2734f – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS 11& 12**

It was noted that these Recommendations should be considered together as they relate to the administration and office processes.

Recommendation 11	Filing, Administration & Annual tasks – Establish a system of back up for the IT system
Recommendation 12	Filing, Administration & Annual tasks – Introduce individual emails for each member of staff

Cllr. Chadwick informed the meeting that he had identified 'Cloud' space for the Town Council and he had performed a back up of the files available to him at the time of his visit. This was an interim solution until a system and routine for a back up process could be established. He also outlined the process regarding the introduction of individual email addresses if required.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr. Chadwick be given delegated responsibility to assist the Clerk and administrators to implement these recommendations. He agreed to report back to each meeting on the progress.

**2734g – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 13**

Recommendation 13	Statutory improvements to Council procedures – Implement statutory improvements as and when they are announced.
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It was **RESOLVED** to add any statutory improvements when they are announced to the rolling log of items for attention which the Clerks Liaison group will manage. These will then be reported upon and consideration be given to any increase in staff workload and costs before a decision is made about whether to carry out or delay implementation.

**2734h – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS 14, 15, 16 & 17**

It was noted that these Recommendations should be considered together as they relate to the administration and office processes.

Recommendation 14	Clerk/Council contact – Establish a three member Clerk Liaison Group
Recommendation 15	Clerk/Council contact – Establish a list of annual tasks
Recommendation 16	Clerk/Council contact – Establish an appraisal system for all staff to include training plans
Recommendation 17	Clerk/Council contact – Review all staff job descriptions

It was noted that Recommendation 14 had been set up in Minute 2734(d).  
The list of annual tasks (Recommendation 15) would be part of the rolling log that the Clerks Liaison group would create – Minute 2734(d).

It was **RESOLVED** that an annual appraisal system should be set up and job descriptions reviewed. The Chair suggested that advice should be taken from the HR department at Weymouth and Portland Borough council regarding these issues and that it may be beneficial for the job descriptions to be created at ‘arm’s length’ rather than by the Clerk or Members.

**2734i – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 18**

Recommendation 18	Employment Policies – Produce a Staff Handbook containing relevant employment policies
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Cllr. Matthews stated that a Staff Handbook existed but that some personnel have changed since it was issued. It was also noted that the policies may require review.

It was **RESOLVED** to re-issue the Staff Handbook to all and add any policies which required review to the Policies and Governance Review update plan which will be brought together by the Clerks Liaison Group.

**2734j – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 19**

Recommendation 19	Training – Establish a training plan for staff and councillors
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Cllr. Lees stated that it is essential that new Councillors get training in their role and that with the potential for a number of new councillors following the May 2015 elections a training plan should be developed now.

The Chair added that more has to be done to identify courses ahead of time as often notice is received by members only a few days ahead.

Cllr Matthews suggested that a Members Handbook should be created which would include all essential information for new councillors and whilst it would not replace the benefits of training it could be used until a training opportunity arose.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr. Matthews investigate the work which would be involved in creating a Members Handbook for the Town Council and if there are any templates which can be used. Training opportunities should be circulated by the Clerk and administrators to all members as soon as they arrive in the office. Creation of a training plan will be added to the ‘on-going’ work log created by the Clerks Liaison group.

**2734k – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS 20&21**

It was noted that these Recommendations should be considered together as they relate to the training budget.

Recommendation 20	Training – Review the training budget
Recommendation 21	Training – CiLCA training for Town Clerk and Assistant Town Clerk

A number of councillors asked whether CiLCA (Certificate in Local Council Administration) training was a statutory requirement for a Clerk. The Locum Clerk informed the Council that it was not a statutory requirement but had in the past been linked to applications for Quality Council Status and the ability to spend budget under ‘Powers of Well-Being’ of the Localism legislation.

It was acknowledged by all that the Clerk and Proper Officer should be trained as they provide the financial and legal advice regarding the administration of the Town Council business

It was **RESOLVED** that these recommendations be sent to the next available F&R Committee for consideration within the budget setting process.

### **2734I – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 22**

Recommendation 22	Training – The Assistant Town Clerk should undertake further training on social media and website updating and other communications skills to facilitate this aspect of her role.
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Cllr. Munro stated that an increased use of social media by the Town Council was being considered following a request from a member of the public.

Cllr Chadwick stated that the updating of social media and websites for the Town Council could be done within the administration office with a small amount of training and that this may make a saving on the media budget in the long term.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr. Chadwick look into what training would be required or is available for social media, whether the expertise to maintain a website in-house is a possibility and what would be the cost or saving of such an exercise.

### **2734m – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 23**

Recommendation 23	Accommodation – Review the issue of council accommodation urgently
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Cllr. Munro-Price declared an interest in this item regarding his business and trade as a Property Agent.

A copy of letter was presented to the Chair to a resident of Portland, Mr Snow. Mr Snow had written to Weymouth and Portland Borough Council on the subject of new premises for Portland Town Council which they are continuing to consider. However the letter did state that Weymouth and Portland Borough Council would fund,

*‘public meetings in hired halls until suitable accommodation is identified’.*

Weymouth and Portland Borough Council would the letter continued pay for this from the Property and Infrastructure repairs budget.

Cllr. Nowak added that there was no mention of a timescale with this offer nor whether the Town Council could claim in arrears.

It was **RESOLVED** that Cllr. Nowak continue to chase the Borough Council for further clarification on the payment for meeting halls as well as a solution to the ongoing issue of the unsuitable accommodation for the Town Council office.

**2734n – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 24**

Recommendation 24	Staff numbers – Maintain existing
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It was **RESOLVED** to accept this Recommendation

**2734o – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 25**

Recommendation 25	<p>Working Hours</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Town Clerk: Increase hours to (redacted); establish a training contract for completion of CiLCA</li> <li>– Assistant Town Clerk: Increase hours to (redacted); consider application for CiLCA after Town Clerk has completed</li> <li>– Administrative Assistant: Increase hours to (redacted)</li> </ul>
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Cllr. Chadwick felt that until the extent of the workload and the estimate for eradicating the backlog were established this recommendation could not be considered.

Cllr. Munro agreed and suggested that the Council waits for the report from the Clerks Liaison group before any decisions were made about increasing hours for the Clerk and/or administrative staff.

It was **RESOLVED** to postpone a decision on Recommendation 24 until the Clerks Liaison Group has put together a report detailing the ‘regular’ workload for staff and whether the current contracted hours are enough to cover the work expected.

It was also **RESOLVED** that extra hours could be offered to the Assistant Town Clerk and the Administrative Assistant for the short term to cover for the absence of the Clerk. This is not a change to their contracted hours, as suggested by Recommendation 25, but a one-off agreement to cover the sickness of the Clerk until his return to work.

**2734p – STAFFING REVIEW RECOMMENDATION 26**

Recommendation 26	<p>Salary Scales:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Town Clerk: Re-grade to (redacted) upon completion of CiLCA, with immediate point (redacted)</li> <li>– Assistant Town Clerk: Re-grade to (redacted)</li> <li>– Administrative Assistant: Re-grade to (redacted)</li> </ul>
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Cllr. Munro stated that the Clerk had originally joined the Town Council on a salaried figure and that this had then been brought into line with the SCP rate for Parish and Town Clerks. Each year an increment had been applied and that he was now at the top of his current scale.

Cllr Nowak felt that the members had to establish whether the job was being carried out correctly and efficiently before consideration is given to an increase in pay scale. Cllr. Munro agreed stating that the Clerk needed to be evaluated and given the rate for the job he undertakes.

Cllr. Lees asked whether there are other Town Clerks which do not have the CiLCA qualification in post. It was noted that this was indeed the case in at least two Town Councils that the members were aware of.

It was proposed by Cllr. Chadwick, seconded by Cllr. Nowak and **RESOLVED** (Votes: For 7, Against 4) that this recommendation was **NOT** accepted and that re-grading of staff should not take place at this point in time.

The meeting closed at 9.10pm with notice that the next meeting would be held on Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> February 2015 starting at 7pm. Venue to be confirmed.