

PORTLAND TOWN COUNCIL

FINANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT THE PORTLAND COMMUNITY VENUE ON WEDNESDAY 9TH JANUARY AT 10.30 AM

PRESENT: Councillors Susan Cocking (Chairman), Jim Draper, Charlie Flack, Ray Nowak, Dave Thurston and Rob Hughes

IN ATTENDANCE: Three members of the public

295. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Jo Atwell

296. Declarations of Interests

None were declared

297. Minutes of the Finance Meeting Held on 12th December 2018

These were agreed as a true record of the meetings and signed by the Chairman.

298. Minute Update and Matters Arising

Minute 288 – Distribution of Agenda and Minutes

Cllr. Flack stated that no notice for this month's meetings had been advertised in the Free Portland News. The Clerk apologised and explained that despite best efforts and with Christmas, the deadline had been missed. However, the agenda and minutes from the previous meeting had been available in Tesco's and the Library. Mr Vincent stated that he did not believe that the notices displayed in Tesco's were very effective as Tesco had covered up the notice board with a trolley of flowers. He asked whether they could be displayed in the Library window rather than inside on the notice board. It was discussed as to whether it would be possible to display the notices on a notice board in Easton Gardens and Cllr. Nowak stated that as the 'Monkey Hut' already had a notice board it might be possible to utilise that.

Town Clerk to speak to the Library and investigate the use of the notice board at the Monkey Hut.

The Chairman advised that the community kitchen was now complete.

Item 281 – Events budgeting to be discussed later in the meeting.

299. Public Participation

Mr Vincent sought clarification on a statement made in the December issue of the Free Portland News which suggested that Portland Town Council were paying rent to the Portland Community Venue. The Chairman assured Mr Vincent that it was more cost effective for the Town Council to be situated at the PCV than it was in Easton where a rent of £10,500 per annum was paid which was not a cost incurred at the PCV. In addition, the Chairman stated that with Allsorts nursery moving in and the rent from these and other users, the cost of the loan repayments were covered.

Mr Matthews noted that Weymouth had declared their hand on the precept to be applied.

300. Portland Community Venue matters for approval or authorisation

(a) The Chairman stated that the quote submitted by Swift Signs matched that provided in support of the Leader Grant and was pleased that, given the time elapsed between the quote and the order, there had been no increase. In addition, she explained that there were to be two signs one on the railings, along Clovens Road, and one which would re-use the old Aldridge Community sign. As the majority of the costs of the signage would be covered by the Leader Grant there would only be a minimal charge of 20% to the Town Council.

Councillor Hughes asked whether the signs would be made in such a way that in the event of changes to the users (i.e. if a Venue user were to move out) whether it would be possible to make changes to the signs. The Chairman confirmed that the signs would be in vinyl, and peel-off, to allow changes to be in the future if required.

The Chairman sought approval from the Finance Committee to place the order with Swift Signs, this was given.

(b) PCV Website – Cllr. Draper confirmed that he was in discussions with the website designer and anticipated that the website would be up and running by the end of January 2019.

(c) The Chairman explained that the final Leader Grant claim was required to be submitted by 14th February. The majority of the money had been claimed as part of the initial submission with the final claim consisting of the remaining invoices for the community kitchen, the signage and the website.

(d) Cllr. Thurston enquired as to when the equipment required to support the community kitchen would be purchased. The Chairman assured Cllr. Thurston that this issue would be discussed at the next PCV meeting to be held on 6th February 2019

301. Payments for Approval

Payments for approval were presented by the Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) Mr Wayne Lewin totalling £1,182.99 as detailed below;

WPBC (PCV)	DD	1,486.00
water2business	DD	71.23
Lammings and Sons	BACS	72.00
Darkin Miller Ltd	BACS	350.26
Toshiba	DD	57.08
Gladstone Jewellery	BACS	95.00
Crosbys Carpets	BACS	337.50
Tesco	BACS	7.00
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The following was noted:

- i. For the purposes of Council Tax, PTC are in the process of having the building divided such that each of the long-term tenants will be billed separately. As the other tenants are charitable organisations and therefore exempt from Council Tax, it will mean an overall reduction in the cost of Council Tax for PTC.
- ii. The payment of £2,477.10 was a contra entry, paid from PTC to PTC in respect of the closure of the Nationwide account. The sum also appears in the receipt's element of the accounts.

Mr Lewin also highlighted for discussion the proposed payment to Mr I Looker (ex-Town Clerk) of £2,061.34. The amount to be paid to Mr Looker is the amount recovered from HRMC for an overpayment of National Insurance by Mr Looker minus an administration cost of 10 hours; being the resource required to recover the overpayment. Mr Lewin acknowledged that this amount was above the committee's approval limit but felt that it warranted discussion prior to being submitted to Full Town Council for consideration and approval.

The Committee discussed the proposal and agreed that the Officer time expended was realistic and that the sum proposed to be paid to Mr Looker was fair and reasonable. Cllr Nowak proposed that the reduced amount be paid, and the proposal seconded that the reduced amount be submitted to Full Council for approval.

Mr Lewin went on to advise that there had been some receipts this month totalling £55,893.98. These consisted of the following:

Leader Grant Payment	£ 53,356.88
Nationwide (closure)	£ 2,477.10
Sparkle donations	£ 60.00
	£ 55,893.98

To note that the receipt of £53,356.88 had been a community infrastructure payment (CIL).

He further advised that with regard to the Precept for 2018/19, at the point of being 75% of the way through the year the Council had spent £65,183.85, which was 80% of the total precept amount of £81,074.00. He also confirmed that the majority of payments for the year had been made and the only areas outstanding were the Website and staff wages which was around £4,000 per month. He felt that whilst spend to date was slightly over, he was confident in predicting that final spend would be on budget.

302. Precept Discussion

Cllr Draper explained that since the last meeting there had been several meetings held with various bodies of both W&PBC and DCC. These meetings had produced a

better understanding on how the original figures had been generated, but with this information the Council were better able to predict what amounts would realistically be required to provide the services being transferred. Following these meetings, a review of the figures had been undertaken and a revised budget agreed. He explained that the final precept figure for Portland had been calculated at £99.00 and stated that this compared favourably, not only with Weymouth but with many of the Councils of a comparable size in Dorset and which have the same level of services to be delivered.

Mr Lewin explained that the 'like for like' precept figure had not changed. That is the figure that excluded any additional services to be provided as part of the Local Government Review (LGR) and which had been presented at previous meetings; this figure remained at £83,000. In real terms the 'like for like' precept figure has reduced as the Tax Base has increased.

Mr Lewin then presented those budget figures, together with an explanation as to why they had changed from the previous draft

- i. The proposed advertising budget had increased to take account of the additional adverts in the Free Portland News (FPN) now required to support public consultations.
- ii. Equipment costs have been increased by £15,000.00; this takes account of the requirement to provide additional equipment such as motor vehicles, PPE and any additional liability associated with the transfer of the management of green spaces.
- iii. Office Costs of £5,000 have been included to cover the additional administrative burden of having extra staff and premises to manage. The additional premises being those at Victoria gardens.
- iv. Audit fees – as audit fees are paid by the hour, the number of hours required to undertake an audit will increase and the knowledge of this has resulted in an inclusion of £500.00 to cover the extended audit needs.
- v. Insurance has been increased by £1,000.00 to cover an increase in insurance premiums due to and increased public liability risk.
- vi. The previous budget figure for Green Spaces had been set at £75,000.00 however this included staffing costs. The Green Spaces figure has now been split to remove staff costs and included where they should be shown, under Payroll. The result of this now means that the Green Spaces figure is down to £36,000.00 and more accurately reflects the costs anticipated for the management of the Green Spaces (large green spaces and maintenance of playparks). Mr Lewin explained that the previous figure provided by W&PBC had only been for running costs and had not included any provision for maintenance, and that original costs had been increased by 25% to take account of the required maintenance.
- vii. The rationale applied for Green Spaces has also been used for the running and maintenance of Toilets. That is, an additional 25% has been added as the figure originally provided was just for running costs and did not include scheduled and unscheduled maintenance. It now seemed apparent that all of the toilets would be transferred over, including those at Portland Bill, which the Town Council had previously

- sought to remain with DCC. However, it had become clear that if the Portland Bill toilets were not included in those services to transfer to PTC then they would likely be closed. It had further become apparent, following long debate with DCC, that it was an all or nothing decision, and given that the toilets were an asset that promoted tourism it was agreed that all of the toilets would be taken. The view being that to leave them to DCC would be too much of a risk. In the event that the toilets became too much of a liability then it would be for the new Council to determine how/if they would be managed going forward.
- viii. Car Parks; W&PBC had estimated the running costs and this had been increased by 25% to cover maintenance and now had a revised budget of £7,500.00.
 - ix. Payroll has been amended to include that figure that has been removed from Green Spaces (£39,000) to a revised total of £85,000.00. The total figure for staff costs now stands at approx. £130,000, but which includes three office staff and two and a half ground staff, plus a cleaner. Taking account of the total precept figure the staff costs remain well within the recommended figure of 50% of the total.
 - x. The Clocks and Monuments original figure of £6,000.00 had been increased by 25% to £7,000.00 as per the previous rationale.

In summary, Mr Lewin explained that this now took the new LGR precept budget to a total of £279,600.00. He also stated that the precept figure that PTC would be asking for would be a total of £362,600.00 (£279,600.00 plus £83,000.00), adding that the like for like precept figure of £83,000.00 was below the published inflation figure. He further explained that it would be necessary confirm these figures by 31st January 2019 accepting that it was likely that there would be things that hadn't been thought of and for which it would be necessary to accommodate within the budget.

Cllr Draper proposed that the precept budget, as discussed, be submitted to Full Council as the Finance Committee's recommendation for the 2019/20 precept.

Unanimously agreed.

303 – Local Government Review

The Chairman stated that further meetings with W&PBC and DCC were being generated and would be ongoing until such time that LGR was complete.

It was proposed that the following be minuted:

- i. That for the maintenance of Parks and Gardens that PTC would prefer to have employees rather than a contract. (This supports the TUPE transfer of one employee from W&PCB and allows for greater flexibility and control of the service),
- ii. That the mowing of large green spaces would remain with Contractors,
- iii. That Dorset County would continue to maintain the verges,
- iv. That cleaning contracts be let to service the toilets,
- v. The Verne Common Nature Reserve and the High Angle Batteries would **not** transfer to PTC (DCC has the experience to maintain these areas, PTC does not). Noting that this does not preclude a change in these arrangements at a later date.

304 – Events Budgeting

Mr Lewin stated that as requested, he had gathered the last 3 years costs associated with events budgeting, that is the Civic event, the Sparkle and the Summer Fete.

- i. For the Sparkle there was only one year's costings as the previous two years had been grant funded. For this year, there had been no expenses and had therefore cost nothing to hold. The equipment used having been procured from previous years grants.
- ii. The Summer Fete – The information available covered two years; for year one that expenditure was £1,165.00 (which included some one-off costs). For year two the expenditure was £792.00. From the information available it was not possible to determine what the income had been for year one, but for year 2 it was clear that an income of £415.00 had been generated. The primary expenditure for year 2 had been prosecco, rosettes for the dog show, and the toilets. Mr Lewin explained that the income generated from the Summer Fete went to the Grants pot and did not therefore come back to the precept.
- iii. Given the information available he was content that the amount of £1,000.00 included in the precept budget adequately covered the events expenditure for both the Sparkle and the Summer Fete.

A discussion followed on whether it was a Council responsibility to hold these events and Cllr Hughes suggested that it would be preferable not to hold events and reduce the overall precept budget. It was generally felt that the events were important in engaging with the public and were valuable in providing visibility of the Councillors to the public. Cllr Nowak added that the Beacon event had attracted thousands of people but had cost nothing; although he acknowledged that in order to retain the Beacon would cost money.

Cllr Draper suggested that, given the cost of holding the events, should Cllr Hughes wish to discuss further then he should move to have them discussed further at Full Council.

The Chairman proposed that an annual events budget of £1,000.00 remained appropriate, this received a majority approval¹

294. The Committee's next meeting is scheduled to take place on Wednesday February 27th, 2019 at the Council Offices, Portland Community Venue, Fortuneswell starting at 10.30 am.

The meeting closed at 11.55 am hours.

¹ At this point the Fire Alarm sounded and the meeting was suspended for 20 minutes.

Signed Dated.....
(Chairman)