STRATFORD-UPON-AVON TOWN COUNCIL

AIMS & OBJECTIVES TASK & FINISH GROUP MEETING

31 JULY, 2019

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Present**:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Cleeve | J Fradgley |
| Coles | Mayor Rolfe (ex-officio) |
| How (Chairman) | Wall |
| I Fradgley | Warren-Howles |

Clerk: Town Clerk

Apologies: Councillors Alcock, Curtis/Dowling, Fojtik and Mackenzie

1. Election of Chairman and Deputy Chairman

The Mayor took the Chair for the election of Chairman. It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

AGREED: To appoint Councillor How as Chairman.

The Chairman called for nominations for Deputy Chairman. It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

AGREED: To appoint Councillor Wall as Deputy Chairman.

2. Appointment of Scribe

The Town Clerk explained that since the new administration and the change to part time working by the Deputy Town Clerk, her out of hours working had increased significantly. It was acknowledged that this could be a temporary measure, ceasing when the new Council members becomes fully aware of council procedures and are conversant with historical background information.

However, the increase in sub-group meetings outside normal working hours that require a clerk appears set to continue. As a consequence, the Town Clerk proposed that the new Committee Clerk, due to join the Council in September 2019, may well be, if willing, the ideal candidate to clerk these additional evening meetings other than just the Planning Consultative Committee meetings.

Although there will be budget implications, the reduction in the Deputy Town Clerk’s hours had resulted in quite significant savings and thus, the additional services of a Committee Clerk would still be within budget.

It was Proposed, Seconded and unanimously

RECOMMENDED: That the Town Clerk should pursue the idea with the new employee when she starts in September.

In the meantime, if meetings are held that are not clerked by an officer, a scribe should be appointed from amongst the Task & Finish Group’s number and following the meeting, the notes should be submitted to the Town Clerk as soon as possible for circulation to all members. It was noted that the Aims & Objectives Task & Finish Group reports directly to Council.

3) Receipt of Budget

The Town Council’s management accounts were available for scrutiny to aid deliberation of item 6 on the agenda – *To determine whether the Town Council continues to provide the service, increases the provision or ceases the operation.*

Members were advised that the 2019/2020 budget was adopted before the new administration took office, making it highly unlikely that a budget provision will be in place for the introduction of new initiatives requiring expenditure.

The Town Clerk further advised that budget deliberations begin in earnest from October, with the new 2020/2021 budget coming into effect on 1 April, 2020.

In the meantime however, if savings can be made on the services or activities that Council currently provide, and if, for example, there was a further reduction in the management charge, then there will be a residue of monies already in the existing budget. If not, and Council wishes to implement an initiative as recommended by the Aims & Objectives Task & Finish Group immediately, then the Finance & Scrutiny Committee would consider a virement of funds from reserves.

Members were mindful that although the reserves remain healthy, they have reduced quite considerably. The Chairman advised, and the group were in agreement, that it would be irresponsible to instigate any initiative without very careful consideration of the monies available and the financial impact on the budget as a whole.

Additionally, the Aims and Objectives Task & Finish Group must have a very clear understanding of the Council’s future intentions, so that these initiatives can be costed and fed into the budgetary process in October.

The issue of whether the Town Council should fund-raise to provide services was discussed. However, the Town Council as a local authority has the power to raise a precept, unlike charitable organisations which have to rely on fund-raising to finance their activities.

It was agreed that external funding sources, such as government, Duchy or lottery grants, should be thoroughly investigated as part of the remit of the Aims & Objectives team.

4) Understanding the Powers and Duties of the Town Council

The list of the Powers and Duties of Parish Councils was received with interest.

Members were clear that the responsibilities of the Town Council focussed primarily on residents, and that the higher authorities had the wider powers and duties as a result of the implementation of the Local Government Act 1972. It was also noted that Stratford- upon-Avon Town Council has always been only too aware of not providing a service which would result in double taxation.

The Town Clerk advised that, surprisingly, the Town Council has not been subject to devolved services being passed to them by the higher authorities, but as government subsidies tighten, this may well change.

Members were advised that in the past, the District Council had started negotiations with the Town Council to take on the responsibility for recreation grounds and children’s play areas within the town, similarly to other parishes throughout the district. However, although the Town Council was open to this proposal, the Town Council made it clear that if it were to take on this responsibility, they would want every play area and recreation ground, including the lucrative Recreation Ground south of the river. The matter was taken no further.

Since splitting from Stratford-upon-Avon Town Trust, approaches were made by the Town Trust for the Town Council to take on the responsibility of Redland Allotments in Shottery and the Bandstand on the Recreation Ground. However, the Trust was only willing for the responsibility of administration and maintenance to be passed to the Council, not the freehold of the land or ownership of the Bandstand. The matter was taken no further.

5/6) Scrutiny of what the Town Council Does/  
 Determination of whether the Town Council Continues to Provide the Service, Increases Provision or Ceases the Operation

When considering the services and events that the Town Council currently provides, it became clear that the determination of whether the Town Council continues to provide the service, increases provision or ceases the operation should be considered concurrently.

The Chairman introduced each operation as listed and the Town Clerk and returned members gave background information regarding the provision. For the next meeting, the Clerk was asked to revise the list in order of financial impact, starting with the most expensive.

Although part of the exercise was to see if the event or service should continue, and if so, whether a reduction in the cost of the service could be achieved, it soon became apparent, that at this first meeting, members needed to get a thorough and complete understanding of the service/event and its implications.

The extensive list took some time to consider, and although Councillor Wall expressed disquiet that the members were not creating an immediate action plan, The Chairman advised that all he services listed would receive full consideration at a subsequent meeting/s.

Members considered that the issue of fetes, festivals and other events should become the sole agenda item for the next meeting, as the events listed clearly amounts to one of the most significant and serious draws on the Council’s budget and manpower resources.

7) Date, Time and Venue of Next Meeting

Thursday, 5 September at 6:30pm at the Town Hall.

Councillor J Fradgley gave her apologies. It would therefore be helpful if Councillor Jackson would attend as the replacement ward member.

*The Chairman declared the meeting closed at 8.11pm.*