



## MORECAMBE TOWN COUNCIL

### Draft Minutes of Finance & Governance Committee held at Morecambe Town Hall on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020 at 5.00pm

**In attendance:** Councillors Evans (Chair), Balcer, Hanson, Heath, Jenkins, Matthews and Ross-Clasper.

1. **Apologies for Absence:** Apologies were received from Councillor Anderton and Bates
2. **Declarations of Interest:** Members were asked to declare any interests, and the nature of that interest, which they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.

There were no declarations of interest on the items on the Agenda previously circulated. Councillors Heath and Ross Clasper declared an interest in any.

3. **Grievance:** The Chair requested that Members consider an additional item on the Agenda to consider the details of a recent letter received from the Assistant Clerk setting out complaints arising from comments and actions and non-actions relating to her previous submission of a grievance. It was **RESOLVED** that this item be exempt in accordance with Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 as the discussion would involve disclosure of personal and private information about individuals.

At this point, Councillors Heath and Ross-Clasper declared an interest and left the meeting.

Councillor Hanson reported on the nature of the complaint made and informed Members that the Assistant Clerk is currently on long-term sick leave.

Councillors Heath and Ross-Clasper returned to the meeting.

4. **Festival Funding & Committee:** The Town Clerk reported that invitations to apply for festival funding had been posted on the Council's website and social media as instructed. Several applications had already been received but more are expected before the deadline for submission at 5:0pm on 28<sup>th</sup> February. So far five Councillors had put their names forward as Members of the Festival and Events Committee.

5. **Internal Audit:** The Town Clerk reported that he had been seeking quotations from independent and qualified and that two had been received. The detailed scope of both proposals were considered. Both offered to undertake the audit in full compliance with the Governance and Accountability best practice requirements and relevant legislation, specifically, the Accounts and Audit Regulations. Both internal auditors would provide a detailed audit report with recommendations for consideration by the Town Council.

Having considered the internal audit objectives set approved by the Finance and Governance Committee, one offered to carry out a 'Governance Health Check' , as part of the audit package. This will test whether the Council has all the statutory, legal and best practice policies and procedures in place, to provide assurance to the Town Council and the general public that good governance arrangements are in place.

Both quotations are for the audit of the Town Council's financial and governance arrangements in 2019/20, as required to support the statements made each year in the *Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR)*, that is submitted to the Government appointed external auditors.

There was then a long discussion about the audit of previous years finance and governance arrangements and how this might be accommodated, given the concerns raised relating to 2018/19, in particular.

Following comments and questions it it was resolved unanimously that *Internal Audit Yorkshire* be recommended as auditors for 2019/20 and on completion of that work they also be asked to carry out a full audit of 2018/19.

6. **Information Commissioners Office:** The Committee discussed the letter drafted by the Town Clerk and circulated to all Members regarding several Freedom of Information (FOI) requests that had not been previously dealt with. As directed by the ICO, the agreed letter will be sent to the resident who submitted the FOI requests and the ICO.

The letter set out that the Town Council takes its responsibilities under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) seriously and, following a more detailed review, would now be withdrawing its previous refusal to the requests under Section 14 (disproportionate or unreasonable level of disruption) of the act.

The Town Clerk and Assistant Clerk were thanked for the many hours of work they had put into dealing with this matter and for their diligence and integrity in doing so.

Having considered the requests again and the available evidence, however, it was **RESOLVED** that the Town Council be recommended to refuse to respond to the requests under Section 12 of the FOIA, being that the cost of complying with the requests will exceed the statutory cost limit (£450) and place a significant administrative burden on the Council.

It was noted that, as required by the FOIA, the Town Clerk had estimated the time and cost of dealing with each request and had included this in the letter. Members were advised that the resident will have the right to respond to the request and that the ICO will be making its decision on the case in due course. Both responses will be reported to full Council in recognition of its corporate responsibilities under the FOIA.

7. **Governance standards and arrangements:** Members considered its governance responsibilities and agreed to build on the standards and principles needed to ensure that the Council fulfils its purpose, achieves its outcomes for the benefit of the local community and operates in an effective, efficient and ethical manner.

These include, but are not limited to the:

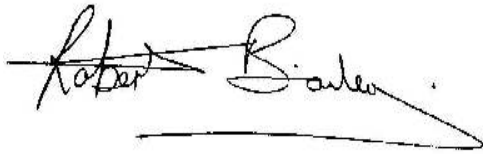
- a) Ethical Framework (Standards of conduct);
- b) Constitutional Framework (Standing Orders and Financial Regulations);
- c) Operational procedures including a review of policies and procedures;
- d) Human resources – staff management and training; Members training etc
- e) Openness and accountability;

- f) Community engagement including website; social media; newsletter; consultation etc;
- g) Members responsibilities for specific and nominated service areas

After some discussion, it was **RESOLVED** that this approach be recommended to full Council and that the Finance & Governance Committee reviews each element throughout 2020/21, making recommendations as required.

8. **Date of next meeting:** It was **RESOLVED** that the committee meets again on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> March at 5pm.

The meeting closed at 6:15pm.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert Bailey', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

Bob Bailey, Town Clerk

8<sup>th</sup> March 2020