

Minutes of the **SPECIAL MEETING** of the  
Swanage Town Council held at the Town Hall, High Street,  
Swanage on **WEDNESDAY, 24<sup>th</sup> MAY 2023** at 7.00 p.m.

PRESENT:-

Councillor T. Foster (Town Mayor) – Chair

Councillor J. Bishop  
Councillor M.P. Bonfield  
Councillor A. Harris  
Councillor C. Moreton  
Councillor C. Tomes  
Councillor W.S. Trite  
Councillor M. Whitwam

There were no members of the public present at the Meeting.

23. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for their inability to attend the Meeting were received from Councillors Monkhouse and Rogers.

24. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Members were invited to declare their interests and consider any requests for Grants of Dispensations in accordance with Section 9 and Appendix B of the Council's Code of Conduct.

**Agenda Item No. 11** – Councillor Bonfield declared a disclosable pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct by reason of being an employee of a local taxi company.

**Agenda Item No. 11** – Councillor Whitwam declared a non-pecuniary interest under the Code of Conduct by reason of being a trustee of the Swanage Railway Trust.

25. **TO CONSIDER THE INDEPENDENCE OF THE INTERNAL AUDITOR AND TO CONFIRM THERE IS NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST WITH THE EXTERNAL AUDITOR**

The Town Clerk reported that the external auditor required affirmation of the independence of the internal auditor. Although this was not a statutory requirement it was noted as good practice, as per Section 4.9: Independence within the JPAG *Practitioners' Guide*. It was noted that this recommends a review of the independence of the internal auditor on an annual basis with regard to personal, financial and professional independence. Following consideration of this matter, it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Trite and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

To confirm the independence of the appointed internal auditor, Darkin-Miller Chartered Accountants.

The Town Clerk further reported that the newly appointed external auditor, BDO LLP, required evidenced confirmation that there are no conflicts of interest with the aforementioned auditor. After consideration by Members regarding this question, it was proposed by the Town Mayor, seconded by Councillor Moreton and **RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-**

To confirm that there are no conflicts of interest with the external auditor, BDO LLP.

26. **INTERNAL AUDIT REPORT 2022/23**

(a) **Visit 6 of 6**

The final interim Internal Audit Report for the year 2022/23 prepared by Darkin-Miller – Chartered Accountants was presented. It was noted that three medium priority and two low priority level recommendations had been made.

It was AGREED:-

That the final interim Internal Audit Report 2022/23 and the recommendations contained therein be accepted and approved.

(b) **Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23**

Consideration was given to the Annual Internal Audit Report for 2022/23, prepared by Darkin-Miller Chartered Accountants, supplementary to the Annual Internal Audit Report (AIAR) 2022/23, page 3 of the AGAR. The document provided background information and explanations regarding the recommendations made and conclusions reached in respect of the Council's services, in accordance with the internal audit's objective to provide an appraisal function for the review of the Council's internal control system.

It was noted that the Audit Opinion set out therein stated that the Council's 'central systems and internal control arrangements appear to be effective' and that the Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23 did not identify any significant control weaknesses for inclusion in the Annual Governance Statement. It was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by Councillor Bonfield and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Internal Audit Report 2022/23 and the recommendations contained therein be accepted and approved.

27. **SYSTEM OF INTERNAL CONTROL 2022/23**

In accordance with paragraph 6(1)(a) of the Accounts and Audit Regulations 2015, a Report on the Findings of the Review of the System of Internal Control 2022/23 was submitted for consideration. The importance of the scrutiny role played by the Finance & Governance Committee was highlighted, in particular its oversight of budgetary control and the implementation of improvements to the system of internal control recommended in the internal auditor's reports. The work undertaken during the year to agree a corporate plan and review the Council's committee structure so that it aligned with corporate objectives was also noted. It was proposed by Councillor Whitwam, seconded by Councillor Bishop, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Review of the System of Internal Control 2022/23 be approved and accepted.

28. **ANNUAL GOVERNANCE & ACCOUNTABILITY RETURN 2022/23**

(a) **Section 1 – Annual Governance Statement 2022/23**

It was proposed by Councillor Moreton, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Governance Statement 2022/23 be approved and signed.

(b) **Section 2 – Accounting Statements 2022/23**

Prior to agreement of the Accounting Statements 2022/23, clarification was sought as to the definition of long- and short-term investments. It was explained that the requirement to account for certain investments, albeit counterintuitively,

in Box 9 of the AGAR Section 2 Accounting Statements, Fixed Assets and Long-Term Investments was in compliance with the JPAG Practitioners' Guide. It was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Accounting Statements be approved and signed for submission to the Council's external auditor with the Annual Governance & Accountability Return 2022/23.

A further question was raised as to any requirement to disclose potential future capital expenditure plans in the financial statements. It was confirmed that the only statutory requirement in regard to the Council's financial statements was that of Section 2 – Accounting Statements of the AGAR, and no further supplementary statements were required, there being no mechanism within the AGAR to state such matters. It was noted that a Financial Review was produced so as to provide greater transparency and a better understanding of the derivation of the figures in Section 2 of the AGAR. It was agreed that Officers would liaise with the internal auditor and report back to Members on this matter.

29. **ANNUAL TREASURY REPORT 2022/23**

It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

That the Annual Treasury Report 2022/23 be approved and accepted.

30. **ITEMS OF INFORMATION AND MATTERS FOR FORTHCOMING AGENDAS**

- (a) **Finance Workshops** - the Town Clerk requested that members submit their availability on Wednesdays in June/July for attendance at two finance workshops, with a view to developing a Medium Term Financial Plan.

**EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Proposed by Councillor Harris, seconded by Councillor Trite and AGREED:-

That, under Standing Order No. 1 c), in the public interest, the press and public be excluded from the Meeting in view of the confidential nature of the business to be transacted under agenda items 9 to 12 for reasons of legal and commercial confidentiality.

31. **SEAFRONT STABILISATION AND ENHANCEMENT SCHEME**

- (a) **To consider proposal from Dorset Coast Forum to undertake public consultation**

Members considered a proposal from Dorset Coast Forum to conduct public consultation on the proposed Sandpit Field and Spa area Stabilisation and Enhancement Scheme on behalf of the Council. The consultation period was noted as August-October 2023, with a report due in November 2023. The costs were reported as £9,550.

Further to the procurement process carried out in summer 2022 in respect of the Seafront Masterplan public consultation, the outcome of which was reported under Minute No. 68 of the Council Meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2022, and noting the unique and specialist role that Dorset Coast Forum plays in drawing upon the expertise of a wide range of stakeholders, it was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Harris, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

To appoint Dorset Coast Forum to undertake a public consultation on the Seafront Stabilisation Scheme on behalf of the Council and allocate a budget of £9,550.

(b) **To consider engaging WSP under a retainer to provide professional advice re. stabilisation works**

Members considered a briefing note submitted by the Assets and Compliance Manager advocating the retention of WSP to provide professional advice regarding the stabilisation works on the seafront.

It was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

To engage the services of WSP, on a retainer with a ceiling fee of £5,000, to provide ongoing advice regarding the stability and safety of the land and structures at Sandpit Field, Weather Station Field and Spa beach hut area.

32. **VICTORIA TERRACE/MARSH WAY WALL STABILISATION – TO AGREE THE ENGAGEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL ADVICE TO PREPARE COSTED ENGINEERING OPTION**

Further to Minute No.173 (c) of the Council Meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> March 2023, consideration was given to a briefing note submitted by the Assets and Compliance Manager regarding a requirement to appoint professional advisors to prepare a costed engineering option to stabilise the boundary wall at Victoria Terrace/Marsh Way. It was noted that the land at Marsh Way had been part of an asset transfer between Dorset Council and Swanage Town Council in 2019. During the debate reference was made to legal advice received.

It was proposed by Councillor Tomes, seconded by Councillor Harris, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

To engage the services of WSP under Financial regulation 11.1.b. to undertake relevant surveys and intrusive investigations to determine the most appropriate option regarding the stabilisation of the wall and to allocate a budget of £25,000.

Further to their declarations under Minute No. 24, Councillors Bonfield and Whitwam left the room during consideration of the following item.

33. **FORMER TAXI OFFICE, SWANAGE STATION – TO AGREE NEW LEASE ARRANGEMENTS**

Further to Minute No.194 (b) of the Council Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023, the Town Clerk reported on the conclusion of a review of the expression of interest that had been received regarding a lease of the former taxi office at Swanage Station. Members noted the content of a briefing paper which outlined the outcome of discussions with the business owner concerned and the Council's appointed valuer.

Following a brief discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Bishop, seconded by Councillor Tomes, and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:-

To agree to let the Taxi Office at Swanage Station to Mr Usher (Bill's Taxis) on a five-year term, at the rental figure set out in the briefing note, subject to any due diligence checks, as recommended by the Council's professional advisors.

Councillors Bonfield and Whitwam re-entered the Meeting.

34. **PROPERTY RELATED LEGAL MATTERS**

(a) **Beach Ice cream Kiosks – To receive update following determination of County Court Claim**

Further to Minute No.196 (a) of the Council Meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023, the Town Clerk provided a brief update regarding the expiration of the lease for the Beach Ice Cream Kiosks and Members discussed the options open to the Town Council. Following discussion, it was proposed by Councillor Bonfield, seconded by Councillor Harris and RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY:

That the Town Clerk should continue to act under delegated authority in the matter, in accordance with legal advice received.

The meeting closed at 8.15 p.m.

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