

**MINUTES FOR THE OPERATIONS COMMITTEE**

**THURSDAY 27th MARCH 2017 AT THE GUILDHALL TOTNES**

Present: Councillor M Adams (Chairman), Cohen, Paine, Westacott MBE, Sweet and Hart-Williams

Apologies: Councillors Barker.

In Attendance: Catherine Marlton (Town Clerk), Christina Bewley (Deputy Clerk), Councillors Hodgson and R Adams, 3 members of the public and 1 press

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| No | Subject | Comments |
| 1 | To receive apologies and to confirm that any absence has the approval of the Council. | Agreed. |
| 2 | The Mayor will request confirmation that all Members have made any amendments necessary to their Declarations of Interests, if appropriate. | None. |
| 3 | *The Operations Committee will adjourn for the following item:*  Public Question Time: A period of 15 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions or make comment regarding the work of the Committee or other items that affect Totnes. | The following statement was read out by Cllr Hodgson in reference to Item 5 on the agenda:  Ops Committee 27.3.17 – statement re Financial report – Cllr Jacqi Hodgson  The Financial statement prepared by the independent financial advisor clearly exonerates me from the wild and wholly unfounded accusations made about my expenditure as Mayor from May 2014 - May2016. The summaries of their checking of the accounts agrees with all the statements I have made that I did not overspend on the £13,000 two years of Mayoral budget during my period of office, indeed there was an underspend of £2,229.28.  I was accused by the Chair of this committee of running the mayoral budget in the red by £1,000 and that this was due to the costs of my Tea Dance. This Financial report agrees with my statement that the Tea Dance income paid into the Town Council’s Paige Adams account (at the suggestion of the then Clerk) is to be considered is indeed mayoral income valued at £960.83 (after VAT is deducted). It was not my request for the Tea Dance money to be paid into the Paige Adam account.  The question around how an overspend of £137.76 during the year 2015/16 occurred is documented in both the independent financial report and the new Clerk’s statement today as being due to the lack of a clear policy on both the implementation of the Dec 2013 Paige Adams recommendation of stopping the free uses of the Civic Hall. The TC did not follow this up with a policy and indeed it was not implemented until Feb’16, when ‘out of the blue’ and without any warning the three free uses all advised on by then financial staff and agreed by myself as mayor in June 2015 were reneged on. So those 3 free uses as requested, properly advised (and I have email evidence of that TC officer advice) and granted in all good faith and a total charge of £1,435 deducted from the mayoral budget on February 5th 2016. We need a clear TC policy on what the mayor may or may not grant.  Similarly the Mayoral Allowance, which was charged in full to the Mayoral budget is claimable amount of £750 is made up of a claimable Councillor allowance of £375, plus an additional £375 mayoral allowance. (By the way  this was not two mayoral allowances claims, this is an error in the report). So the Councillor allowance should  have been charged to the Councillor allowable expenses budget line (1234), and just £375 charged to the Mayoral allowance.  If either or both of these amounts had not been incorrectly charged to the mayoral budget then the 2015/2016 expenditure would have been well within the annual budget. As it is the £137.76 overspend that year was a small amount, in particular when compared to other budget stream over spends in the same year, e.g. Councillor Allowable expenses which over ran by £1,190, subscriptions over ran by £367 etc.  The suggestion in the Financial report that there is no budget for the mayor from 1st April through to the third  week of May is ludicrous. No mayor can be expected to have no budget for that period. Clearly from the rest of  the report it is not permitted to use the previous tax year’s budget, so the sensible approach is to allow the  current year’s budget with a reasonable ceiling of say £500 per month. This would allow expenditure for example on the Vire Twinning visits and associated civic event which usually happens during that period. Again we need a clear policy to guide the mayor and all councillors.  The outcome of this report will hopefully reassure all parties concerned that I did not overspend during my two years as mayor of this Council. Clearly we need to ensure we have clear and up to date mayoral policies to guide all concerned, but more importantly we need to bring back public confidence in this Town Council which has been brought into question by this episode. We need to draw a line under this very unpleasant and somewhat shocking period of slander and false accusations; this can only happen if those who have made allegations now accept their error and publicly apologise. |
|  | *The Committee will convene to consider the following items:* |  |
| 4 | To considers arising from the Minutes of 23rd February 2017 (already agreed by Full Council 6th March 2017). | Agreed.  Item 3 - The Clerk advised that an amendment had been agreed at the FC meeting to show Cllr Hodgson arrived before the recommendation was made.  Item 5 – No further update available on this.  Item 6 – Subject to final confirmation, it has been agreed that the Totnes Image Bank will move to the Eastgate storage area.  Item 7 – The Clerk advised that we are struggling to recruit a Guildhall Supervisor for Saturday openings.  Item 9 – This had been agreed. |
| 5 | To consider the draft policy for Mayoral Allowance and Civic Budgets and the associated advice from Darnells. | The Clerk explained that the letter from Darnells is still draft as there has not been time to get the signed letter out in time for this meeting. The final letter will be the same as the draft.  The letter from Darnells and the Clerk’s report were read out and discussed.  The draft Mayoral Allowance and Civic Budgets Policy was discussed.  It was agreed to **RECOMMEND** the Policy to Full Council subject to the following changes:   * the maximum spend allowed from 1st April to 18th May being the pro rata amount of the financial year’s budget allocation, * expenditure is not allowed on social events unless agreed by the Mayor or Deputy Mayor.   It was **AGREED** that the Committee would produce a Statement, to go to the Full Council for approval, which will clarify that the lack of a Policy on the use of the Mayoral Allowance and Civic Budgets contributed to the apparent overspend by Cllr Hodgson during her two Mayoral terms. |
| 6 | To agree the use of a debit card on the main Town Council account – for use in line with the agreed financial regulations. | It was agreed to **RECOMMEND** the use of the debit card to Full Council. |
|  | *The Operations Committee will be asked to* ***RESOLVE*** *to exclude the press and public “by reason of the confidential nature of the business” to be discussed and in accordance with the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960.* |  |
| 7 | To discuss an outstanding amount due by a Civic Hall hirer. | Covered in confidential minutes. |
| 8 | To consider a draft letter to businesses following the restructure of Tourism provision in the town. | Covered in confidential minutes. |
| 9 | To consider the change in parking permit provision and the implications on members of staff. | Covered in confidential minutes. |
| 10 | To note the date of the next meeting on **Monday 17th March 2017** at 3pm – if required. | It was agreed that the next meeting would be on **Monday 24th April 2017 at 5pm**. |

Catherine Marlton

Town Clerk