

**Downham Market Town Council
Governance & Finance Committee Meeting
Thursday 23 May 2024 at 7pm**

This meeting was held at:
Downham Market Town Hall, Bridge Street, Downham Market, Norfolk PE38 9DW

	<p>Present</p> <p>Committee Members - Cllrs Brewer, Hobbs, Lane, Perkin, J Pyatt & Westrop (6)</p> <p>Non-Committee Member – Cllr C Pyatt</p> <p>Town Clerk – Claire Dornan</p> <p>There were no members of the public present</p>
	<p>The Mayor, Cllr Hobbs, opened the meeting in the absence of a Chair.</p> <p>Cllr Hobbs advised the nearest fire exit from the Balcony and meeting location in the event of the alarm sounding; outside Coggles Funeral Directors.</p> <p>Cllr Hobbs asked that phones be placed on silent.</p>
001	<p><u>To elect a Chair of the Committee</u></p> <p>Cllr Brewer offered to be Chair of the Committee as she had been Vice Chair of the old Governance Committee.</p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Westrop Seconded –Cllr Lane</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>‘That Cllr Brewer be elected Chair of Governance & Finance Committee.’</p> <p>All In Favour</p> <p>Cllr Brewer acknowledged the hard work and commitment of the historic Chair of Governance Committee, Anna Incorvaia and thanked Anna for all her assistance to the Council.</p>
002	<p><u>To elect a Vice Chair of the Committee</u></p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr Lane</p> <p>It was resolved:</p>

	<p>‘That Cllr Perkin be elected Vice Chair of Governance & Finance Committee.’</p> <p>All In Favour</p>
003	<p><u>To receive Members’ Apologies for Absence</u></p> <p>All elected members of the Committee were present.</p> <p>It was noted that Cllr C Pyatt would like to join the Committee if a new Cllr is not elected to the Council following the election request in East Downham Ward.</p>
004	<p><u>To receive Members’ Declarations of Interest</u></p> <p>There were no declarations made.</p>
005	<p><u>To agree Terms of Reference of the Committee</u></p> <p>Members reviewed the current Terms of Reference and asked that the Town Clerk make the following amendments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership to increase from 5 to 7 • Amend frequency of meetings from Fortnightly to Monthly • Remove any reference to recruitment or disciplinary matters as these are determined by HR Committee • Add Finance responsibilities • Add Legionella responsibilities • Remove reference to Receipt sampling <p>Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr Lane</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>‘That the Committee approve the Terms of Reference at the next available meeting following the proposed amendments being made.’</p> <p>All In Favour</p>
006	<p><u>To receive and agree actions where required:</u></p>
006.1	<p><u>April 2024 Bank Reconciliation</u></p> <p>The April 2024 Bank Reconciliation was circulated prior to the meeting.</p> <p>The Cash In Hand position at 30 April 2024 is £1,112,228.49.</p>

	<p>It is noted that the Cash In Hand position includes the Reserves, Ear Marked Reserves, the JCC Account and the CIL Account. These accounts are not within the day-to-day budget allowance.</p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr Hobbs</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>‘That the Chair is authorised to sign the April 2024 Bank Reconciliation dated 23 May 2024.’</p> <p>All In Favour</p>
006.2	<p><u>April 2024 Governance Sample</u></p> <p>It was noted that that the April 2024 Governance Sample is outstanding.</p> <p>It was agreed that Cllrs Lane & Perkin would undertake the check on Thursday 30 May 2024 at 10am.</p>
006.3	<p><u>Actual V Budget Report to 30 April 2024</u></p> <p>It was noted that this is Month 1 of 2024/2025. There were no concerns raised within the report.</p> <p>It was suggested that an election budget be considered for 2025/2026 as it had not been anticipated that there would be an election in North Ward but this would be now be unbudgeted expenditure.</p> <p>The Town Clerk advised that she had used emergency expenditure when resolving the Town Hall kitchen flood and replacing the locks on the Town Hall Car Park when vandalism, which was reported to the Police, took place.</p>
006.4	<p><u>Bills For Payment</u></p> <p>Members had received a copy of the Bills for Payment list prior to the meeting.</p> <p>Cllr J Pyatt noted that payment 140, 141, 143 relating to Business Rates had an incorrect description. This is to be updated by the Administrator.</p> <p>Cllr J Pyatt asked for an update on the Business Rates for 15 Paradise Road and 6 Market Place. The Town Clerk advised that she had emailed the Borough Council on 06 March 2024 and a response was still awaited.</p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr J Pyatt</p> <p>It was resolved:</p>

‘That the Bills for Payment numbered 61 – 150 be authorised, subject to the description amendments discussed.’

All In Favour

Members discussed the request from Property Committee to seed the JCC field.

Proposed – Cllr Westrop

Seconded –Cllr Lane

It was resolved:

‘That Governance Committee support the request of the Property Committee to spend £240 + VAT from the Reserves to re-seed the site to prevent nettles growing through the bare soil.’

All In Favour

Members discussed which Committee should review the Council’s telephone contracts. It was agreed that all contracts should be reviewed by Governance & Finance Committee.

Members discussed the email from Shaun Vincent, Abzag Ltd, dated 10 May 2024 following notification from the Town Clerk that the Council had voted not to sign a new contract on 02 May 2024. The email stated:

‘As you are aware under the old agreement there is still a payment due, which would have been waived by superseding with the new contract. I trust you will now arrange for this outstanding payment of £5,616.00 (£4,680.00 plus £936.00 VAT) to be paid to ABZAG Ltd without further delay.’

It was noted that there had been no discussion at the time of requesting a fixed price contract about an outstanding payment or that any new contract would supersede an outstanding payment.

The Town Clerk had asked for a copy of the original contract as she had been unable to locate a copy of the contract which should give a breakdown of any payments due to Abzag Ltd.

Mr Vincent had referred to a discussion in March 2022 when the current Town Clerk was not in a position of authority which Mr Vincent was aware. It was also noted that a copy of the email referred to has not been provided and that as Mr Vincent had been the Council Leader of Broadlands District Council during this time, he would have been aware of the process of Council authorisation.

It was noted by the Town Clerk that there was an unsigned Purchase Order (19/0212) on the Council’s system dated 08 January 2020 which stated:

Professional Charges for DMTC Neighbourhood Plan Proposal dated 20th September 2019 (agreed at Full Council meeting 30th October 2019)

When reviewing the minutes of the Full Council meeting on 30 October 2019 there was a vote:

“The Neighbourhood Plan Strategy Group recommend to Full Council the professional services of the preferred consultant be engaged in the preparation and delivery of a Downham Marker Neighbourhood Plan”
After much discussion the above was agreed with a deposit paid and 5 interim payments, making sure each stage is completed before payment.

Proposed Cllr Hendry Seconded Cllr Pickering Agreed

During this meeting there had been no recorded details of the contract or what each stage required of Abzag Ltd in the minutes. It also does not confirm that there is a contract or that the Town Clerk was authorised to sign such a document.

It was noted by members of the Governance & Finance Committee that the Neighbourhood Plan had not reached completion and had stalled as the consultation information had been deleted in error by the previous Town Clerk and needed to be reinput. This consultation information had only been typed up by Richard Warden in March 2024 and therefore work had not started on the next stage of the Neighbourhood Plan. The work completed by Mr Warden related to the Public Consultation for which Mr Vincent had already received payment for, believed to be stage 4.

When Mr Warden had completed the Public Consultation work the Town Clerk suggested the Council arrange a fixed price to complete the Neighbourhood Plan as it was acknowledge that when the initial discussions took place in 2019, it could not be foreseen that there would be Covid 19 restrictions and legislative changes relating to the planning environment. This was to be fair to the consultant. It was not expected that the consultant would use the opportunity to seek payment for work which was not completed.

Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr Westrop

It was resolved:

‘That the Town Clerk place the invoice in dispute as the Committee do not consider the payment due as there is no evidence of work having been completed between 2022 and 2024. If a signed contract is received or a detailed invoice provided, then the Committee will reconsider the status of the invoice.’

All In Favour

006.5	<p><u>Bank Statements</u></p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr Hobbs</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>‘That the Chair is authorised to sign the Bank Statements from 01 April 2024 to 20 May 2024.’</p> <p>All In Favour</p>
006.6	<p><u>Receipts List</u></p> <p>Members advised that they had not been sent the Receipts List and therefore this item could not be discussed.</p>
006.7	<p><u>Q4 VAT Return</u></p> <p>Members discussed the concerns that had been raised regarding the Town Council’s VAT position at 13 & 15 Paradise Road and the Jubilee Community Centre when raising a query with Norfolk Parish Training & Support attaining to the sale of 15 Paradise Road.</p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Westrop Seconded –Cllr Perkin</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>‘That the Council engage the services of The Parkinson Partnership LLP at a cost of £1,000 to complete a remote review of the Council’s VAT position with the cost to be debited from the Professional Fees budget.’</p> <p>All In Favour</p> <p>Cllr Brewer offered to review the documents required by The Parkinson Partnership LLP with the Town Clerk on 24 May 2024 at 2pm.</p>
7	<p><u>To receive a copy of the new NALC Model Financial Regulations and agree actions</u></p> <p>Members discussed the new Model Financial Regulations and agreed that there are too many changes to adopt them as they have been presented by NALC.</p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Brewer Seconded –Cllr Lane</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>‘That Governance & Finance Committee recommend to Full Council that Full Council re-adopt the existing Financial Regulations, allowing the Committee six months to</p>

	<p>review and cross reference the new NALC Model Financial Regulations 2024 and make recommendations to Council.'</p> <p>All In Favour</p>
8	<p><u>To receive recommendation from Property Committee and agree action:</u></p> <p><u>'That Downham Market Town Council amend the Disposable BBQ and Lighting of fires policy to allow managed / professional BBQs on Council property.'</u></p> <p>It was suggested that the Town Clerk should speak to the Council insurer and understand their requirements to allow BBQ's on Council land.</p> <p>Proposed – Cllr Westrop Seconded –Cllr Lane</p> <p>It was resolved:</p> <p>'That the review of the Disposable BBQ and Lighting of fires policy be delayed until advice has been obtained from the Council's insurer, Norfolk Association of Local Councils and Norfolk Parish Training & Support.'</p> <p>All In Favour</p>
	<p><u>Notes</u></p> <p>It was suggested that at the next meeting of the Committee, the following items should be on the agenda:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor Making Procedure • Review of contracts • Cllr expectations policy • AGAR & End of Year process • Internal Audit • Standing Orders review • Grant Policy adaption following there being no Community Development Committee in 2024/2025 <p>It was agreed that all Code of Conducts should be managed by Full Council.</p>
	Meeting closed: 8:01pm
	SIGNED
	DATE