

NORTHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING

Tuesday 5th January 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Birch (Chair), Marriott (Vice Chair) Lane, B Markham, McCutcheon and Russell
In attendance: Councillors Ansell, Ashraf, Hallam; Borough Councillor Walker; Mr R Walden (Acting Town Clerk), Dr L Sambrook-Smith (NorthantsCALC)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Hibbert. The Town Clerk reported that Councillor Ashraf had resigned as a member of this Committee but was still attending this meeting as an observer in her capacity as Chair of the Town Council. The vacancy would need to be filled at the next meeting of the full Council.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST: There were none

1. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Chair reported on research undertaken by the Acting Town Clerk on Information Technology and related matters essential for the efficient operation of the Town Council. This included specialist financial management software, technical accounting support, remote hosting of computer systems and emails for officers and councillors and a cloud based telephone system.

RESOLVED: (i) That provision of £17,500 be included in the draft 2021/22 budget for these matters
(ii) That further consideration be given to the matter on receipt of information on alternative sources for this support

2. BANK ACCOUNT

RESOLVED: That, upon the recommendation of the Northants County Association of Local Councils, the Council open an account with Unity Bank

3. CIVIC OCCASIONS

The Acting Town Clerk sought the Committee's instructions on the form it would wish coming civic events to take.

RESOLVED: (i) That the Borough Council be asked if it is planning to hold any form of ceremony to mark the winding up of that Council on 31st March/ 1st April and if such ceremony could incorporate a formal "handover" of the mayoralty and the civic plate and muniments.

(ii) That the Annual Council Meeting (Mayor Making) be held on the early evening of 17th May 2021 followed by the usual form of civic reception.

(iii) That the Town (Electors) Meeting be held in the Court Room on Monday 24th May 2021 at 7.00pm accompanied by the opportunity for the widest possible selection of community groups to take part in a community exhibition in the Great Hall of the Guildhall.

4. OFFICES OF CIVIC DIGNITY

Arising from questions asked in the preceding item, the Acting Town Clerk advised the following position with regard to the various offices of civic dignity currently employed by the Borough Council. The Town Council had the legal power to create new Honorary Freemen or Freewomen and, consistent with the transfer of the Mayoralty on 1st April 2021, it was appropriate for the Council to accept the continuing maintenance of the Roll of Honorary Freedoms. The Council however had no power to appoint Honorary Aldermen and the National Association of Local Councils advised that, having regard to the opportunity of creating new Honorary Freemen or Freewomen, there was no purpose in seeking to create other offices of dignity. With regard to the Roll of Hereditary Freemen, although the Council had no power to maintain this, other new Town Councils which had replaced ancient boroughs had been granted delegated powers to continue to do so by their principal council.

RESOLVED: (i) That the Council confirms it will continue to maintain the Roll of Honorary Freedoms (personal Freemen and Freewomen and Freedoms of Entry)
(ii) That the Borough Council/ West Northants Council be asked to delegate to the Town Council the power to maintain the Roll of Hereditary Freedoms and grant new Freedoms to persons meeting the eligibility requirements.
(iii) That it be accepted that the Council has no power to appoint future Honorary Aldermen, it will acknowledge and continue to accord the same civic precedence to anyone so appointed as they enjoyed before 1st April 2021.

5. POLICY DOCUMENTS

The full Council at its first meeting had approved a number of policy documents subject to detailed scrutiny by this Committee and review at the Annual Council Meeting.

RESOLVED: (i) That the following members scrutinise the current draft documents on the Councils website as indicated and report back to a later meeting:

Councillor McCutcheon	Freedom of Information and Data Protection
Councillor Russell	Equal Opportunities and HR policies
Councillors Marriott and Lane	Standing Orders and Financial Regs
Councillor Birch	Staff Handbook

(ii) That scrutiny by other Members of the Council is welcomed and they be asked to forward any comments to their colleagues indicated above.

6. POLICE LIASION

Northants County Association of Local Councils (NCALC) had agreed with Northamptonshire Police to establish a new approach to liaison between parish and town councils and the police, the idea being that each parish appoints a person to act as a single point of contact for the police.

RESOLVED: That the Town Clerk be this Council's contact point.

7. TRANSFER OR PROPERTY AND SERVICES FROM THE BOROUGH COUNCIL

At the invitation of the Chair the Acting town Clerk reported that the Cross Party Working Group was recommending to the meeting of the Borough Council to be held on 18th January 2021 that, subject to the concurrence of the Shadow West Northants Council, the Town Council be granted a long lease of the historic part of the Guildhall on an internal repair

basis only. The principal council would retain the freehold and responsibility for structural repairs including the roof and the external statues. As the Guildhall was currently managed and serviced as a single unit with the modern office extension which could not be readily be divided it was likely that the landlord would continue to be responsible for heating, lighting and other services, cleaning, security and other overheads such as insurance and business rates. The Town Council would then be required to pay a service charge for its proportion of those costs.

He further reported that, as instructed at the informal meeting of the Committee in December 2020, he had sought information from Borough Council officers on the financial and staffing implications of the Town Council accepting the following other transferred services and property to enable it to take an informed decision about such transfers at its next meeting:

Local open spaces and play areas (but not premier parks or open space held under the Housing Revenue Account)

Market

Allotments (already transferred under Statutory Order)

Closed Churchyards

Community Centres

Muniments and civic regalia

Tourism

Town Twinning

Events and Entertainments

Hanging baskets and planting displays

Festive Lighting

Community Grants

Civic events and Offices of Dignity

Street Furniture

War memorial and statues

Neighbourhood Wardens

Parks Rangers

Council representatives on outside bodies

RESOLVED: That the Town Council is willing to continue to explore a long lease of the historic part of the Guildhall as indicated subject to the receipt of further details of all income and expenditure related to the premises

8. DRAFT BUDGET 2021/22

The Acting Town Clerk reported that the Cross Party Working Group was recommending to the Borough Council at its meeting on 18th January 2021 a draft base budget to recommend to the Town Council totalling £1.1M. This included for set up costs, mayoral services and Guildhall accommodation costs plus a contingency figure of £400,000 for future services and establishing a reserve. However, depending upon the decisions relating to transfer of services and property, this contingency would probably not be sufficient to cover all such costs. He had requested financial information from Borough Officers and hoped to be able to present a fuller budget to the next meeting on 19th January. He however reminded members that, of necessity, this must be regarded as a contingency budget (which must be finalised at the full Council meeting on 27th January when a precept would be set) to enable discussions on individual services to continue up to 31st March 2021 and beyond.

(signed)

Chair