

**NORTHAMPTON TOWN COUNCIL  
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

**Monday 12<sup>th</sup> April, 2021**

**PRESENT:** Councillor Birch (Chair); Councillor Marriott (Deputy Chair); Councillors Hibbert, Lane, B Markham, McCutcheon and Russell

In attendance: Councillors Ashraf with Mr R Walden (Acting Town Clerk), Mrs J Thorneycroft (Administration Officer), Ms E Hawkins (Civic and Mayoral Officer); Mr D Simpson (West Northants Council)) and Dr L Sambrook-Smith (Northants CALC)

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were none.

**2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were none.

**3. MINUTES OF LAST MEETING**

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

**4. TRANSFER OF FESTIVITIES AND EVENTS**

**(a) Transfer Agreement**

The Acting Town Clerk recalled that West Northants Council (WNC) had agreed to transfer to this Council responsibility for managing the following festivities and events:

- Fireworks
- Christmas Lights and Activities
- Diwali
- Bands in the Park
- Music Festival
- Northampton in Bloom
- Other minor events

The former Borough Council's budget for this service was also being transferred on a tapering basis over three years. The grant to be paid in 2021/22 was £321,640 which included £37,000 being the full cost of one staff member, who was spending over 75% of their time on these matters would be liable to a TUPE transfer to this Council. There were two other WNC staff who currently spent respectively 20% and 30% of their time on the activities so are were liable for transfer. A full breakdown of the transferred budget was presented.

The transfer was subject to a formal agreement with WNC which was currently being negotiated but he reported that the following provisions had already been agreed:

- The grant could only be expended on the defined festivities, expenditure could be audited by WNC and any funds not expended would be returned to them.
- Until the Agreement was finally concluded, staff at WNC would continue to manage the festivities in the usual way and any expenditure committed in that time would be deducted from the grant.
- The stock of festive lights and fittings would transfer to the Town Council and a licence to continue to occupy the current storage at St John's Street Car Park initially until 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022 was being prepared.
- The Agreement did not include any licence to hold events on WNC land for which permission would have to be sought in advance. for
- Hanging planters and barrier baskets were currently stored at the West bridge depot and NTC would need a licence to continue thus arrangement in future.

**RESOLVED:** That the Acting Town Clerk be authorised to conclude the agreement with WSN.

### **(b) Enhancement of Events**

The full Council had authorised this Committee to agree to the enhancement of all or some of the events this coming year from the contingency budget already agreed for this purpose. Mr Derrick Simpson, WNC's Town Centre Manager, who had had responsibility of these matters for many years, was welcomed to the meeting to advise members on potential enhancements.

It was noted that the transferred budget was the actual sum included in the former Borough Council's draft budget and did not include £26,000 additional money spent in 2019 on Christmas lighting etc. Having regard to the potential to restore the Christmas budget to the full amount and to meet additional staff costs of £37,000, the Committee agreed that a total further enhancement of £52,500 would be appropriate. This made a total contribution of £113,00 from the Town Council. Allowing for the tapering nature of the grant, it was agreed this contribution be met from the current contingency budget. There would be no resultant requirement for any increase in the existing precept for this purpose for the next four years. The balance of the contingency would still be available to allocate as part of further service devolution deals which may be agreed with WSN later in the year.

Mr Simpson then provided information on a number of enhancement options which were debated.

**RESOLVED:** That the WNC Town Centre Manager be requested to prepare detailed proposals for the following enhancements which the Town Clerk be delegated to approve after consultation with the Town Mayor and the Chair of this Committee:

**Fireworks:** £7,500 enhancement to include for a spectacular finale and additional LED screens and cameras to spread along the Racecourse either side of the stage area, including the catering area to enable visitors to watch the pre-firework stage entertainment and show video clips.

**Christmas Lights:** £15,000 enhancement to include additional free standing illuminated attractions, a moving light show on the Guildhall (subject to the consent of WSN) plus additional street entertainers during the period up to Christmas. (A suggestion of a short firework display from the top of the Grosvenor Centre Car Park to make the lights switch-on did not find favour with the Committee)

### **(c) Northampton in Bloom Planting Displays**

Orders had already been placed with Veolia/ Ideverde for the maintenance, filling and planting of all containers and then maintaining and watering them from June to September inclusive before return to the depot. Arrangements for judging community contributions to Bloom and a suitable presentation ceremony, usually at the Guildhall, still had to be arranged.

The Committee felt that enhancing the public contribution to Bloom was a very effective way of announcing to the Town Council's arrival to its constituent communities. There was, however, insufficient time to prepare an agreed scheme and obtain competitive quotations. It was therefore concluded that the best available and most effective solution would be to extend the existing contract with Ideverde, whose division, Plantscape, could provide on a rental basis a wide range of containers already planted up for maximum impact. This would then provide the Council with the time to evaluate whether it wished purchase the planters for the future and add them to its stock of containers.

All Members of the Council had been invited to put forward suggestions of locations which would benefit from additional summer planting and the type of planting they would prefer. The aim was that it might be possible to achieve some form of enhancement in most council wards. Eight Councillors had submitted suggestions and these were considered. It was felt that such an initial approach would provide an immediate impact but would also allow the Council the opportunity to give more measured consideration to future years' schemes in consultation with all relevant local community groups. WSN had advised that Mr Simpson would be able to process all requests for its consent to planters on highways or greenspaces.

**RESOLVED:** That an officers team comprising Julie Thorneycroft (NTC), Alan McGregor (Ideverde Plantscape) and Paul Townsend (West Northants Council) be allocated an enhancement budget of £30,000 (£20,000 for new planters, hanging baskets etc and £10,000 for installation costs and watering) and be authorised to determine, following site inspections, the most advantageous method of providing impactful new planting throughout the town including approximately £1,000 of items in the ward of each Councillor who had put forward detailed suggestions.

## 5. ESTABLISHMENT OF THE COUNCIL OFFICES

The Acting Town Clerk reported on all necessary arrangements which had been undertaken to prepare for the Council's office accommodation at the Guildhall including a new telephone and IT system and accountancy software. Unfortunately, broadband was not available to the designated area and would need to be installed separately and this will involve some further accommodation works. Further, since the quotes for the necessary works had been accepted by the Council it had become clear that the staff team would have to work from home for the time being and further equipment including laptops and remote access to the phone system had had to be arranged as an extension to the agreed contract with Horizon. They will also be installing dedicated high speed broadband to the Guildhall. These extra works were being undertaken through his current delegated authority. However, now that the new staff team had started work, further equipment and software had been identified which would ensure the efficient and effective operation of the organisation. Details of all such equipment was circulated.

**RESOLVED:** That the action taken to date by the Town Clerk be endorsed he be authorised to complete all other office furniture and equipment requirements to be funded the contingency budget for furniture and equipment to ensure the effective establishment of the Council and its staff in the Guildhall offices and whilst working from home.

## 6. PAYMENT OF ACCOUNTS

**RESOLVED:** That the following accounts be approved for payment:

		£
Members of staff	<i>Salaries, NI, Tax, Pensions and payroll for April, 2021</i>	11,315.93
<b>2commune Ltd</b>	<i>website hosting, license</i>	522.00
<b>BHIB Limited</b>	<i>Insurance Renewal</i>	5,020.41
	<i>Mayoral vehicle policy</i>	2,212.01
		<b>7,232.42</b>
<b>Horizon Telecom Ltd</b>	<i>3 x Asus ExpertBook notebooks</i>	2,217.60
<b>John Roan Photography</b>	<i>Photography Mayor &amp; Deputy</i>	145.00
<b>Microshade Business Consultants Ltd</b>	<i>Consultancy March 2021</i>	330.00
	<i>Mthly Host Fees &amp; set up costs</i>	1,081.74
		<b>1,411.74</b>
<b>Northants CALC Ltd</b>	<i>Membership and Internal Audit 2021/22</i>	8,107.22

## 7. FINANCIAL RISK ASSESSMENTS

It was noted that the Council was required to undertake a variety of financial risk assessments and the Finance Advisor had supplied drafts of all documents he believed to be necessary.

**RESOLVED:** That the Town Clerk be authorised to approve and publish these as appropriate in consultation with the Chair of the Committee

## **8. APPOINTMENT OF INTERIM TOWN CLERK**

As authorised by the full Council on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2021, the Appointments Panel had met on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2021 and had interviewed three candidates identified by NCALC as potential Interim Town Clerks. A fourth candidate had withdrawn their application prior to the meeting.

At the start of their interview candidates gave a presentation of what they perceived would be their top priorities if offered the position.

It was noted that the Panel had unanimously agreed that, subject to the receipt of satisfactory references, Stuart Carter, BA Hons, CiLCA, currently Town Clerk with Evesham Town Council and previously Town Clerk with Marlow Town Council, be offered the position of Interim Town Clerk on a 12 months' contract expiring on a date to be agreed in May 2022 on the previously approved terms and conditions of appointment.

## **9. OCCUPATION OF PART OF THE GUILDHALL**

The Acting Town Clerk reported on discussions with West Northants Council (WSN) on the detailed content of the Licence to occupy part of the historic section of the Guildhall. The licence fee was based upon rental figures for 2019-20 plus a service charge and equated to £23.72 per square foot making at total of total of £64,638.00 for the current year. This compared favourably with local serviced office space rentals which could be up to £35 per square foot. There would be a 3% increase in each of the next two years. The Town Council would be occupying approximately a third of the total floor space of the historic part of the Guildhall so the total equated proportionately to the £180,000 contingency figure for the whole of the historic area included in the Council's draft budget.

The Licence provided for exclusive use of the demised areas including the Mayoral Suite and offices previously occupied by NBC Leadership and political parties. WNC will be providing the following services: External and internal repairs and decorations, Building Statutory Compliance, Non-domestic business rates, Buildings insurance and landlord fixtures and fittings (including office furniture as required but not IT hardware), Fire and burglar alarms. General Guildhall Security and CCTV, Initial Access Passes, Gas/electricity/water charges, Caretaking, Heating, Daily Cleaning including toilet supplies and Refuse collection.

The extent of underground car parking which could be made available, especially for evening meetings, was being investigated and would depend upon the requirements of WNC which had not yet been finalised.

He advised that the room previously known as the Investors Suite was of a high modern standard and could provide suitable boardroom standard accommodation for all Town Council committee and sub-committee meetings including for space for press and public. The Council would have exclusive use of this room so it would therefore not be necessary to rent additional meeting rooms apart from the Council Chamber for full Council Meetings.

WNC would be able to supply large TV monitors for displaying plans at Planning Committee meetings and other necessary occasions.

The Committee agreed that this room would in future be known as the Town Council Committee Room. The room did though have a raised skylight roof which was due for repair and so would be unavailable for up to three months (the same applied to the room formerly the Judges Retiring Room). During this time the Town Council could have access to other meeting rooms in the Guildhall without additional charge.

Following concerns expressed by Councillors at the last Council meeting and subsequently, the following points have been clarified:

- The toilet adjacent to the former Leaders' Office was included in the demise making a total of 5 toilets.
- There would be shared use of the kitchen off the Court Room with the Town Council having dedicated storage and refrigerator space
- The door leading from the rear of the Court Room could only be opened by security pass except when activated by the fire alarm.
- When the Council Chamber was being hired by third parties, Guildhall Officers would be on hand to facilitate the event and would not permit guests onto the rear staircase which led down to the Town Council demise.

**RESOLVED:** That the Town Clerk be authorised to instruct the Council's legal advisor to conclude the Licence as indicated above.