



## WISBECH TOWN COUNCIL

### STAFFING AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

21 JUNE 2021 – 7.30 pm

### MINUTES OF MEETING

**Present:** Councillor Tierney, Chairman; Councillors Hoy, Human and Tibbs.

**Apologies:** Councillor Mrs Pehlivanova.

**Public Participation:** None requested.

The minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 6 July 2020 were confirmed and signed.

#### **S1/21 Election of Chairman**

On the proposal of Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Human, it was decided that Councillor Tierney be elected as Chairman of the Staffing and Communications Committee for the municipal year 2021/22.

#### **S2/21 Election of Vice-Chairman**

On the proposal of Councillor Human, seconded by Councillor Hoy, it was decided that Councillor Tibbs be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Staffing and Communications Committee for the municipal year 2021/22.

#### **S3/21 Communications**

The Chairman informed members that, following informal discussion with councillors, he would produce, in liaison with the Clerk, a draft Communications Strategy for consideration at the next meeting of this committee.

Councillor Human expressed the opinion - with which there was concurrence by other members - that the council needs to take an inclusive approach in the way that it provides information to the public; not everyone is able to access information by electronic means.

Members decided that the situation be noted.

#### **S4/21 Staffing update**

The Clerk reported briefly and in general terms in relation to the council's staffing situation.

Members were informed by the Clerk that with the exception of one period of absence by one member of staff last autumn, there had generally been no sickness absence during the last twelve months.

The Clerk mentioned that he continues to look for relevant training and learning opportunities for the council's staff, so that they remain best placed to deliver efficient and effective service for both the council and the local community. He informed members of some of the training and learning activities which had been attended (via video conferencing systems) by council staff during recent



months; he made particular reference to the fact that the council's Customer Services and Liaison Officer had been awarded, last week, the Diploma in Markets Administration.

The point was made by the Clerk that the main issue being faced by the council in relation to staffing is the long-term vacancy for the post of Markets and Allotments Officer (see minute S5/21 below for more detail).

Members were reminded by the Clerk that, given the significant reduction in markets activity which had been seen during Covid-19 "lockdowns", there had been no requirement for that role to be delivered in full. The "essential" aspects are being covered currently on a temporary basis by other council staff and one of the council's contractors. Members were informed of the manner in which the current temporary arrangement is operating.

The Clerk invited members to give thought, now that we are returning to "normality", as to how they wish the duties of this post to be delivered going forward: recruit to the post "as is"; contract-out the functions; have a combination of a re-designed post and some contracting-out.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Human, seconded by Councillor Tierney, that they would prefer to see the functions of the current post of Markets and Allotments Officer delivered under a contractual arrangement, instead of by the council employing such a member of staff, and they authorised the Clerk to undertake discussions/negotiations with the individual who is currently delivering some of the "essential" aspects of the role on a temporary basis as to whether he would be interested in delivering the functions of the post of Markets and Allotments Officer permanently (as a contractor).

#### **S5/21 Town Council staffing – annual leave**

Members considered payments to two members of council staff in lieu of their respective unused 2020/21 annual leave allocations.

Members are aware that the council has been operating for a number of months (not only in the financial year 2020/21 but also in 2019/20 (and has continued into 2021/22)) with a reduced staffing capacity because of an unfilled vacancy (Markets and Allotments Officer); that situation was compounded in 2020/21 by way of a period of sickness absence of another employee.

Members were reminded by the Clerk that the council's Operations and Assets Officer resigned in September 2019 and a re-designed post of Markets and Allotments Officer was created on 9 October 2019.

Because of difficulties in recruiting to the post of Markets and Allotments Officer, plus the fact that interviews which had been planned for early 2020 were subsequently put "on hold" because of the Covid-19 pandemic situation - such a staff member did not begin working for Wisbech Town Council until November 2020. However, he remained in post for less than two months (leaving, for personal reasons, just before Christmas 2020).

The post of Markets and Allotments Officer remains vacant. The "essential" duties of that post holder are being covered (together with some functions delivered by local contractors) by the other three council staff.

As members are also aware, another council employees had a continuous period of sickness absence which exceeded seven weeks during the autumn of 2020. The council's "remaining" two employees covered jointly for that period of staff absence.



Given the situation outlined above, it is not surprising that the Clerk and the Administrative Services and Civics Officer had found it difficult to take leave during the financial year 2020/21.

Members noted that the Clerk had sought to ensure that, because of the need to support the health and well-being of staff through time for rest and relaxation, both the Administrative Services and Civics Officer and the Customer Services and Liaison Officer were able to take their 2020/21 annual leave entitlements; this required him to minimise his absences from the office (hence, it not being possible for him to utilise all of his annual leave allocation).

The Clerk informed members of the annual leave entitlement of both the Administrative Services and Civics Officer and him for the financial (and leave) year 2020/21 and the respective number of annual leave days remaining at the end of the financial year.

Members were reminded by the Clerk of the level of underspending on the Staff Salaries budget for the financial year 2020/21 (minute R3/21 refers).

The Clerk shared with members his calculations as to the respective amount of salary payment which would be due in lieu of annual leave to these two officers, as well as the associated costs of employer's National Insurance and Pension contributions.

Taking into account these additional payments would still result in a substantial saving (around £11,500) on the Staff Salaries budget for the financial year 2020/21. In addition, there is already (at the end of month 2) an underspending on the overall Staffing budget for the financial 2021/22 of around £5,500.

It is acknowledged by members that, because of circumstances beyond the staff's control (i.e. needing to continue to deliver council services during several months of staff vacancies), both the Clerk and the Administrative Services and Civics Officer had been unable to take a proportion of their annual leave entitlement for the financial year 2020/21.

Members consider that it is both fair and reasonable for these employees to receive payment for the additional hours worked (instead of being on leave).

Members expressed their appreciation, on behalf of Wisbech Town Council, to the Clerk, the Administrative Services and Civics Officer and the Customer Services and Liaison Officer for going "above and beyond" to continue the delivery of council services during a prolonged period of staff vacancy.

Members decided, unanimously, on the proposal of Councillor Hoy, seconded by Councillor Tibbs, that

- (1) the information reported by the Clerk be noted;
- (2) payment to the Clerk and the Administrative Services and Civics Officer for the hours that they worked instead of taking annual leave during the financial (and leave) year 2020/21 be authorised;
- (3) each of the three staff currently in post be paid a bonus, in the sum now specified, in recognition of their work during a very difficult and challenging time (caused not only by the long-term staff vacancy situation but also the issues which they had faced in continuing to deliver efficient and effective services for the council during the Covid-19 pandemic).



(Members resolved to exclude the public for this item of business on the grounds that it involved the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972)

**Meeting finished at 8.00 pm.**

Signed.....

Dated.....

DRAFT