

COWES TOWN COUNCIL

Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee Meeting held in the Drawing Room, Northwood House, Cowes on Tuesday 25 February 2025 at 6.15pm.

Present: Councillors Carter (Chair), Brown, Ellis, Hollis, Oliver, Rafferty & Walters.

In attendance: Councillors Peacey Wilcox and Wardrop (non-voting); Debbie Faulkner, Town Clerk; two representatives from Cowes Fringe.

963 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Nicholson.

964 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Peacey Wilcox declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute Nos 966 as she is an IW Councillor.

Councillor Oliver declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 970 as he has made deliveries on behalf of the Isle of Wight Food Pantries.

Councillor Rafferty declared a pecuniary interest in Minute No 972 as he is an employee of Cowes Harbour Commission.

Councillor Walters declared a non-pecuniary interest in Minute No 972 as he is Cowes Town Council's representative on Cowes Harbour Commission Advisory Committee.

965 MINUTES RESOLVED

That the Minutes of the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting held on 19 February 2025 be taken as read, approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

966 IW COUNCIL'S INVOICE AND CREDIT NOTE FOR COWES LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP COSTS FOR 2023 – 2024 AND EARLIER INVOICES

The Town Council received an invoice for Cowes Library partnership costs for 2023 / 2024 in the sum of £40,900.17; the Town Council had only budgeted for £22,400. Following a meeting with IW Council Officers, the invoice has been sent back to the IW Council and has now been credited. Councillors have also reviewed Library invoices for the previous five financial years and found some large increases in salary costs. It was agreed:

ACTION

The Town Clerk will add the Cowes Library Partnership costs amended invoice for 2023 / 2024, from the IW Council, to the Agenda for the next Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting.

967 TO RECOMMEND AN APPOINTMENT OF A PUBLIC CONVENIENCE CLEANING CONTRACTOR AS FROM 1 APRIL 2025 (MIN NO 961 REFERS)

At the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting on 19 February 2025, Councillors reviewed quotations from five contractors. It was agreed that the Town Clerk would seek references for Contractor A, ask whether public holidays and bank holiday cleaning could be included and confirmation that their staff are directly employed for at least the minimum wage. Contractor A has provided the names of three referees, all of which have provided a satisfactory reference. Contractor A has confirmed that public

holidays and bank holidays are included within their quotation; staff are directly employed and paid the 'real living wage'.

It was also agreed that the Town Clerk would ask Contractor E if they would consider negotiating a reduction to their revised (higher) quotation. Contractor E has reduced their quotation by £7,673. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That Contractor A be appointed as the Town Council's cleaning contractor from 1 April 2025 initially for a period of one year, for the sum of £48,687.53.

968 APPLICATION FOR GRANT

The Town Clerk reported that £5,894 remains in the budget heading 'Grants' for the Financial Year 2024 / 25. The Town Council have been asked to consider the following Application for Grant:

- Cowes Fringe – 2025 Festival – £1,500.

After a question-and-answer session with the applicants and a full discussion by Councillors it was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council make a grant to Cowes Fringe in the sum of £1,500.

969 UPDATE ON EXISTING HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND OF £5,000

The Town Clerk gave Councillors an update on the Household Support Fund. Cowes Town Council had received £5,000; the Clerks have purchased vouchers to the value of £4,000, leaving £1,000 remaining for the purchase of further vouchers. The Clerks have handed out 60 vouchers from the 80 purchased, 20 remain available for issue.

970 DONATION TO ISLE OF WIGHT PANTRIES CIC

The Isle of Wight Pantries CIC asked the Town Council to donate £100 to help people that are unable to afford the £5 that they are required to spend to achieve a food parcel to the value of at least £15. The Mayor has already donated £25 from his Mayor's Allowance; Councillors are asked to consider making a donation of £75 which will be fully accounted for by the Pantry. It was:

RECOMMENDED

That Cowes Town Council donates £75 to Isle of Wight Pantries CIC.

971 BUSINESS RATES APPLICABLE TO THE TOWN COUNCIL'S OFFICE (ROOM 11)

Northwood House Charitable Trust Co. Ltd (NHCTCL) being the Town Council's landlord, have advised that they are no longer able to pay the Town Council's Business Rates as from 1 April 2025. However, to enable the Town Council to not have a further financial burden, NHCTCL will reduce the monthly rent for the Office to compensate for the cost of the Business Rates.

Councillor Rafferty left the meeting for the next item.

972 REQUEST FOR FUNDING FROM COWES200

Cowes200 have written to the Town Council requesting financial support for their project. The project has been set up to launch a new era for Cowes events planning across the entire season, introducing a whole new approach starting in 2026. Cowes200 will unite event calendars and bring everyone together to create a 200-day, season long festival of sail and power, both on land and water. Cowes200 are asking organisations to pledge up to

£15,000; the intention being to invoice each partner equally on a quarterly basis the actual costs for each quarter rather than a fixed quarterly sum. It was agreed:

ACTION

The Town Clerk will write to Cowes200 to seek further financial information for consideration before any recommendation can be made to Full Council.

973 DEVOLUTION PROCESS

On 6 February 2025, the Government announced that Hampshire County Council, Portsmouth and Southampton City Councils and Isle of Wight Council had been successful in their joint bid for inclusion on the Government's fast-track Devolution Priority Programme (DPP). As a result the IW Council elections have been postponed until May 2026. However, the Government has advised that Town and Parish Council elections will still be held on 1 May 2025 along with any IW Council by-elections.

974 VACANCY FOR A FACILITIES MANAGER / TOWN MANAGER

The Town Clerk advised Councillors that the advertisement for the position of a full time Facilities Manager / Town Manager has been advertised for two weeks with a deadline for applications being 12 noon on Friday 28 February 2025. To date, two shows of interest have been received but no completed application forms have yet to arrive.

975 COWES TOWN COUNCIL'S FLEXIBLE WORKING POLICY

Councillors were asked to consider the draft Flexible Working Policy which takes account of employees' preferences, interests and non-work responsibilities whilst also meeting the needs of the Town Council. Common examples of flexible working include having flexible start and finish times, working from home, job sharing, hybrid working, part-time working, compressed hours, annualised hours, term-time working, career breaks, sabbaticals and phased retirement. It was agreed:

ACTIONS

1. Councillor Rafferty will email his comments on the document to the Town Clerk for sharing with other Committee members.
2. The Town Clerk will add 'Flexible Working Policy' to the Agenda for the next Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting.

976 OTHER STAFFING MATTERS

Councillors questioned whether there will be any repetition of staff working above their normal weekly hours due to the pressure of work. The Town Clerk advised that now the Admin Assistant is in place it will be easier for staff to work their normal weekly hours.

The proceedings terminated abruptly at 7.36pm as the fire alarm sounded. Those matters not able to be discussed will be carried over to the next the Finance, Acquisitions & Staffing Committee meeting.

CHAIRMAN