

APPLEBY-IN-WESTMORLAND TOWN COUNCIL

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Finance Committee Minutes

For the meeting held in the Moot Hall

Monday 13th November 2023 at 7.40pm

Present:

Cllr Chalmers (Chair) Cllr Heap
Cllr Anderton Cllr Pape
Cllr Curley Cllr Potts
Cllr Davidson

Also in attendance:

Cllr Connell Cllr Railton
Cllr Rooke Cllr Mycock
Town Clerk and Clerk's Assistant

F1/11/23 Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies received.

F2/11/23 Declarations of Interest

Cllr Anderton declared an interest in item 8, due to being a member of ACAT, and its Council representative. Cllr Chalmers also later declared an interest as a business owner in town, during a discussion in item 7.

F3/11/23 Actions from the Previous Minutes

The Charity Accounts will be discussed in item 8.

F4/11/23 Chairman's Report

There was no Chair's report in respect of this meeting.

F5/11/23 Management Accounts

The Chair presented the Management Accounts for October 2023.

The Clerk reported the TIC income was high due as it included September's cash sales. Other income included the final payment from Cumberland Council for the Public Hall wi-fi, an agreement that had been in place for 2 years, but which has now finished and will be paid for going forward by the Council. Work has been carried out to remove and replace old open cold water tanks and cylinders at a cost of £4,750. All three of the desktop computers have now been upgraded using internal resources, at half the price of outsourcing the work to an external IT specialist.

Cllr Anderton also asked whether we would be getting a rebate from Urbaser on our refuse collection because of the strikes and The Clerk confirmed that yes, it is understood that this will be forthcoming.

The Management Accounts for October 2023 were accepted and **RECOMMENDED** to Full Council.

F6/11/23 Internal Audit Report

The Internal Auditor visited the office last week for the half year audit of the Council's financial record keeping and reporting. No written report has been received as yet, but they highlighted how easy the accounts are to follow. Cllr Heap also added that the accounts run beautifully and are very well maintained. Cllr Chalmers thanked Cllr Heap for her monthly check.

F7/11/23 TIC Running Costs

A breakdown summary had been distributed to councillors prior to the meeting showing the running costs for the front of house Council & Tourist Information Centre. This showed that the Council subsidised the TIC in the year April 2022-March 2023 by £36,000 (£3,000 per month). The Clerk reported that the last year that could be used as a comparison of previous running costs was 2019-20(pre-Covid). This showed a subsidy amount of £27,000, but this was mitigated by a Tourism grant from EDC of £4,500, which is no longer received.

Cllr Potts commented that the last report the TIC Manager had presented to Council was very informative and he felt helped Councillors have a greater understanding of the work they do. The Clerk confirmed that the TIC Manager will be attending this month's Full Council meeting to give a report.

The Clerk reminded Councillors that the Centre is not just a visitor centre, but is also the front of house for the Council and a large proportion of their enquiries are local residents and businesses. The Clerk also commented that if the Council didn't operate a TIC for the town, then who would and if we didn't have a front of house Council centre, then additional staff would be needed in the Clerk's office to deal with local enquiries.

Cllr Davidson commented that she felt the TIC do great work in drawing tourists into the area, which directly benefit local businesses and in her hands-on experience of working in the sector, towns who do away with their TIC's end up struggling.

Further discussion took place and it was agreed that it was not about whether or not to keep the TIC, but rather that the Finance Committee have a duty of care to manage Council finances and that it was important that the Council monitor the running costs and identify and consider ways of increasing income to mitigate future running costs.

It was agreed to review the TIC managers' report to Full Council before any further discussion was had.

ACTION: Cllr Mycock brought up the subject of 'Tourism tax'. Clerk to do some research.

F8/11/23 Charity Accounts

The Clerk reported that an application had been received from ACAT for £2,000 towards the town's Christmas lights. An amount of £2,000 has been awarded to ACAT towards the lights since 2016-17, totalling £14,000. In more recent years, the money has been issued as a grant from one of the two charity accounts, but the Clerk did not think this was sustainable and the charity accounts should not be used for repetitive annual grant requests. In previous years, there was an amount of £2,000 in the Council's budget for Christmas lights and although it could not be added as a budget line this year, proposed that it should be included in next year's budget figures. With regard to this year's request, the Clerk proposed that this amount be covered under Contingency or by viring the amount from an underspend budget line.

Cllr Anderton pointed out that before ACAT, the lights were arranged by the Chamber of Trade, which no longer exists. Cllr Chalmers made a suggestion that town centre businesses are asked to make a contribution towards the lights. Cllr Curley reported that he had met with Archie Spence on behalf of ACAT, who had asked about the possibility of the Council taking on the lights in the future. It was agreed to discuss this in a future meeting.

It was **RECOMMENDED** to Full Council to add a Christmas Lights budget line of £2,000 back into next year's budget figures and that the contribution of £2,000 for this year's lights would come from the Council's finances.

The Clerk has looked into Cllr Pape's request regarding his understanding that the capital should be retained and only the interest on the two charity accounts should be given out as grants. She had been unable to ascertain from the Charity Commission whether this was a stipulation the Trust's governing document and could find no copy of the document on file. Cllr Chalmers raised concern that if there is no trust deed, how do the trustees know they are abiding by it when approving grants.

Cllr Connell suggested the next step would be to establish when the trusts were set up and locate any documents that might be kept in the Kendal archives.

F9/11/23 Councillors' reports and items for future agendas

There were no items for future agendas.

F10/11/23 Next Meeting

To note that the next meeting of the Finance Committee will be on Monday 11th December 2023 at 7.15pm, or at the rising of the Planning and General Purposes Committee in the Moot Hall.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 8.18pm.

At the Council Meeting held on Wednesday 22nd November 2023, the Chairman of this meeting was authorised by the Committee to sign these minutes, to confirm they are a true and accurate record:

Cllr Chalmers
