

WELLINGTON TOWN COUNCIL

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STAFFING AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 28 MAY 2019 AT 4.30 PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, 28 FORE STREET, WELLINGTON

Present: Councillors V Stock-Williams, J Lloyd, M Lithgow. M Barr, N Smith. J Thorne

Kathryn Hemensley (Town Clerk), Gill Croucher (Assistant Clerk)

1. Apologies

Councillor A Govier

2. Election Of Chairman

The Clerk opened this first meeting of the newly-elected and re-designated Staffing and Resources Committee. The first item of business - to elect the Committee Chairman - was conducted.

Cllr Janet Lloyd was proposed, duly seconded then elected as Chair of the Committee. It was agreed that although the Council collectively was the Clerk's line-manager, Cllr Lloyd, as Mayor, would act as the first point of call for line management.

3. Terms of Reference for the Staffing and Resources Committee

The aspirations of the group were discussed and a need identified for an updated formal Terms of Reference (TOR) for the group. The group wished to oversee all aspects of Council resources, to include:-

- Staffing levels, Terms and Conditions, remuneration, day-to-day management, appraisals;
- Staff and Member training and development;
- Review and development of Office premises and IT facilities;
- Overhaul of Council Public Relations and Communications;
- Continuous improvement and recommendations for enhanced or new initiatives

Recommended that a revised and comprehensive Terms of Reference be drawn up for the Staffing and Resources Committee, for approval at a near future meeting of full Council. The Chairman and Clerk would jointly work up an initial draft.

4. Review of Council Staffing Resources

The Clerk was invited to give a review of the current situation, based on observations from her first six months in post. This reflected that the Clerk, being new to Local Government initially had lots to learn. CiLCA training and on-the-job learning was effectively being put to use and the support and knowledge of the Assistant Clerk had been vitally important to the Clerk's success in post to date. There was still much to achieve and at a period of growth in the town, an overhaul of operational practices, facilities and resources as well as governing documents was recommended to ensure that the Council remained dynamic, effective and well-engaged with its community. Additional resources were requested as current hours are not sufficient to fulfil both day to day activities as well as reaching out into new areas of operation.

The Assistant Clerk advised the meeting that she would be terminating her temporary contract at the end of July.

Councillors then discussed their views with a majority identifying an urgent need to increase resources to 4 full-time equivalent posts with skillsets tailored to the Council's specific requirements. Councillors affirmed commitment to their Duty of Care towards employees and the desire to maintain a positive and thriving workplace. There was a need for additional capacity to expand into new areas of operation, and to explore initiatives to enhance the Council's amenities and public services for the town. Additional opening hours for customers were required, and the capability to react quickly to the external environment as the need arose. Extra resources would also enable grant applications which might ultimately enhance the Council's income. The ideal of a positive, forward-looking Council was strongly reinforced. The need to review staff salaries was noted given apparently higher pay rates offered elsewhere.

Recommended by majority vote, with one abstention (on grounds of wording) to make a proposal to full Council to:-

- Increase staffing levels to four full-time-equivalent posts to include a Deputy and Assistant Clerk. This could be phased to best suit contemporary requirements
- Engage the Services of a temporary worker (temp) at Deputy level to immediately alleviate resourcing pressures
- Work towards extended opening hours of the office to enhance public service

5. Review of IT and Communications

a) Councillor discussion focussed firstly on IT and it was noted that very little has been spent on upgrading IT resources in recent years. A major overhaul was required to improve current efficiency and to provide for new staffing resources and communication aspirations. Currently the website is hosted by Sonic, who also set up the email accounts; however we do not appear to pay regular bills or have a management agreement in place. We no longer have enough email log-ins to cover new Councillors. The website could be much improved and the laptop and office PCs are run on different software which cannot be integrated. It was however agreed that a structured holistic approach would achieve the best outcome, rather than ad hoc piecemeal improvements. Also that in addition to a comprehensive quotation recently sought for IT upgrading, other competitive quotes would be required.

Recommended to propose to Council that an IT sub-group be set up to review current IT provision, and to seek recommendations with costings for upgrading current facilities.

Cllr Lithgow volunteered to sit on this sub-committee, should it be resolved.

b) Similar discussion took place around the Council's communications, which again were felt to be in need of review and updating. Aspirations included making greater use of social media, a new website and generally a more interactive framework for the Council to directly engage with the public. Query was raised as to whether current communication methods, still fulfilled the Council's needs and reflected value for money. Care would need to be taken that any new proposals for communication would not inadvertently exclude segments of the local community or breach legal requirements of the Council's publication scheme.

Recommended to increase the remit of the IT review sub-Committee to include a full review of Council communications, and to develop a strategic communication policy.

Cllrs Stock-Williams, Thorne, Barr and Lloyd volunteered to join Cllr Lithgow on the sub-committee.

6 & 7. Office facilities and staff and Member safety

It was noted that the general safety of the office could be improved, and future consideration might be given to a panic alarm, a special line to the police, or other safety features. Sometimes the office was locked by sharers of the building therefore denying access to those attending afternoon or evening meetings. The back door had also been found unlocked in the morning with no indication of how this had happened. The Clerk would shortly be meeting with the Landlord's Facilities Officer to progress the additional office space to be acquired (Somerset West and Taunton Council). Issues around safety and security would be explored at this meeting.

The meeting closed at 6.10 pm