Fleetwood Town Council

Onward to a Better Future

**You are summoned to attend the EOM Council Meeting**

**To be held on Tuesday 10th September 2024**

**at 6.00 pm at the FTC Office 122 Poulton Road Fleetwood**

**MINUTES**

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| **4180** | Opening of the Meeting – ***Chairman***  Present: Chairman, Councillor C Raynor\*, M Belshaw, H Swatton, C Smith, J Kuruvakdua, J Martin, K Nicholson, M Moliner, M Blair,  Assistant Clerk, Shirleyanne Munro\*  ***For purpose of this minute only, those marked with \* will be recorded as CR and SM*** |
| **4181** | To receive apologies for absence – ***Chairman***  **Apologies Record For:** Councillor C Stephenson,R Raynor and Lorraine Beavers MP  **Not Present:** Councillor A Craig |
| **4182** | To record Disclosable Pecuniary Interests from members (including their spouses, civil partners, or partners) in any item to be discussed. Committee members MUST NOT make representations or vote on the matter therein - ***Chairman***  **Noted. None recorded** |
| **4183** | To record Other (Personal or Prejudicial) Interests from members in any item to be discussed. Committee members should state if they need to bar themselves from discussion and voting on any related matters - ***Chairman.***  **Noted. None recorded** |
| **4184** | To collectively discuss, review and note comments / actions from the AGAR (Internal Audit Report 2023 – 2024) – **Chairman / Assistant Clerk / All**  The Chairman and Assistant Clerk opened the meeting by advising, that this meeting being called is not ‘Finance’ related, but more procedural, document control and timescales. The Council has had two financial health checks carried out, once in August, the other last week with Scribe and S Munro.  Continuing, the Chairman said that as everyone will (and confidentially) should know, our AGAR (Annual Governance Accountability Return) has been submitted late, despite extensions granted and that Irene Tonge (Clerk) has been signed off by her GP, unwell. As it stands with Irene, we do not have a timescale for her return.  The new auditor was approved at the Council meeting in April 2024, with engagement commencing May 2024, however it was noted, that there had been no actual face-to-face meet between FTC and Jo O’Donoghue, everything had been conducted by either email or telephone call.  Due to the lack of communication from our Clerk, with the late submissions, missing extensions, and incorrect paperwork being submitted, the auditor has completed the AGAR and presented it to PKF-Littlejohn (overarching auditors) flagging it as ‘c*ause for concern’*.  CR has been in contact with Rebecca Plane, Head of Change at PKF-Littlejohn, having exchanged a few emails regarding our situation. It is too late to do anything regarding the AGAR for the year being reviewed, as the paperwork isn’t complete, nor up to date.  SM has this afternoon spoken to Lia Twiner, Rebecca Plane’s P.A., who has advised that the paperwork, before going back to PKF, must be signed off by CR and SM.  **Auditor’s Report**: As you will have received and read, the Auditors report around our AGAR. On Saturday 7th Sept, CR and SM were in the office, working on the report, pulling together our comments on the recommendations, and we’re happy to review them this evening with you. This version will be sent off to PKF as well as the relevant paperwork.  SM has started to build an initial framework within SharePoint, and everything, from effect of now, will be saved on to there, with relevant sections accessible. No staff member should be saving anything to their desktops; I.T. audits will be carried out by SM.  The Auditor’s recommendations, also include that our full council meeting packs are uploaded to our website. SM attended the SLCC Lancaster Branch meeting and asked what they do; many of them replied they upload agendas and minutes only, with the minutes containing their financial information. CR commented when reviewing minutes from previous years at the weekend, you could see a change in the layout of FTC agendas.  SM talked about the section of the Auditor’s report where reference was made to minutes not being available on the website. CR and SM had been through meetings packs, and they were all out of sync. Councillor M Blair confirmed she was happy to come in and work with SM on sorting them out. Once complete, SM will upload them to the website.  In relation to financial procedures, we’ve purchased a ‘sign-off’ stamp for invoices, a spreadsheet has been set up to capture all spend, either by invoice or card, which (for future years) can be sent off to the in-situ Auditor for review. This will line up with Scribe transactions.  CR continued, saying, we’ve been marked ‘down’ on items such as the Risk Register and Risk Management plan not being up to date; despite it being approved by Councillors previously, there is no record on any agenda for 2023-24. This has been reviewed by SM, along with other policies and they will start from November to come to Council meetings for review and sign off.  A Councillor asked, how long do we have to complete or submit what we have around our recommendations. CR said that we have a 30-working day notice period, where SM will try her best to get everything pulled together and submitted, prior to her stopping for annual leave on Friday 20th September. It was noted that this wasn’t a lot of time, but SM will work this weekend coming again to try and get everything ready. Councillor M Blair offered to provide reception cover in office, whilst SM is on holiday. This was gratefully accepted and approved by SM.  Another Councillor mentioned that she had confidentially expressed concerns to the Chairman about the capability of the Clerk, highlighting a couple of incidents.  Continuing CR said that another area where we’ve been marked down, is the Allotments. We didn’t issue rent increase letters last year as we were too late; SM will aim to action this also prior to annual leave, as the deadline for the letters going out is September 30th, but this may not be achievable. If not, we will proceed with normal rent letters.  VAT is another area, where we’ve been marked as non-compliant, as no VAT claim was submitted. SM will contact HMRC, to ascertain and confirm when last claim was made. Form 126 is required to be completed.  To conclude, we ask the Councillors present, to approve the AGAR for 2023-2024, note the recommendations made by the Auditor, and to approve the recommendations made by CR and SM.  This was agreed by all Councillors presents.  Approved by C Smith  Seconded by M Belshaw  The Councillors then discussed the appointment of a new auditor, with the Council disengaging from the current one. It was noted that part of the engagement letter was to carry out an interim 6-month review, however, with disengagement a possibility, this will allow for procedures, policies, minutes etc to be brought up to date and recorded accurately.  It was overwhelmingly agreed that this would be the correct course of action for the Council to take. |
| **4185** | To consider and resolve to exclude the public and press under the Public Bodies (Admissions to Meetings) Act 1960 and the Data Protection Act 1999, to hear items of a confidential matter regarding a staff member - **Chairman / Assistant Clerk** (**Green Paper)**  Noted and recorded. |
| **4186** | To discuss and approve the Assistant Clerk taking on more financial responsibility for the Council (processing invoices, bank reconciliation, payroll) – Chairman  CM asked the Councillors present, to ensure business continues as normal, we temporarily appoint Shirleyanne Munro, Assistant Clerk, to the role of Responsible Finance Officer and Temporary Clerk until the return of Irene Tonge.  This was overwhelmingly agreed by the Councillors.  Approved by H Swatton  Seconded by M Belshaw  This is with effect from Wednesday 11th September. There is no monetary increase in salary, as this is only a temporary back fill. |
| **4187** | To note and date the time of the next Full Council Meeting, **Tuesday 29th October, 6pm** at the North Euston Hotel  It was noted that SM is on annual leave on that date, therefore a financial report will be tabled. Vice Chair, Councillor M Blair advised that the CEDO will take the minute for this meeting. |