

Swanley Town Council

Civic Centre, St Marys Road, Swanley, Kent, BR8 7BU

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www.swanleytowncouncil.gov.uk

POLICY AND FINANCE

MINUTES

Wednesday 19th July 2023

Present:

Members	Present	Apologies	Reason
Chair: Cllr G Darrington	✓		
Deputy Chair: Cllr P Brown	✓		
Cllr C Barnes	✓		
Cllr P Darrington	✓		
Cllr C Morgan	✓		
Cllr C Prestedge	✓		
Cllr E Uttley	✓		
Cllr R Wood	✓		

Officers: Chief Executive Officer (CEO) – Ryan Hayman
Executive Assistant – Tracey Bayliss
Responsible Finance Officer (RFO) – Steve Innes
Venues Manager – Kerina Keir
Parks & Open Spaces Manager – George Brooker

Also Present: Cllr S Durden, Cllr M Horwood, Cllr K Mitchell, Cllr L Taylor

Public: NONE PRESENT

MEETING COMMENCED: 20:40

12005 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
NONE

12006 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING
To approve as correct the Minutes of the Meetings held on Wednesday 21st June 2023.
APPROVED AND SIGNED

12007 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST
NONE

12008 TO RECEIVE THE MONTHLY FINANCES

The Olympic – 7102 Water Rates – It was asked what the credit in May of £1,268.47 was for. RFO confirmed that it was a rebate for an overcharge and will be absorbed by future bills.

Housing Stock – 4043 Rent – Property #4 – It was asked why there was a difference in rent between last year and this year, what was the rationale behind it and did we follow the correct procedures in doing so. CEO confirmed that the correct procedures were followed. The rationale behind the new rent is that we had a potential tenant lined up before the previous tenant moved out and we were fortunate to be in that position as it meant that STC did not lose any rental income through time delays. From a business point of view, we made the decision to reduce the rent by £50 per month to get the new tenant in and not lose four to eight weeks' worth of rent having to advertise for a new tenant which would equate to a loss of income between £1,200 to £2,400. The tenant has been paying their rent up to date. £1,200 is a fair rental amount and that is the ceiling which Sevenoaks District Council recommended was the value to pay.

The CEO went on to add that there have been some discrepancies in and around when some of the payments have gone in from the properties which has been discussed previously. We have to be seen as being reasonable. We can propose that rent needs to be paid on a certain date, but if a tenant asks for an alternative in line with their salary payment date, we have to be reasonable about that request and often accept it. It does mean that some rent payments fall into other months but this usually does even out.

Every agreement change such as this does not go to a Council Meeting, it being a delegated power, otherwise it would be overly bureaucratic, and we would lose perfectly good tenants and a lot of money by waiting for a Council meeting to come around to approve a new or changed tenancy agreements.

It was asked if the report could show the full years' payments, currently it only shows April 22 to September 22 and April 23 to September 23. It was also asked if when the contract renewals come up they could be adjusted so that payment dates were at the same time for everybody and if we can have payments by direct debit rather than standing order. The RFO confirmed that he could change the format of the report to reflect that.

It was confirmed that we cannot demand that the tenant pay by direct debit, and we have to be reasonable in what we can ask tenants to do, in addition we are not authorised to collect direct debits.

The CEO mentioned that rents had not been increased across the board on the housing stock this year. We will possibly increase rents next year, but currently we do not have any justification to increase the rents despite the recent increase in mortgage rates. This is because we do not have any mortgages on these properties and so we have not needed to increase the rent. It will go up naturally to ensure that we are competitive within the market. It was asked if all Councillors could be made aware in advance of the increases in rent to ensure that the Policy & Finance Committee members were aware. CEO confirmed that he was making Councillors aware now and with the delegated powers it will be happening annually.

Bank Reconciliation – It was asked if the CCLA account had been invested elsewhere as yet. RFO said that it had not as yet, and we are potentially looking at moving away from Barclays but insofar as the CCLA account we are happy with the current return each month.

Debtors/Creditors – RFO mentioned that Spectacular Funfairs asked for invoicing to be in advance for the season in May and August. In August the amount will be cleared.

Projects – It was asked when some of the projects were going to start as there were a number of them showing as not started. RFO confirmed that the lighting/shelter at The Olympic has commenced. The furniture at The Olympic has also commenced with the purchasing of new chairs. The garden area at the Alexandra Suite has been put on hold for

now as the quote was somewhat prohibitive. The projects showing in progress are left over from last year and are ongoing. They will be completed by March 2024.

It was asked if the sewage connection project for the park was going to be added to the projects list. RFO confirmed it would be added to the list if the funding is successful. It was asked if we could utilise funds from the CCLA account to pay for that project and seek to get the grant but commit to the project now to prevent any further cost increases in the work. CEO said that it would make business sense to do the work sooner rather than later to prevent increasing costs. Hextable Parish Council have signed off on the project and we are currently awaiting Kent County Council sign off on the project before we can start any works.

- **RESOLVED – accepted reports A/B/C/D/E/F/G/H/I/J/K**

Date of next meeting – Wednesday 20th September 2023

MEETING CLOSED AT: 21:07

SIGNED:

20/09/2023

**Cllr G Darrington
Chair of Policy and Finance**