

NOTICE OF MEETING

You are hereby summoned to a virtual meeting of Yarm Town Council to be held via Zoom online.

Date: Tuesday 30th March 2021 Time: 7PM

The venue is thus wherever councillors/public feel comfortable joining from, that is without background noise & sale of alcohol. Members of the public are invited to attend the meeting.

To join the meeting, please use Zoom with

ID: 531 963 1657 ; PASSWORD: 065167

Juliet Johnson, Proper Officer to YTC



Yarm Town Council
Town Hall
High Street
Yarm
TS15 9AH

In accordance with the Openness of Local Government Bodies Regulations 2014, photographing, recording, broadcasting or transmitting the proceedings of a meeting by any means is permitted; the Chair will notify those present of this at the start of the meeting and ask whether they agree to be filmed, recorded or photographed

FINANCE & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES

PRESENT:

Cllr Alan Gallafant - Chairman

Cllr Alan Moffitt

Cllr John Coulson - Vice Chair

Cllr Peter Monck

Cllr Philip Addison

Cllr Patrick Morton

Town Clerk / Proper Officer - Juliet Johnson

1. Apologies for Absence

1.1 Apologies were received from **Cllr Simpson**

1.2 Not in attendance: **Cllr Johnson** and **Cllr Smailes**

2. Code of Conduct | Declaration of Interest | Dispensation:

a) To record declarations of interest from members of any item to be discussed

With the exception of any item identified above as containing exempt or confidential information under the Local Government Act 1972 – section 100A(4), members of the public (other than those prohibited from doing so) are entitled to attend this meeting and/or have access to the agenda

- b) To consider, vote upon and record any requests for dispensation

2.1 No declarations of interest or requests for dispensation were received.

3. Confirmation of Minutes:

3.1 None to approve (the minutes of the 5th January 2021 Finance and Governance meeting were approved at the ordinary Council meeting on 12th January 2021).

4. Governance:

4.1 To Review the Update to the Council's Risk Register for Approval by Council

(RISK REGISTER REFERS - as circulated for 09.03.21 Meeting)

- a) **The Clerk** presented the Risk Register work in progress and highlighted a number of areas where the adopted Risk Register still seems to refer to another local authority (e.g. banking arrangements, investment in an area that is not part of Yarm, references to staff employed, no specified Yarm assets). This had probably occurred because, in the past, a Clerk may have shared practice with another Parish (common and good practice amongst Clerks). A number of these references had been left in the updated draft for councillors to see the issue (to be removed on approval).
- b) **The Clerk** explained that she had added details to the 'Assets' section so that it reflected the Council's main assets individually and also gave initial detail that could be carried forward to the development of updated Risk Assessments for each asset, as required.
- c) **Cllr Gallafant & Cllr Coulson** questioned the use of both the terms 'Existing procedures are considered adequate but need updating' together in the 'Review/Assess/Revise' column as they appeared to be contradictory statements i.e. if it needed updating, how could it be adequate? **The Clerk** explained that she'd meant that, in many instances, whilst some things were considered adequate they i) could be improved and / or ii) seemed to have not been updated in recent years. In addition, there was an extensive backlog of work that could not all be updated immediately.

AGREED: To relook at how the 'review' column might be worded and consider the expediency of using 'to be confirmed' in the date 'Deadline' column.

**4.2 To Consider Review Work Undertaken to Update Standing Orders
(DRAFT UPDATE OF STANDING ORDERS REFERS; MODEL SOs also circulated)**

- a) **The Clerk** summarised the work undertaken as per email briefing in advance of the meeting:
 - i) this is a working document for initial review, not for recommendation to full Council yet;

- ii) the approach to work to date has been to use YTC's existing Standing Orders (the feeling being that Councillors would be most familiar with this) and add to it from the current NALC Model Standing Orders (2018, with 2020 revision); it is understood that this is a standard approach;
- iii) everything in bold (added from Model) is mandatory;
- iv) everything from the model that is in bold has been added (save 1 paragraph which has now been checked with the auditor - although not applicable to a Parish, should be added - MO 18.g.);
- v) mandatory items in YTC's existing SOs is also now shown in bold type;
- vi) everything highlighted in yellow (bold and otherwise) is new material from Model Standing Orders;
- vii) Model SOs are written '1 size fits all' - so they will apply to extremely large Councils (e.g. Birmingham, Liverpool etc.) as well as Parishes; there are choices within the Model not in bold type, although advisable to include (NB sections such as 'Handling Staff Matters' and parts of 'Finance' can be included in the relevant policies rather than in full in the Standing Orders);
- viii) based on the Model, totally new sections on (e.g.) Management of Information, Public Contracts in Relation to 2015 legislation, Responsibilities to Provide Information (there is a flaw in the model as neither given example applies to us), Responsibilities Under Data Protection Legislation have been added to YTC's existing SOs.
- ix) where non-bold type, non-mandatory material from the Model hasn't been added (yet) it is because:
 - it's already in YTC's existing SOs (odd word is different seemingly without changing the meaning and seems modern enough to understand) - Council may wish to replace YTC's wording with the Model wording ;
 - it can (for a parish our size) go into a separate policy document;
 - it doesn't apply to us, and/or is given as a choice;
- x) the Model SOs largely remove all phraseology such as 'Subject to Standing Order 4, section b, pt. iii) - this has not yet been completed in the review draft; numerical cross referencing also needed to be re-assessed (recognising that removal of all cross-referencing as in YTC current SOs at this stage may have been confusing).

b) Cllr Moffitt stated that he felt even if a single word was kept that was different to a word used in the Model it could change a meaning. Cllr Moffitt also asked why the Model SOs order wasn't followed as the review document's order was really difficult to follow and compare to the Model SOs. **The Clerk** clarified that:

- i) the existing YTC SOs were already in a very random order (e.g. Rules of Debate being Section 1 in Model but section 7 in YTC's current SOs);
- ii) she'd wanted her approach to be respectful to Councillors' existing SOs (was there a reason for such a different order having been created and not updated for many years ?) and had been concerned that by placing draft new SOs in the Model order this might have seemed even more confusing if Councillors were very accustomed to the existing order;
- iii) she'd seen examples of good practice in other Councils where 3 or 4 topic based sections had been created so had tried to take the best parts of the existing YTC order (e.g. beginning with 'Meetings') and create section headings that might be more easy to navigate (e.g. new Councillors arriving in May, past confusions when referencing what SOs did / did not imply in certain contexts) ;
- iv) Cllr Moffitt's comments were fully appreciated - given the SOs were so out of date and so distant from the Model this meant enormous change (along with the newly suggested 4 topic sections) it might

have been better to update the SOs in several separate stages, making it easier to follow the changes and compare to Model;

c) **Cllr Morton** added that a separate list of the key issues might help. **The Clerk** concurred and stated that this had been the aim of the blue text questions throughout (i.e. time allowing, these could be extracted as a list).

d) **Cllr Monck** stated that in the past, a small working group of Councillors had been set up to review SOs. **The Clerk** stated that the Finance & Governance Committee had been set up to work in this way i.e. with Cllr Chris Walker as Chair, working with the Clerk (and bringing in other Councillors as per their particular topic / policy interests) to work through policy updates. With Cllr Walker leaving, clarity was needed as to who else might be interested in policy development and the Council is still working out how the Finance and Governance Committee operates and how it might approach tasks. Likewise, **The Clerk** is still establishing how Councillors wish to work with her, how much practical input they would like to these tasks and at what stage.

e) **Cllr Gallafant** proposed that a working group was set up to help complete the SOs review. **The Clerk** confirmed that she would much prefer to work in this way if Councillors also liked this model.

AGREED / ACTION: Cllr Moffitt, Cllr Monck and Cllr Coulson would form the working group with the **Clerk**.

4.3 Key Points to Begin Review of Financial Regulations

- a) **The Clerk** stated that a full review of YTC's Financial Regulations should be done against the Model Regulations, to follow on from the SOs review above. The Clerk stated that she welcomed, at this point, Councillors raising any issues, queries, points of concern or for clarification regarding the current YTC Financial Regulations which could be part of the list of key issues that **Cllr Morton** had suggested.
- b) **Cllr Addison** confirmed that he and the **Clerk** would go through YTC Financial Regs against the Model, point by point and would produce a draft for review.

4.4 To Review the Update to the Council's Asset Register

- a) **The Clerk** referenced the comprehensive narrative document that currently formed the Asset Register that **Cllr Addison** had added to significantly, giving a timeline of actions for each asset.
- b) Work was underway to create a simplified table that could be updated each year showing original book value, any depreciation or increase in value, write-off or removal. The table would also show insurance value (different to the asset value). This would serve as an easier to read document for all to gain awareness of YTC's assets and their associated issues.

- c) **Cllr Addison** reminded the meeting of i) Cllr Walker's previous in depth insurance values work which should carry through this year and ii) that several items on the Register need to be amalgamated, removed or valued at £1 (auditor's advice).
- d) **Cllr Addison & the Clerk** raised the issue of properly distinguishing between what is 'investment' and what is 'repair and maintenance' and gave the example of the AGAR needing to be corrected (2018/2019 & 2019/2020) as 'investment' expenditure had not been included. **Cllr Morton** raised the issue of showing depreciation.
- e) **Cllr Addison** noted the challenge of needing to bring everything up to date and, given the gap, taking **Cllr Moffitt's** point, it now being difficult to compare like with like, along with ensuring documents and policies were also accessible for the public to understand.
- f) **The Clerk** emphasised the importance of transparency for the public, not overloading people with information that was essentially YTC's internal comprehensive working documents, but instead having a singular simple document that was practical for all.
- g) **Cllr Addison** stated that he'd noted that there had been rather a void somewhere between 2015 - 2020 in ensuring all policies and procedures were up to date in detail. This meant there was now a very significant amount of work that needed doing to catch up and that it couldn't be done overnight if it was to be done properly. **The Clerk** concurred and gave the example of the problems this caused for an Asset Register (i.e. you can't track depreciation or value increase if there are gaps of years).

5. To receive items for information and consideration for the next agenda

5.1 All of the above items will come back to the next F&G meeting prior to going to Full Council.

6. To confirm the date and time of the next Finance & Governance Committee

6.1 TBC.

The meeting closed at 7.45pm

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