

For Council: 15 June 2020 APPENDIX 1A

Lichfield City Council

Minutes of the Audit Committee held remotely via 'Zoom' at 6.30pm on Thursday, 11 June 2020

Present: Councillor M Warfield (Chairman) and Councillors Mrs J Greaves, I Jackson, Mrs A Lax, D Robertson and C Spruce.

In attendance: A Briggs (Town Clerk and RFO), G Keatley (Internal Auditor) and Ms A James (Accounts Officer).

Apologies: Cllr A Smith

1 MINUTES

RESOLVED: *That the Minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 12 March 2020 be confirmed as a correct record [Minutes adopted by Council on 11 May 2020].*

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND REQUESTS FOR DISPENSATION

None

3 OUT-TURN REPORT AND STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Members considered the Out-Turn Report and also the draft Statement of Accounts (Annual Return), for the year ending 31 March 2020. The Town Clerk took each budget head in turn and provided a brief explanation. Members raised numerous queries, including energy costs at the Birthplace Museum, the underspend on civic events and the costs of the City Council's newsletter publication. The Town Clerk answered these queries to the satisfaction of the Committee.

Cllr D Robertson raised the possibility of varying Guildhall hire as we exit lockdown (for example switching hirers from the Guildroom to Guildhall with no alteration in cost in order to allow a booking to proceed). The Town Clerk confirmed he would take a pragmatic approach to this and would make decisions quickly if necessary and then communicate them to members, together with reasoning in order to achieve retrospective formal approval if necessary. The Committee confirmed its support for this course of action.

Cllr C Spruce requested that formal thanks to the Internal Auditor, Accounts Officer and Town Clerk be recorded for their hard work and diligence in regard to the Council's financial affairs. Cllr D Robertson echoed these comments and also included the excellent work of those involved in the 'socially distanced' Markets which had taken place over the past week following the relaxation of Government restrictions.

RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL:

- 1 *The Out-Turn Statement 2019/20 be received.*
- 2 *The Council as Trustee of the Johnson Birthplace Charitable Trust make a payment of £13,791 from the Trust funds to the City Council as the contribution to the expenditure incurred by the City Council in operating the Museum during the 2019/20 financial year.*
- 3 *In respect of the External Auditor Annual Return for the year ending 31 March 2020:*
 - a. *The Council approve the Annual Governance Statement (Section 1 of the Annual Return) and that this be signed by the Mayor and Town Clerk on behalf of the Council.*

- b. The Council approve the Accounting Statements (Section 2 of the Annual Return) and this be signed by the Mayor on behalf of the Council.***
- c. The Council note the Annual Internal Audit Report section of the Annual Return.***

4 IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON 2020/21 BUDGETS

Members considered the Town Clerk's agenda report outlining the current impact of COVID-19 on 2020/21 budgets. Cllr D Robertson raised a number of queries:

Rental Income at Donegal House – The Town Clerk confirmed that the remaining tenant had given notice and that this was not a direct result of COVID-19. The possibility of reducing the advertised rental levels was discussed; the Town Clerk to discuss further with the letting agent.

Community Halls, notably Boley Park and Darwin Hall – The Town Clerk confirmed that the Management Committee of Darwin Hall had been contacted and informal discussions held, with the resulting understanding that the City Council stood ready to assist financially if the situation demanded it. The Town Clerk confirmed that the financial position of Boley Park Community Hall was currently healthy.

Furloughed Employees – The Town Clerk confirmed that no LCC employees were currently furloughed as it was confirmed that the City Council would be unlikely to reclaim such monies from the Government due to its own funding arrangements. Employees were currently working on a rota basis but the Town Clerk confirmed that the structure of LCC employees may need to be revised, depending upon several factors that were as yet unclear, and that the current proposal was to report to the Staffing Committee at its November meeting to assess whether a review may be required.

Slippage from Grant Aid/Partnerships – Cllr Robertson asked whether there was an appetite to make this money available prior to the next scheduled round of grants, and/or whether the monies could be made available for guaranteeing loans to small businesses, possibly in partnership with the Credit Union. The Town Clerk confirmed that the risks associated with the latter use were of concern, but on a wider level it would be a matter for the Leader to discuss with the Chairman of the Grants Committee to establish whether there was an appetite for offering further grants. It is the case however that bodies wishing to apply for a grant can do so directly to the Council and that such requests would be considered on their individual merits.

5 DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

In the calendar of meetings as Thursday 3 December 2020 at 6.30pm

**THERE BEING NO FURTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN DECLARED
THE MEETING CLOSED AT 7.19 PM**