

BLYTH TOWN COUNCIL
Annual General Meeting
Thursday 11 May 2023
Decision Report

1. Recording of Council and Committee Meetings

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council consider whether to pursue the options available of electronically recording Council meetings, after review of recording suitability, with the potential of onward streaming onto social media or continue as we are doing.

Ward

Not ward specific.

Risk Management

Governance arrangements need to be in place when arranging, holding, and recording meetings of the Council and its Committees. We communicate our decisions and actions via various means, e.g., Web site and Facebook, in an appropriate timescale.

There are no legal requirements to electronically record by video and/or audio means. There is no budget provision for additional equipment/resources.

Objective

To promote good governance of the Town Council by adopting transparent practices when, amongst others, the recording of Council and Committee meetings take place.

Report

Members at various Council meetings during 2022 considered this topic, the latest of which was the October Council, where it was unanimously carried not to proceed with this proposal due to the current economic climate.

This was based on a previous decision that if the Council were to go down this route it was to be of the standard of system used at Northumberland County Council.

For similar facilities to be provided to this Council, it is estimated a first-year cost of £42k with ongoing yearly costs of £14k, subject to survey. This would accommodate 3 or 4 voice activated cameras along with 20 wireless microphones.

Another option is for a local company to set up a system similar to the above at an initial set up cost of £26k, along with other costs on a meeting-by-meeting basis of some £6k per annum.

A member of the public has requested that the Council review this decision.

Since then, this Council has invested in video and audio technology, where the video technology is based on voice activation. This is needed to accommodate small sized conference facilities for the more popular hybrid meetings e.g., where an external speaker prefers to attend via Zoom etc.

Although this technology has not been used for our Committee structure, it may be that it is suitable for no additional cost. Based on this uncertainty and if members wish to reconsider their previous decision, not to record meetings, that the Council record some future meetings and review the quality thereafter prior to any ongoing decision. If successful, this system would allow uploading to media platforms later.

2.Blyth Town Council Policy and Procedures

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Council resolve to approve the list of policies and procedures and note the proposed changes. (For a full list of policies please see appendix 1).

Ward

Not ward specific.

Objective

To promote good governance for the Council by implementing fit for purpose policies and procedures.

Report

Since 2018 BTC have had access to NCC HR Services when they entered an SLA. The documents currently in use have been adapted so they are fit for purpose.

In line with current practice BTC have reviewed all the policies (appendix 1) and indicated where amendments have been made to specific policies.

The documents listed below highlight where there are changes/new policies for Councillors to consider.

1. The changes to the Risk Management Policy, attached as Appendix 2, are more in the order of presentation into "like" topics, and are mainly expanding/strengthening the Control of Risk and Review areas, and as such there are no material changes.
2. A Civility and Respect on Social Media Guide has been produced in collaboration with various Council Associations, Appendix 3, This Guide demonstrates how Councils and Councillors can take a positive approach to social media. The Guide also highlights the need for accurate information, and it is strongly recommended that where there is any slight doubt regarding a Council decision on what should be said, that advice is first sought. Similarly, where a Post has been published and subsequently queried with an Officer, that Officers may/will recommend a change in wording/withdrawal of the post.
3. Appendix 4 contains the features of where we are as a Council with its current strategy on investments.

Officers propose that this is changed in order that global conditions and financial markets do not have the effect on the value of our investments that have occurred in recent months.

The use of the CCLA Property, and Deposit funds, whilst in a buoyant market have provided a good yield, when the markets aren't as good, then values can fall quickly. Over the last 10 years the Council have received significantly better returns from the Property Fund than if we had invested in some of the more traditional accounts, but recent times have shown how volatile this type of fund can be. The Covid pandemic did not see any great fall in the Property fund, but this and the recent effect on the Markets in the last few months has seen the value go below, by some 6%, our investment. This decrease is more than offset by the additional investment returns received.

The Deposit fund, more traditional markets, is at a 4% yield. Because of the current instabilities in the Property markets, the CCLA have introduced a 6-month withdrawal period.

Officers are therefore recommending:

- That 25% of the Council's budget, minimum reserve level, are held in more stable funds, in addition to the reserves we must have to meet annual operational needs. Any excess of this we consider such funds as the Property Fund.
- No one investment shall be for a period longer than 12 months.
- Any investment decision requires Council approval, but any urgent decision should be made with the approval of the Chairs and a representative from the other parties and confirmed by Council.

Malcolm Wilkinson
Deputy Town Clerk

2 May 2023