

**Minutes of the  
FINANCIAL & REGULATORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE  
BOARD OF CONSERVATORS OF ASHDOWN FOREST**

**Monday 25 January 2021**

14.00 via MS Teams

Committee members present: Mr C de Mestre (Chairman), Mr J Spicer (Vice Chairman), Cllr. Barnes, Cllr. Roundell, Mr AG Reid, Mrs R St. Pierre, Cllr. Whetstone

*Ex-Officio* Mr C Smith, Ms S McAll

Also present: Mr J Adler (CEO) Mrs L Meehan (Finance Officer), Mrs K Dirs (Clerk), Cllr D Elkin, Cllr R Stogdon. Cllr S Tidy attended for item 04/21

Minutes taken by the Clerk

There were no members of the public present

		<b>Action</b>
<b>01/21</b>	<p><b>Apologies</b> Apologies were received from Susan McAll The Chairman welcomed James Adler</p>	
<b>02/21</b>	<p><b>Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature</b> Mr de Mestre declared he is a commoner grazier and receives the BPS payment</p>	
<b>03/21</b>	<p><b>To agree a recommendation to the Board for approval of the 2021/22 budget</b> The Chairman provided an overview of the current financial position, emphasising the need for transparency and compliance to governance procedures.</p> <p>The Chairman reminded Members that at the Board meeting in November 2020, the Board had agreed to a 10% reduction in staffing costs and the inclusion of a £55k restructuring budget in the 21/22 budget. Both provisional sums are dependent on the outcome of the consultation and regrading of roles. The Chairman explained that the budget also included £50k of income from fund raising activities via TAFF in the 20/21 budget and 150k in the 21/22 budget.</p> <p>The Chairman stressed the committee were not approving the 2020/21 budget at this meeting, but the allocation of income between financial years impacts the 2021/22 budget, the 2020/21 budget has been re-cast.</p> <p>The Chairman highlighted a deficit for 2020/21 of £50k in aggregate (-£70k core and +20k in CS), but the deficit included a drawdown of £30k of unrestricted funds held by TAFF on the provision such funds are made available to the core budget this financial year. The deficit for 2021/22 stands at £55k in aggregate (-£95k core and +40k in CS).</p> <p>Following consultation with ESCC, a Covid-19 relief payment grant of £60,000 (subject to ESCC agreement) is being considered along with an increase in TAFF income. These adjustments would enable a balanced 2021/22 budget for ESCC approval.</p> <p>The Chairman concluded his overview and reminded Members that ESCC are reluctant to accept an unbalanced budget. The Chairman advised that ESCC were planning to treat the</p>	

	<p>proposed budget as an interim Budget and that ESCC were seeking quarter progress reports with the review of revisiting the 2021/22 Budget in September. This would also allow time for the new CEO to evaluate the situation and develop a strategy. But raised questions regarding the treatment of the Budget in the context of the Act.</p> <p>Mr Reid expressed concern that the 21/22 budget was unstable and the Conservators found themselves in a similar position every year and that profound organisational change was needed.</p> <p>Mrs St Pierre raised concern in relation to the repeat late payment of the CS payment and the effect on cashflow. The CEO explained he is in already contact with the RPA in order to address the delays to receipt of the CS payment.</p> <p>Cllr Roundell questioned whether the Covid-19 relief payment was a loan or a grant. The Chairman confirmed the proposed payment is a grant and there is no requirement to pay it back.</p> <p>Cllr Stogdon reminded the Committee that TAFF operational model needed the backing of the entire Board and that fundraisers need to be appointed before charitable donations could be enshrined in budgets. Cllr Barnes proposed the relationship between TAFF and the Conservators needed clarifying.</p> <p>The Chairman acknowledged the comments from Members and confirmed further consultation and close collaboration has been requested by ESCC and part of that approach includes sending quarterly updates to ESCC.</p> <p>The Chairman sought approval for the proposed 2021/22 budget with a recommendation to the Board. A vote was held and returned a majority <b>in favour</b> of submitting the budget to ESCC, pending ratification from the Board.</p>	
<b>04/21</b>	<p><b>To agree a recommendation to the Board to seek the 2020/21 deficit from ESCC</b> The Committee agreed to recommend to the Board that the Conservators seek the shortfall from ESCC under their obligations within the Act if necessary.</p>	
<b>05/21</b>	<p><b>Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman</b> There were none.</p>	

The meeting closed at 16:05