

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

Wednesday 17th June 2020

10.00 conducted via Zoom

Committee members present: Mr AG Reid (Chairman), Mr J Spicer (Vice Chairman), Cllr J Barnes, Cllr S Tidy, Cllr Stogdon, Cllr P Roundell, Cllr F Whetstone, Mr C Smith, Ms S McAll, Mr Mawdsley

Also present: Mr C de Mestre, Cllr D Elkin, Mrs K Dirs (Clerk), Mr R Voden (Interim Chief Executive)

Minutes taken by Mrs K Dirs

There were no members of the public present

		Action
15/20	<p>Apologies Cllr P Roundell and Mrs L Meehan Mr J Spicer (Vice Chairman) was unable to join due to technical issues.</p>	
16/20	<p>Declarations of interest by Members of a Personal or Prejudicial Nature Cllr Barnes declared an interest in item 27/20.</p>	
17/20	<p>Matters arising <u>17.01/20 Verbal update on resolutions from the previous Finance & Regulatory meeting</u> There was nothing to report.</p>	
18/20	<p>Finance: Current financial year 2020/21 The Chairman advised the Committee that the Finance Officer would not be attending the meeting as she was focusing on completing the Statement of Accounts 2019/20 and the Annual Governance and Accounting Return (AGAR).</p> <p><u>18.01/20 To review the cash flow forecast and factors affecting income</u> The Chairman asked Mr Mawdsley to lead the item.</p> <p>Mr Mawdsley explained that the Conservation Officer had received a letter from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) clarifying the outcome of the RPA inspection in 2019. A key element of the letter was an alleged misclassification of land claimed as heathland that receives the LH1 payment. The magnitude of the repayment is worse than expected, although it remains manageable if the claim for LH1 and WD2 prescriptions can be offset and added to the future agreement.</p> <p>The total repayment due (if the RPA classification is correct) is £109K or without offset, £128K. Mr Mawdsley explained that the Conservation Officer is liaising with Natural England to verify the map data and will be conducting a ground truthing exercise if necessary.</p> <p>The Chairman referred to paper FR 09/20 and emphasised the reliance on the Countryside Stewardship (CS) grant income to support the core budget and highlighted the importance for an urgent, but more structured approach to income generation and fundraising.</p>	

	<p><u>18.02/20 To ratify the use of reserves until payment is received from the RPA</u> The Chairman referred to paper FR 10/20 and reported that the current bank balance of £233k was only sufficient for another six months, with monthly expenditure of £40k. The Boards reserve limit set at £266,000 (to cover 6 months' staff and administration costs for both Core and CS staff and commitments) was no longer sustainable and proposed the limit be reduced to £135K.</p> <p>Mr Mawdsley explained he was approaching the Public Works Loan Board for the possibility of a bridging loan.</p> <p>DECISION: To recommend to the Board to temporarily reduce restricted reserves from £260k to £135k.</p> <p><u>18.03/20 To ratify purchase of capital item – cut and collect machine</u> The Chairman referred the Committee to paper FR 11/20, noting the requirement to raise such expenditure to the Committee as per Finance Regulations. The Committee noted the importance of the machinery and the need to meet key requirements of the CS agreement in cutting and collecting bracken. The existing machinery has suffered recurring breakdowns and is no longer fit for purpose.</p> <p>Cllr Tidy cautioned the need to include the replacement of capital items into the budget and asked whether contractors could be used. It was noted that the timing of the purchase of the item was not favourable following the news from Mr Mawdsley.</p> <p>DECISION: The Committee approved the purchase under the finance terms specified.</p>	<p>TR/LM</p> <p>LM/SA</p>
<p>19/20</p>	<p>Income Generation <u>19.01/20 Income Generation update – for information only</u> The Committee reviewed paper FR 12/20. The Chairman advised income generation remained a priority and the TAFF website creation was underway. Some queries arose around car park donations, Gift Aid and the Memorial Wall programme. Cllr Stodgon cautioned the need to engage with the Ashdown Forest Trust as land owner and to ensure formalities are undertaken, particularly in relation to planning permission.</p> <p>ACTION: The Chairman, Mr Mawdsley and Mr Smith to review the status of the Income Generation programme to confirm roles and prioritise actions.</p>	<p>NM/CS/TR</p>
<p>20/20</p>	<p>Finance: Year ending March 2020 <u>20.01/20 To review the Finance Report Year End 31 March 2020</u></p> <p><u>20.02/20 To approve the bad debt write-off schedule</u> Approved.</p> <p><u>20.03/20 To recommend Statement of Accounts 2019/20 for Board</u> To follow.</p> <p><u>20.04/20 To note the Internal Audit Report</u> To follow.</p>	

	<p><u>20.05/20 To recommend the Annual Return 2019/20 for Board approval</u> To follow.</p>	
21/20	<p>The Ashdown Forest Foundation (TAFF) <u>21.01/20 To recommend proposal for the establishment of The Ashdown Forest Foundation as an operational charity for Board approval</u> Mr Mawdsley spoke to his paper, highlighting the need to appoint Trustee Directors of TAFF. There was some discussion around the recruitment of fundraisers and the utilisation of TAFF funds for this purpose.</p> <p>The Chairman explained that the Interim Chief Executive was due to present a paper that would identify opportunities to amalgamate the charities with interests in the Forest. Ms McAll proposed that any rationalisation of the charities should be mutually agreed before an approach is made to the Charity Commission.</p>	
22/20	<p>Licences, Permits, Rates and Wayleaves <u>22.01/20 Ice Cream re-tender and possible diversification</u> The Clerk spoke to her paper and sought agreement from the Committee that in the event the current Ice Cream vendor ceases to trade, the licence could be modified to allow for mobile coffee units and that such proposal was in line with the provisions of the Act. The Committee supported the proposal. Ms McAll requested a provision of the licence to ensure cups are environmentally friendly and all litter is cleared up and taken home.</p> <p>ACTION: The Clerk to research alternative mobile refreshment options</p>	KD
23/20	<p>Forest Amenity <u>08.01/20 Ashdown Forest Cricket Club</u> The Clerk explained there were some outstanding legal formalities with the ownership of the pavilion and historic rights awarded to the previous club, but these issues were being handled by Legal Services. Repairs to the pitch are currently being undertaken and it is hoped that games will commence in July.</p> <p><u>08.02/20 Royal Ashdown Forest Golf Club – Rent Review</u> The Interim Chief Executive explained the income from the club is not part of the lease and cannot be used as bartering tool for a rent increase. The rent valuation is based on market evidence and the course had been closed on several occasions due to flooding. The review had been further complicated by the repercussions of Covid-19.</p> <p>ACTION: The Interim Chief Executive to liaise with Graham Glenn to conclude the review.</p>	RV
24/20	<p>Breach of Bye-law issues <u>09.01/20 Woodlands encroachment (Ashdown Place)</u> The Clerk advised that the boundary fence did not match that of the Award Maps or the HM Land Registry plan. The Vice Chairman had conducted a site visit and the fence was still in situ.</p> <p>ACTION: The Clerk to liaise with the Trust to determine whether it is possible to register a dispute on the property title.</p>	KD

25/20	Employment & Staffing Arrangements (including HR) 10.01/20 Staffing Matters (standing item) – CONFIDENTIAL SESSION: Verbal update	
26/20	Policy and Procedures Mr Mawdsley advised that the Grievance and Disciplinary policy was currently being reviewed by HR at East Sussex County Council and reminded members that the Board were following the 2014 policy, as the policy adopted in 2017 was incomplete.	NM
27/20	Health and Safety (standing item): Verbal update There were none. Mr Mawdsley advised that East Sussex Fire and Rescue Service (ESFRS) were conducting a review of their service. A formal response is being prepared by the Conservation Officer as concern has been expressed that a drop of full time firefighters based in Uckfield and Crowborough at night and weekends, and the loss of appliances at Crowborough and Uckfield, will have a knock effect to the Forest. ACTION: Cllr Stogdon to write to ESFRS requesting a meeting with interested parties prior to the authority making a decision.	Cllr RS
28/20	Data breaches (standing item) There were none.	
29/20	Any Urgent Item of which the Clerk has notice in order to pass to the elected Chairman The Clerk advised that £6k had been received in Rent/Rate income since invoices had been issued on Friday 12 June.	

The meeting closed at 12:10