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MERTON AND SUTTON JOINT CEMETERY BOARD

11 FEBRUARY 2020

(2.00 pm - 3.30 pm)

PRESENT Councillors (in the Chair), Councillor Agatha Mary Akyigyina, Councillor Nick Draper, Councillor Drew Heffernan, Councillor Simon McGrath, Councillor David Williams, Councillor Annie Moral and Councillor Marsie Skeete

ALSO PRESENT Zoe Church - Treasurer
Howard Joy - Surveyor
Doug Napier – Client Side Manager
Lisa Jewell - Clerk

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Jean Crosby. Councillor Vince Galligan attended as her substitute.

Councillor Nick Draper apologised in advance that he would arrive late for the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Agenda Item 3)

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 25th June, 2019 were agreed as an accurate record.

4 BUDGET MONITORING 2019/20 AND REVENUE ESTIMATES 2020/21 (Agenda Item 4)

The Treasurer presented her report on Budget Monitoring 2019/20 and Revenue Estimates 2020/21. She asked councillors to note the information provided in the annexes to the report. In particular she drew councillors attention to:

- The updates to the Risk Register Annexe H, to reflect movement in the growth of the Coronavirus pandemic.
- The estimated increase in pensions contributions in 20/21. These figures would be adjusted before the final report to the Board
- The revised project list for 2021, which includes costs for bearer beams split between new beams and replacement beams
- Prudent assumptions have been made on the level of income generated from contractual arrangements.

The Board discussed the report and noted that discussions with the contractor were ongoing, cemeteries being only one part of the wider contract. Once agreement was reached the income figures would be reported to the Board.

The Treasurer was asked about the timing of the payment of bills and replied that from next year she intended to bill monthly as this would be required from a VAT perspective.

The Board asked the Treasurer about the increase in the Board's contributions to the pensions fund and noted that it is a mature fund, and the only currently contributing members are three part-time employees of the Board. This has resulted in the need for an increase in the Board's contributions to maintain the fund. The last valuation saw a marked downturn in valuation but this new level of contribution should maintain the fund.

RESOLVED

1. That the current budgetary position for 2019/20 based on the end of December 2019 shown in Columns 1 to 3 of Appendix A be noted.
2. The Revenue Estimates for 2020/21 shown in Column 4 of Appendix A be approved.
3. That the precepts for the financial year ended 31 March 2021 be set at zero.
4. That the Board establishes its next meeting as early as possible in June 2020 to ensure that approved information is included in Merton's Accounts and information is despatched to Merton's External Auditors as soon as possible.
5. That the Board review and approve the Risk Management Strategy and Risk Register (as at January 2020) attached as Appendix H

5 CONTRACTOR REPORT TO MSJCB (Agenda Item 5)

The Client Side Manager presented the contractor's report. Members noted the report and discussed the issue of the Health and Safety of Headstones and the ongoing testing program in the cemetery.

The Client side manager gave further detail on the testing process. He explained that if an headstone failed a test it would be laid flat whilst the reason for failure was investigated. In the older areas of the cemetery the age of the bearer beams is causing the failures. The Board has a budget to replace old bearer beams on a rolling programme.

However there were also failures in the newer parts of the cemetery owing to the method of fixing the headstone and in these cases and the grave owner would be contacted to explain that they were required to contact the stonemason and arrange repair. These failures were due to the headstone not being fixed in place with dowels.

Although notices had been placed in the cemetery explaining the testing process and arrangements, complaints were received when grave owners found the headstones laid flat but had not been informed of the situation.

Members were very concerned that this was a very sensitive process and asked to see the letter that would be sent to the grave owners of the newer failed headstones.

Members noted that the testing process had been halted, and asked the Client side Manager to keep them informed of the situation.

RESOLVED

The Board noted the contents of the report, asked to see the letter sent to the grave owners of failed headstones and asked to be further informed of the Board's responsibility when headstones failed the safety tests.

6 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC (Agenda Item 6)

RESOLVED: That the public are excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following report(s) on the grounds that it is (they are) exempt from disclosure for the reasons stated in the report(s).

7 REPORT OF CLIENT SIDE MANAGER (Agenda Item 7)

The Client side manager gave the Board an update on ongoing issues. Board members reconfirmed their instruction that the Client Side Manager progressed these issues with support from other Officers as necessary.